THE ACTIVE VIRTUE OF THE COLUMBIAN ORATOR

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In a well-known passage describing his early education, Frederick Douglass identifies a book he read while still a slave in Baltimore. The text, *The Columbian Orator* (1797), by Caleb Bingham, enabled Douglass, he said, “to utter my thoughts and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery.”¹ The appeal of Bingham’s *Orator* is not immediately obvious to the modern reader. Containing speeches from Greek, Roman, British, French, and American political history, dramatic excerpts and adaptations, and several millennially inflected sermons and religious selections, the *Orator* seems a rather unremarkable vehicle of piety, patriotism, and Enlightened republicanism. Even its strong anti-slavery sentiments can be found in other English and American schoolbooks composed prior to 1820.² But with 200,000 copies sold by 1832, Bingham’s *Columbian Orator* was a standard, and widely imitated, text in American secondary school education from the late 1790s to 1820.³ Because a number of other texts were patterned on the *Columbian Orator*, it has been treated as a typical educational anthology for its era, but by encouraging generations

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of American students, including not only Douglass but Ralph Waldo Emerson and Harriet Beecher Stowe, to speak and write in a tradition of nonconformist activism, it had a power uniquely its own.4

The secondary school anthology of the early national period was as much a conduct manual as it was a literary primer. The first American reader, Noah Webster’s 1785 An American Selection, drew not only from English literary anthologies like Robert Dodsley’s Preceptor (1748) but from English conduct manuals such as The Young Gentleman and Lady’s Monitor.5 As vehicles for general socialization, school readers emphasized elocution as a means of discipline and control, a classic union of physical deportment and linguistic expression. Whether called a “selection,” “preceptor,” “assistant,” “mentor,” or “orator,” the texts universally declared their intent to train students in the ways of virtue. The particular type of virtue the anthologies illustrated, however, as well as the linguistic and social disciplines they expected, differed considerably from text to text.

As historians of the late eighteenth century have recently shown, a definition of virtue was at the center of a struggle between classical republican political thought and liberal economic theory.6 The classi-

4Emerson demonstrates his familiarity with the Orator by quoting from one of its original poems in a letter to a friend; see The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Ralph Rusk, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 1:17. Harriet Beecher Stowe reports that the Orator was a schoolbook of her Litchfield youth in Poganuc People (Hartford, Conn.: Stowe-Day Foundation, 1987), p. 151.

5Webster’s An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking, first published as part 3 of his Grammatical Institute, had many eighteenth-century variants but four basic versions printed between 1785 and 1795. Unless otherwise noted, I refer to the version Webster issued to compete with Bingham: the 1795 Hartford edition.

rical republican view held virtue to be a disinterested civic duty practiced by a "Roman patriot, self defined in his civic sphere of action."7 While not dismissing that interpretation, the commercial middle class began to associate it with codes of conduct such as those described in Joseph Addison’s Spectator. This expanded concept, what might be called mannered virtue, accumulated a variety of strictures concerning work, social relations, and sexuality. Although the historiography varies according to social group and context (e.g., in the novel virtue is often defined as chastity), toward the end of the eighteenth century, even civic virtue took on “mannered” connotations.

Most early American school anthologies contained illustrations of both civic and mannered virtue, but the majority tended to accent the mannered virtues. Webster, siding with the Federalists in the aftermath of Shays’s Rebellion, claimed in his 1787 edition of An American Selection that since republican virtue was virtually moribund in the new nation, the only way to control self-interest and forestall social decline was through “manners, which are the basis of government.”8 Even as he celebrated the radical oratory of the American patriots, Webster maintained that virtue was found in obedience, industry, and restraint. Many schoolbook writers of the nineteenth century followed Webster’s lead.9

Bingham’s Columbian Orator, on the contrary, promoted an understanding of virtue that was informed by a tradition of Christian radicalism. Steeped in the New Light Congregationalism of his mentor, Eleazar Wheelock, Bingham maintained that virtue was the personal act of will through which people manifested their communitar-

7Pocock, Virtue, Commerce and History, p. 69.
8Webster, American Selection, p. 214. By manners, Webster meant the austere Connecticut manners of his childhood not the Frenchified affectations of “mannered” conduct most Americans considered a sign of corruption. See the satire of Chesterfield’s French mannerisms in Webster’s “Chesterfield and Cicero” dialogue. Paradoxically, however, in many editions of his Selection, Webster endorsed Chesterfield’s maxims regarding behavior.
9See, e.g., Milcah Moore’s Miscellanies (Philadelphia: Joseph James, 1787); Donald Fraser’s Young Gentleman and Lady’s Assistant (New York: Tho’s Greenleaf, 1791) and Columbian Monitor (New York: Loudon and Brower, 1794); Joseph Dana’s A New American Selection (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1792); Caleb Alexander’s Introduction to Speaking and Writing (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1794) and The Young Gentleman and Lady’s Instructor (Boston: E. Larkin and L. Blake, 1797); and John Wood’s Mentor (New York: John Buel, 1795). Alexander Thomas’s Orator’s Assistant (Worcester: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1797) was an exception but according to Charles Evans’s American Bibliography (New York: P. Smith, 1941–59), it was not reprinted.
ian impulses. Although also pursuing a republican civic ideal, this incarnation of virtue did so without the elitism so often evident in Jeffersonian rhetoric. Bingham’s goal was to train all students, property or not, to express themselves in service to their community. While the message Bingham sought to convey shared certain democratic and egalitarian characteristics with many other nineteenth-century American schoolbooks, which taught the rhetoric of dissent to advance a subtle array of bourgeois values, the Orator’s stoical and communitarian New Light Calvinism was boldly critical of the self-interested aspect of economic individualism. To act with virtue, according to New Light doctrine, was a rigorous, heroic social responsibility, not an opportunity to do as one likes within a broad context of individual, liberal rights. For Bingham, free and virtuous expression—one of the central “RIGHTS OF MAN” so ostentatiously proclaimed in The Columbian Orator—was a spiritual duty, not a possession.

Central to Bingham’s philosophy of active virtue is the conviction that speech is an action. In the introduction to the Columbian Orator, he draws attention to the classical belief that a speaker’s action, or pronunciation, is his chief means of “success in the art of persuasion” (p. 7). The classical connotations of the term, however, were notoriously subtle and also involved the gestures and tones of a speaker’s performance. Bingham invokes this complex tradition with a quotation from Cicero: “It is certain that truth (by which [Cicero] means nature) in everything excels imitation; but if that were sufficient of itself in action, we should have no occasion for art” (p. 10). The ambiguity of the word action in this passage—referring simultaneously to principle, practice, gesture, and pronunciation—explicitly ties stylistic

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11See Appleby, Capitalism and a New Social Order, p. 79n.
12See Sacvan Bercovitch’s Rites of Assent (New York: Routledge, 1993) for an important discussion of the ritual of dissent as a characteristic value of American culture.
13Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, p. 457.
14Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Caleb Bingham’s The Columbian Orator are from the 1821 edition published in Troy, New York, by William S. Parker.
15Both John Mason’s An Essay on Elocution, or Pronunciation (London: R. Hett, 1748) and Thomas Sheridan’s A Course of Lectures on Elocution (Troy: Obadiah Penniman, 1803 [1759]), key sources of eighteenth-century theories of gesture and verbal performance, express frustration at the ambiguous use of the word action in classical literature. For pedagogical purposes they tried to restrict its meaning to gesture only, although they both acknowledged that it meant more than that to the ancients.
delivery to the practical consequences of speech. The active pronunciation of speech is a metaphor for the social efficacy of oratory, where speech itself functions as an action by means of its declarative force. For Bingham, as well as for his revolutionary peers, spoken words were deeds.\textsuperscript{16}

In \textit{The Columbian Orator}, Bingham repeatedly draws on Cato the Younger as an exemplar of speakerly action. In the first instance he references the myth of Cato's opposition to Caesar's dictatorship, influential in both Britain and America following the publication of Addison's \textit{Cato} in 1713. Although Addison deliberately fashioned his play so that it would carry no subversive allegory, to Americans of the 1760s the play justified the Revolution against Britain. As Fredric Litto has shown, revisions of Addison's play by Patrick Henry and Nathan Hale have entered American political and literary traditions of defiance.\textsuperscript{17} Bingham also contributes to the radical appropriation of the play by adding an epilogue that unites the words of oratory with the deeds of revolution: "Rise! then my countryman, for fight to prepare; / Gird on your swords and rush fearless to war." As soldiers are aware, military commands are deeds, and Bingham further references the illocutionary force of language in Napoleon's declaration of freedom to Italy and in Cassius's speech to his armies after the death of Caesar (pp. 69, 136, 142). In these selections, speech \textit{declares} social change.

The most intriguing literary actions in \textit{The Columbian Orator}, however, are those that don't rely on conquest for efficacy. The \textit{Orator}'s epigraph begins: "Cato cultivated ELOQUENCE, as a necessary means for defending the Rights of the People, and for enforcing good counsel." Bingham goes on to illustrate this quotation with Cato's famous reply to Caesar following the Cataline conspiracy. Caesar is attempting to exonerate his corrupt peers, and Cato counters with an alternative model of speech and conduct:

\begin{quote}
At such time, in such a state, some talk to us of lenity and compassion. It is long that we have lost the right name of things. The Commonwealth is in this deplorable situation, only because we call bestowing other people's estates,
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\textsuperscript{17}Fredric Litto, "Addison's \textit{Cato} in the Colonies," \textit{William and Mary Quarterly} 23 (July 1966): 430–49.
liberality, and audaciousness in perpetrating crimes, courage. . . . For these virtues, we have luxury and avarice; or madness to squander, joined with no less to gain; the State is poor and private men are rich. We admire nothing but riches; we give ourselves up to sloth and effeminacy; we make no distinction between the good and the bad; whilst ambition engrosses all the rewards of virtue. Do you wonder, then, that dangerous conspiracies should be formed? [P. 49]

Cato's literary action in this speech is a complex integration of performance and ethical philosophy. His lean phrasing—often in short independent clauses—is a principled substitute for the degraded rhetoric of Rome, in both political and linguistic senses. This double-edged assault is further reinforced by reference to Cato's own stoical deeds: "As I never spared any fault in myself, I was not easily inclined to favor the criminal excesses of others." Cato's personal integrity, his direct syntax, and his critique of self-interest form a multifaceted illustration of precisely those virtues his culture has forsaken. Like Socrates', whose Apology also appears in the Orator, Cato's active virtue—a mode of principled belief, direct speech, and exemplary conduct—is simultaneously an ethical, literary, and political intervention.18

In contrast to the activist model Bingham finds in Cato, the model of virtue Noah Webster discovers in the same source emphasizes obedience. Webster's excerpt in his American Selection from act 1 of Addison's Cato features the dialogue between Juba and Syphax where Roman virtue is compared to its Numidian (or African) counterpart. While the "glowing dames of Zama's royal court" are handsome beside the "pale, unripen'd beauties of the north," and the strength and the intelligence of the Numidian officers equals that of the Roman officers, ultimately their virtues remain shallow. Juba argues:

These are all virtues of a meaner rank,
Perfections that are placed in the bones and nerves;
A Roman soul is bent on higher views;

18Frederick Douglass's awareness of the illocutionary power of Cato's speech is evident in his December 1860 tributes to John Brown. After the Tremont Street riot of 3 December, where Douglass had to fight his way from the stage, he concluded his "Self-Made Men" speech on 9 December by using Cato's phrases to defend John Brown's life and his own freedom to speak about it. See Frederick Holland, Frederick Douglass, the Colored Orator (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), p. 282. Elsewhere, on 14 January 1862, Douglass adopted Cato's objection "there must be no calling things by their right names" to critique the euphemistic language of the Slave Power. See The Frederick Douglass Papers, ed. John Blassingame et al., 5 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979--), 3:477.
MEMORANDA AND DOCUMENTS

To civilize the rude unpolish'd world;
To lay it under the restraint of laws;
To make man mild, and sociable to man.19

Webster's decision to represent Cato as one of "mild and sociable" views underscores that he sought to foster a patriotism quite different from Bingham's. In this passage, as in others on "Modesty," "Discretion," and "Pride" (usually extracted from the Tatler and the Spectator), Webster's Selection privileges the mannered postures of Augustan gentility, well suited to a mid-nineteenth-century culture comfortable with the spectacle of revolt only at a distance.

The political consequences of the two anthologists' differing concepts of proper conduct are especially evident in their presentation of George Washington's speeches. After the Revolution, virile resignation was widely considered to be that act that distinguished republican leaders from monarchical ones.20 As Garry Wills has shown, George Washington "perfected the art of getting power by giving it away," and during his career he self-consciously evoked images of the Roman general Cincinnatus who, after being summoned from the plow to defend Rome, gratefully returned to the fields when his services were no longer required.21 Washington's example proved to Americans that the spirit of revolution could be contained. Webster, responsive to the classical allegory, places Washington's resignation speech between Thomas Dawes's remarks on America's "agrarian law" and the fable of Saint Pierre's patriotic "self-sacrifice" in Calais. Washington's speech neatly bridges the two selections by first affirming that men's proper employment is agriculture and then by recommending his officers (rather than himself) to the patronage of Congress. Webster presents Washington's restraint as a model of patriotic conduct that students should imitate.22

Whereas Webster offers a static figure, Bingham presents a man willing to act in the real world. Among the first selections in the Orator, Bingham foregrounds Washington's address to Congress in 1789

19Webster, American Selection, p. 198.
22Webster, American Selection, pp. 62, 64, 63. Webster's second edition (Philadelphia, 1787) presented a more active Washington. Some of the best passages of that reader were Washington's letters describing the battles of Monmouth and Trenton. Webster dropped the entire section after only one edition had been printed.
at the commencement of his presidency—the speech of a man embarking on a new career. Bingham also includes Washington’s acceptance of the French flag from Ambassador Adet at the conclusion of Jay’s Treaty, an act Washington feared would be viewed unfavorably by his pro-English peers. As it turned out, Washington’s acceptance of the flag, if only to deposit it in the government archives, infuriated Federalists like Webster. Bingham uses Washington’s controversial speech to radicalize Washington with the active spirit of the French Revolution.

As Washington’s commencement address to Congress demonstrates, Bingham’s virtuous heroes often look to the future. Ernst Bloch has described the character of Jeffersonian virtue as a utopian one, an “activity of expectation, of hopeful presentiment” rooted in “energy and surplus.” One of the selections in The Columbian Orator that best reveals how politically subversive this energy can be is Arthur O’Connor’s 1795 speech on behalf of Catholic emancipation in the Irish House of Commons. Like Cato, O’Connor’s polemic unites word and deed, for after delivering his speech, he renounces his seat in parliament and joins the United Irishmen. O’Connor also justifies his actions in utopian terms. He is aware that he is unlikely to see the fruits of his efforts in his lifetime, but he announces nonetheless that he intends to “risk everything dear to me on earth” for the “Immutable principles” of free speech and trade (pp. 243–46). Thus the utopian energy of O’Connor’s literary action overflows its ability to produce an immediate effect, a surplus, or disruptive excess, that differs considerably from the patriotic containment Webster seeks to achieve.

In addition to its illustrations of active virtue, The Columbian Orator’s preference for educational dialogues sets it apart from other anthologies. Bingham had developed this fondness from his college experience at Dartmouth and especially from his study of the French historian Charles Rollin. Because of his family’s friendship with Eleazar Wheelock, in 1779 Bingham attended Wheelock’s recently founded Dartmouth College rather than Yale. Although no college syllabi survive prior to 1796, the library’s earliest records, dating from

1788, show that students were often checking out such texts as Thomas Sheridan on reading, Alexander Pope's *Iliad*, Charles Rollin's *The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belle-Lettres* and ancient histories, John Ward's *System of Oratory*, Joseph Priestley's *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Lord Kames's (Henry Home) *Elements of Criticism*, and William Enfield's *The Speaker*. The titles indicate that students were primarily studying history and rhetoric, with Rollin being very popular on both counts.

Bingham's use of Rollin in the epigraph to *The Columbian Orator* is significant for two reasons. First, Rollin was an extremely popular author in America both before and after the Revolutionary War. Like Sallust, Rollin associated periods of decline in ancient history with the corrupting influences of luxury, and he argued that a fundamental source of social decay were the laws of primogeniture and their consequent inequitable divisions of property. In Rollin's history Americans therefore found a powerful critique of the courtly patronage they hoped to avoid. Rollin would also have appealed to Bingham because his educational theory stressed *example* rather than *precept*. In particular, Rollin's dislike of rhetorical doctrine helps explain the relative lack of theory in Bingham's texts:

rhetoric without the study of good authors is lifeless and barren, and that examples in this, as in all other things, are infinitely more efficacious than precepts. And indeed, the rhetorician seems only to point out the path at a distance which youth are to follow; whilst *the orator takes them by the hand and leads them to it*.

Firmly maintaining that students learn by doing, Rollin further argued that encouraging students to engage in dialogue and conversation was a more effective educational technique than the lecture system because it made education "a diversion" rather than a chore.

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27See the valuable article by David Lundberg and Henry May, "The Enlightened Reader in America," *American Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1976): 430–49. The authors provide statistical overviews of the contents of a number of colonial libraries.


In moving toward Rollin's preference for educational dialogues, Bingham would have received encouragement from college professor John Smith. The year Bingham came to Dartmouth, Smith wrote and produced at least one drama for the entertainment of the college, "A Dialogue between an Englishman and an Indian." In it, the Indian, played by a "real Aboriginal" of Wheelock's school, refutes the arguments of a bad-tempered Englishman who believes that Indians should be exterminated. The Indian admits that his race is "unpolished" but replies that if all such peoples were done away with, the Englishman's ancestors would have been, too. Through his advocacy of "generous benevolence," the Indian persuades the Englishman to question his prejudice. Although Smith reveals concern that college dramas may be morally questionable, such productions were encouraged at Dartmouth over the following years.

Many of the Orator's dialogues were written by David Everett, who attended Dartmouth in the early 1790s when the college literary societies staged patriotic dramas such as "The Demolition of Ancient Mexico," presented readings of Barlow-esque poetry on the virtues of Columbia, and sponsored forensic debates on social issues. In contrast to Yale, where students disputed such technical questions as "which is the most just and equitable mode of taxation for paying the Continental debt" or "whether the repeal of the legal tender act be unjust," the debates at Dartmouth were rather broadly philosophical: "should commerce be free from restraint?"; "how to establish a uniform system of education?"; "should the Indians have exclusive right to

30See Richard Moody, Dramas of the American Theater, 1762–1909 (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1966) for transcriptions of Smith's Dartmouth plays, as well as a letter in which he discusses their moral influence. See Harold Rugg, "The Dartmouth Plays, 1779–1782," The Theater Annual 1 (1942): 55–57, for photographic facsimiles of the plays and brief background commentary. Dartmouth College was, of course, founded as part of Eleazar Wheelock's multifaceted project to educate native American men and return them to their tribes as missionaries.

31United Fraternity Records, 1786–1800. Baker Library, Dartmouth College. Everett attended Dartmouth when its literary societies were under attack for elitism. In 1793, radical egalitarian students destroyed the records of the Social Friends and formed an open "Independent" or "Pot Meal" society which continued for some years. See Asa Tilton, "The Dartmouth Literary or Debating Societies," The Granite Monthly: A New Hampshire Magazine 52 (1920): 157–69. Everett remained a republican for life. See also Everett's Daranzel, or the Persian Patriot (Boston: John Russell, 1800), an orientalized version of Addison's Cato, as well as his Essay on the Rights and Duties of Nations Relative to Fugitives . . . (Boston: David Carlyle, 1807) on the Chesapeake affair. Everett also launched several republican newspapers, including, in 1809, the Boston Patriot. For biographical material on Everett, see Francis Blake, "David Everett," pamphlet, General Collection, New York Public Library, pp. 1–13.
all the lands they possess as hunting grounds." Records of Dartmouth's United Fraternity during Everett's tenure indicate a bias toward public-spirited conclusions: in December 1793, the Fraternity asked, "Do all men by nature have equal endowments?" Yes, the membership decided. In January 1794, "Would the occupation of Canada be advantageous to America?" No. In May, "Which is preferable, a public or a private education?" The Dartmouth students decided for a public one.

The spirit of the Dartmouth College debates is evident in the dialogues Everett wrote for the Orator. His "Forensic Dispute on the Question, Are the Anglo-Americans Endowed with Capacity and Genius Equal to Europeans?" opens and concludes in the affirmative. The "Oppressive Landlord" is a biting critique of economic exploitation: the landlord, Don Philip, claims his liberal right to pursue his "own interest" rather than that of the community at large. In a "town crowded with foreigners who are exiled from their own homes," he is confident of gaining "whatever price is demanded from them." In the end, his property is destroyed by fire, and only his lawyer remains to console him (p. 89). Everett's dialogue on "Physiognomy" takes issue with Lavater's theory that men can be known by their looks. Lavater's precocious disciple is eventually robbed by a handsome flatterer (p. 79). With such criticisms of racial prejudice and economic self-interest, The Columbian Orator anticipates the concerns of the abolition movement by envisioning a society that is genuinely inclusive only insofar as it meets its obligation to protect the lives of its disadvantaged.

Whereas most early American readers portray Native Americans as "brave, strong, cruel, eloquent, and finally unfit for civilization," The Columbian Orator is one of the few to uphold Native Americans' tribal dignity and land rights. In the "Dialogue between a White Inhabitant of the United States and an Indian," apparently modeled on


33 Elson, Guardians of Tradition, p. 70. Christianized Indians fared better in early readers. In the 1799 Columbian Reading Book, a white man asks, "Whose Indian are you?" The Indian replies, "I'm God Almighty's Indian. Whose Indian are you?" (see Clifton Johnson, Old Time Schools and School-books [London: Macmillan, 1917], p. 282). None of the Indians in Bingham's Orator is Christian, and they are proud of it.
Smith’s earlier dramatic dialogue, the Indian refutes the notion that whites had more right to Indian land because they cultivated it better:

**White Man:** If any have a superior claim, it must be those, who, by their arts and industry, can support the greatest number on the smallest territory.

**Indian:** What would your people say, if poor men should go to a rich man, and tell him, the Great Parent has given the earth to all men in common; . . . your great farm supports but few; you may move to one corner of your land; that is sufficient for you; we will take the rest. . . . Should you call this just? [P. 270]

The Indian cleverly shows that claims of manifest destiny can be turned against rich landholders by poor whites, and the consequences would be unsettling indeed. He then goes on to indict the white man’s unethical laws, concluding, “you call us savages! But that must mean something better than civilized, if you are civilized” (p. 270). The inversion of the terms *savage* and *civilized*, a strategy clearly borrowed from Chief Logan’s speech and other eighteenth-century representations of Native American oratory, is unusual insofar as Bingham’s portrayals of the Indians are not tinged with the customary tone of inevitable doom.34 As in Bingham’s representations of Asians, blacks, and poor whites, *The Columbian Orator* frequently attacks the notion that these groups are any less human (or resilient) than their wealthy Christian antagonists.

Although the Orator’s antislavery passages are well known, they have generally been evaluated without benefit of the context from which they have been drawn; thus, scholars have tended to dismiss them as merely supportive of bourgeois individualism.35 The “Dialogue between a Master and Slave,” which privileges the slave’s clever illocutionary strategy and logical argumentation, has been viewed as the slave’s escape from physical bondage into the more subtle confines of Enlightenment ideology.36 But even though the passage

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34 Chief Logan’s speech was first made famous when published in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). Americans’ use of this speech, and others like it, to create the stereotype of the doomed noble savage is discussed by Roy Harvey Pearce in *Savagism and Civilization* (1953; reissued, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).


evokes an instrumental view of literacy as the slave articulately expresses his individual rights, it also uncovers the limitations of a strictly rights-based world view: the slave cites the planter's wealth as evidence that he has profited at the expense of his peers (p. 241). The shift in the argument from the slave's (legitimate) human rights to the master's (illegitimate) economic rights is an important instance of how the Orator's communitarian emphasis complicates its endorsements of middle-class liberal values. The Columbian Orator forcefully advocates individualism, but it circumscribes individual rights within a larger framework of collective and spiritual duty.

The Orator is a radical text, but it is so not because it calls for changes in social relations beyond the terms set by the American Revolution; rather, it strives to conserve the volatile aspects of Revolutionary ideology most authors of American (and British) textbooks were carefully attempting to subdue. In large measure, this "radicalism" derives from Bingham's New Light millennialism, which affirms the capability of speech—the preaching of righteous gospel—to usher in the millennium. This version of millennialist doctrine, called post-millennialism, held that human activity could inaugurate the millennium in advance of Christ's appearance. Although its enthusiasm for "the earth heaving, charnel-houses rattling, tombs bursting, graves opening, [and] the air darkening with fragments of bodies" alienated


The secondary school readers written after Bingham's death in 1817, such as John Pierpont's American First-Class Reader (1823; reissued, Boston: David H. Williams, 1839) or his National Reader (Boston: Hillard, Gray, Little and Wilkins, 1827) mark a steady withdrawal from the Revolutionary ideology Bingham sought to conserve. As Elson remarks, by the publication of the McGuffey Reader series in the late 1830s, almost all activist sentiment had been expurgated from high school readers in favor of an antiquarian respect for "vaguely defined" early American keywords like liberty, the Declaration, or the Constitution (Guardians of Tradition, p. 295).

some late-nineteenth-century educators, at the start of the century, the Orator's millennial violence was embraced as a positive omen; indeed, the text outstripped its competition in the first half of the century precisely because it included a greater number of religious selections.\textsuperscript{39}

In basing its promotion of active virtue on a vision of America as both New Jerusalem and one-in-the-becoming, the Orator presented an unusually idealistic, and perhaps anachronistic, lesson for young Americans. The Columbian Orator was, in most respects, a text of the 1790s, for it grew out of the collision of republican ideals of equality and popular participation against the exclusionary and mannered elitism of the Federalist party. The speakers given voice in Bingham's Orator clearly sanctioned, and popularized for many years after, the unruliness and enlightened rationalism of the small republican societies that arose in the mid-1790s in imitation of French Jacobin clubs. These voluntary, egalitarian political groups manifested, in Joyce Appleby's words, "a collective hope" for a better future based, in part, on active political participation.\textsuperscript{40} Although there is no record that Bingham ever joined a radical club like the Massachusetts Constitutional Society or the Boston Jacobin Club, a bookstore he owned in Boston was a central meeting place for the beleaguered democratic-republicans of that Federalist city.\textsuperscript{41} Bingham's publications reflected his commitment to the efficacy of debate and social action, but, more important, they preserved for generations of students the active spirit of Jeffersonian republicanism long after it had lost its influence.


\textsuperscript{40}Appleby, Capitalism and a New Social Order, pp. 79–86. For a study of the democratic-republican clubs, see Paul Goodman, The Democratic-Republicansof Massachusetts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

\textsuperscript{41}Fowle, "Caleb Bingham," p. 440.

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