BAILYN BESIEGED IN HIS BUNKER*

Boom!... Boom!... What is that noise? Where is it coming from? Can anybody tell us what that noise is?... Maybe they're rehearsing at Lexington and Concord.... I'll tell you what it is. It's the sound of cannon around the Charles Warren Center at Harvard.[1] Dirk Hoerder's paper--and others like it--have practically brought the place down. The growing assault is reducing the place to rubble. The rebels have reached Harvard, it's about to fall, and there's no money in the budget to replace it. It's tragic. Bernard Bailyn has retreated into his secret underground bunker, the one he had built back in '68 to protect him from those crazed maniacs, the STUDENT RADICALS. Look--there he is now, he's digging his way out. Pauline Maier has him by the hand; she's leading him through a hole in the collapsed roof.[2] Thank God Dirk got out: he alone has survived to tell the tale.

The foundations of Bailyn's bunker were actually laid in the period after World War II. While Harry Truman, the young Dick Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover, and others were trying to read radicals out of the American present, historians were trying to purge them from the past.[3] But when the realities of the 60's made this interpretation untenable, somebody had to update the old interpretation. Around here [Boston], the updaters ran from B to Z--Bailyn to Zobel.[4] Most recently, in his Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson,[5] Bailyn has ascended to a celestial neutrality, what he humbly calls "an ultimate mode of interpretation" (Lemisch hums "Ode to Joy"). In this ultimate mode, Hutchinson is "savagely assaulted" by adversaries who Bailyn neutrally sees as "inflamed mobs," "paranoiac," "the subversive party," "extremists," driven by "passion," and "personal discontent."[6] And these same loonies appear in Bailyn's version of Tom Paine, that "bankrupt Quaker corsetmaker"--can you think of anything worse?--"a bankrupt Quaker corsetmaker," a "savage" and "enraged" "ignoramus," whose writing was "slapdash," "crude" and "slightly insane." Get that--slightly insane.[7]

Bailyn's current detection of a lunatic undercurrent in the American Revolution replaces an earlier Bailyn version in which the revolutionary crowds were united with their leaders, and, like them, good eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen. This was most fully spelled out not by Bailyn, but by Pauline Maier. Opening her book with a Tocqueville quotation about the Revolution being marked by respect for law and order,[8] she gave us a law and order crowd, acting out of an ideology shared with their Whig leaders. It is in a way a new consensus interpretation, and the term consensus, which we thought was used up a decade ago, deserves revival here, just as Gutman has recently revived it to describe Fogel and Engerman's work on slavery.[9]

With Maier's view, I have a few disagreements. I was struck, for instance, by the contortions she went through to fit into her law and order model those who advocated open disobedience to the Stamp Act (1765). The movement for business as usual without the use of stamps involved a direct confrontation with British authority, unlike the more passive strategy, boycott.[10] But somehow, in her book, the theme of the movement towards direct disobedience becomes the very reverse of what it was--a movement, as she calls it, "away from overt violence."[11] Now I think that tomorrow, instead of protesting gas prices by boycott, I'm going to tell them to fill it up, I'll drive off without paying, and get Maier to tell the judge that this is evidence of my deep respect for law. And she supports her claim that "the people most often worked through established governmental channels" by citing Rhode Island, whose legislature was the only one to endorse disobedience.[12]

Some people just can't be squeezed into Maier's consensus, so instead she just reads them out of America. For instance, she acknowledges that violent customs riots don't fit her pattern. Don't worry, the violence was probably due, she says, to "volatile foreign seamen,"[13] Irishmen apparently. This libel against Jack Tarr, foreigners in general, and the Irish in particular has a positively Boorstinian flavor.

These excesses aren't typical of Maier's important work. She has a more scholarly temperament than her mentor Bailyn--that bankrupt Quaker corsetmaker with his slapdash, crude and slightly insane writings. Her work deserves the central place it's gaining in the current literature, and the problem is that she's just plain wrong. Her book is, as she describes it, "to a large extent ... a study of political perception,"[14] a view of the crowd from the top down, a series of assertions about what was on their minds based on projection downwards from what she finds in the minds of Whig leaders: almost an old-time intellectual history. In the very act of trying to make the case for consensus, she presents an enormous amount of evidence for conflict, showing us again and again a crowd which is in fact self-willed, out of control, its alleged leaders desperately struggling to keep up.

But here's Dirk Hoerder working in the very belly of the monster, across the hall from Maier at the Charles Warren Center, and nonetheless attempting to see things from the crowd's point of view as well as from the point of view of those we think of as "leaders." He sees other gaps in the argument, picking up, for instance, on the difference between passive and active resistance (241). He goes some distance in establishing that Boston was a class society. But the paper's central virtue is in moving us towards seeing distinctive class ideologies in revolutionary Boston.

Hoerder presents us with a complex and sophisticated picture of leaders sometimes fitting Maier's pattern and sometimes not. Now leaders lead, now they follow the crowd: they oscillate between controlling and initiating (240). Sometimes he finds obstacles to the "independent articulation of interests" (238). But what is novel and challenging is the prominence in his account of "self-led" (240), "self-organized" crowds (242), going beyond the control of the gentlemen (242); crowds showing "independence of action" (242), acting on their own, expressing other grievances than their leaders (257). Their independence reflects independent traditions (265), and, finally, a distinctive class feeling which is there, albeit "rudimentary" and "submerged" (265). Hoerder shows us the folly of projecting ideas in the heads of crowds from ideas in the heads of elites. The closer we look, the more evidence we find of self-organization and distinctive ideas. The previous failure to see this was an artifact of historians' ideology and their sources.

Hoerder's stress on self-activity and the tension between leaders and crowds presents a serious challenge to Maier and Bailyn. But it could go farther. Bailyn is in his bunker, we rebels think we have him surrounded, but unless Dirk and Jesse and many others in the growing rebel army do better than we have, King Bud III may come out of this with his empire intact.

So let me suggest some of the weaknesses that I see in the larger attack on the Bunker. If my remarks incidentally present Bailyn with an escape route, they're intended as a few notes for a handbook which might finally lead to a successful rebellion.

Hoerder would be the first to acknowledge that he hasn't clearly established class, or class consciousness, or distinctive ideologies. Maybe they just aren't there. Or, maybe other methodologies might find more. If there were a conscious lower class, you wouldn't get very far inside that consciousness by looking at the fears of the upper class. Nixon's terror of the Left tells us something--it's relevant evidence--but not that much about what was in the mind of the Left. And it won't ~~do~~ to say, as does Hoerder, that when the "wealthy and powerful" take to their guns, this is testimony to the "class character" of the actions of the crowd" (244). It may be testimony to some kind of consciousness on the part of the wealthy and powerful, and Hoerder does present plenty of evidence of that kind of consciousness, but such projections tell us little more about the consciousness of the lower classes than did Maier's projections from Whig leaders into the mind of the crowd. Holding to the notion of a "history from the bottom up,"[15] I just don't see how you establish lower-class consciousness without looking directly into the minds of the lower classes.

Of course Hoerder does, but not deeply enough here, although I think he has looked more deeply elsewhere.[16] One of his tools is what has been called Rudé-fication, those wonderful techniques developed by George Rudé: Those tools are useful, perhaps necessary, but certainly not sufficient to establish class consciousness, or the lack of it. Take the technique of looking at crowds' targets of destruction (243-244). Just how much can we read in the information that rioters damaged expensive window panes, coaches and coach houses? Something, enough to make it worth doing, and we'll all continue to do it. But this kind of action is at best a gross guide to what's on people's minds. Looking at broken windowpanes is hanging a lot on a little; it's not going to get you to class consciousness. In reading back from targets of destruction, we are once again projecting indirectly into the minds of the rioters: we'd do better to ask them directly what's troubling them. And in order to do that adequately, we've got to get there before the riot. Studying the explosion is illuminating, but focusing on the riot may obscure causalities which can be found only by the study of "normal" daily life. Or, to put it another way, your picture of Attica may be a very misleading one if you begin with the prisoners' uprising.

If we're looking for distinctive values and class consciousness, we've got to get into the minds of ordinary people. If we say that people are acting in accord with distinctive traditions, we've got to examine those traditions. Otherwise our statements about the advance or decline of the crowd's independence are weak, as are statements about the degree of class consciousness, whether rudimentary, or more fully developed. Indeed, Hoerder's overall scheme has a faintly manipulative, even Maierian flavor, which needs further testing. Until we look into the minds of the crowd, how do we really know that leadership got them moving in 1765, then lost control, and later regained it? Are we sure that their external conduct is an adequate measure of their attitude and consciousness? Behavior is not synonymous with attitude. I can easily conceive of coexistence between a fully developed class consciousness and a high degree of control by leaders. Conversely, I can imagine a fully autonomous and uncontrolled crowd with just about no class consciousness. There's no necessary correlation either way, and we're not going to know what's rudimentary, or distinctive, or controlled, by looking from the outside. Hoerder has rich information on a variety of crowd activities of the sort which Eric Hobsbawn has called "prepolitical."[17] It would be extremely valuable were Hoerder to make the link between these activities and his political riots.

Getting into people's minds requires a number of assumptions and approaches. One assumption which has been notably absent

in the attack on Bailyn is the idea that lower-class people can have ideologies.[18] The attack on Bailyn's ideological approach has led to a general bias by the attackers against all ideological approaches. But this is a case of throwing out the baby with the Bailyn. It makes perfect sense to me to counter Bailyn's ideological approach with a better ideological approach. Hoerder says that "rioters ... did not simply act on ... abstract principles or theories ..." but rather when "imperial policies and practices had a local impact and became issues in their daily lives" (252).[19] That may be a little condescending. Why should rioters be such plodding people that they can't act on "abstract principles," values, ideologies?

I think the answer has something to do with the idea that economics is what's really real. There is currently a boom in this kind of thinking in the ranks of the anti-Bailyn army. The boom comes in part out of the Marxist notion of the primacy of base over superstructure, a notion whose validity has not been demonstrated.[20] I really don't think the struggle against Bailynism is going very far until the opposition recognizes the possibility that all kinds of people might have ideologies, values, culture (more narrowly perceived as "abstract principles") and that economics might not necessarily be the crucial determinant of those principles. Until we look at such things, we're not going to understand Puritans, or lynch-mobs, or fundamentalist anti-textbook movements, or anti-busing protestors, or American Revolutionary crowds.[21]

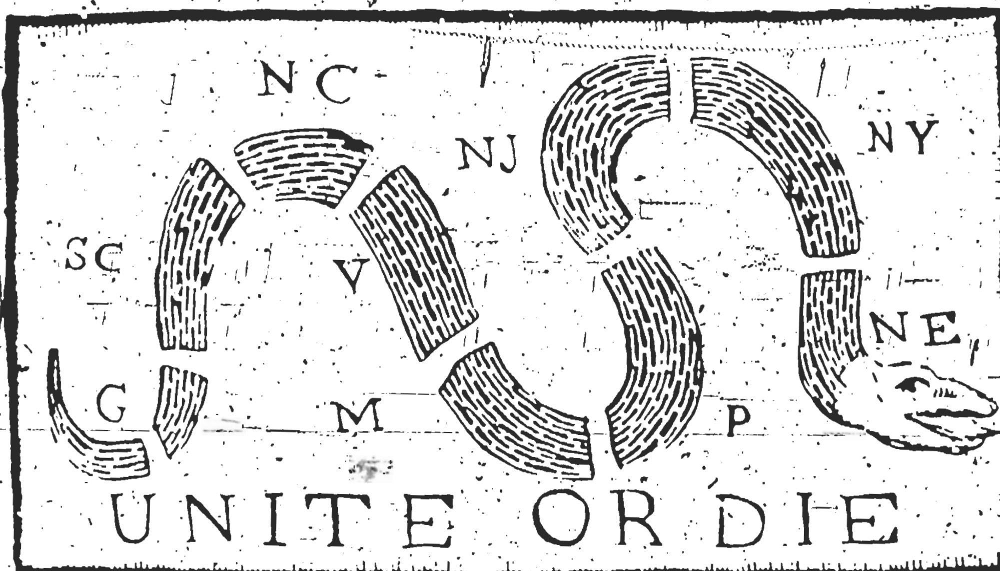
Just as we've got to begin to see economics as one of many contributors to popular ideology, we've got to study popular politics in the broader context of popular culture. Class is an extremely complex affair, and we can't really begin to understand it until we move from a narrow understanding of class as a merely structural phenomenon to class as a cultural phenomenon. There isn't a section of the brain labeled politics, another one labeled economics, another one labeled values, and another one labeled religion. I don't think you can adequately study self-activity and independent consciousness by looking narrowly at politics alone. We have much to learn from a black history which has for quite a while moved easily from religion to folklore to tradition to politics. And the same goes for a developing women's history, whether it is seeing the intermixture of sexual politics and medical ideology, the politics of quilt-making, or the attempts of nineteenth century women to delay the pace of the move westward.[22] Such examples offer assurance that it is possible to do this. Other examples are Christopher Hill's The World Turned Upside Down,[23] Herbert Gutman's work, and Natalie Davis and Edward Thompson on charivari.[24] In my own work I'm trying to move deeper

into culture and consciousness through biographies of ordinary people, looking at popular religion and ideologies, values and visions, aspirations, desperations, frustrations. I think I'm learning as much about the meaning of the American Revolution by asking why men went to sea, as I earlier learned from the more directly political study of impressment.[25]

And close to home is Al Young's stunning study of Pope's Day, tar and feathering in Boston.[26] Young's exploration of anti-Stuart ideology and the politicization of traditional ritual does indeed get into the mind of the crowd. Along these lines, I found some of Hoerder's most interesting material in his passing mention of Bible-quoting rioters (237, 267). In instances such as these in Hoerder's work, there is much that seems to me potentially fruitful in connection with a distinctive lower-class culture.

In conclusion, we colonial historians need to move beyond politics, to culture, and values and ideas. Unless we do, Bailyn in his Bunker may weather the storm easily, quite properly confident that we will never see the distinctive and often moving realities of the lives of ordinary people in early America.

Here in Boston, on April 18, 1975, for once the Bicentennial should mean something to us historians, shining through the gloom, the bullshit, the plastic, and the corruption. We want to know what happened two hundred years ago today, and tomorrow, here in Boston, and in Lexington and Concord. To find out, we will have to expand enormously our conception of politics and of history itself. We will have to look at how people worked, the clothes they wore, the holidays they celebrated, the memories they preserved and passed on to their children, the songs they sang, the gods they worshipped, and their personal visions and secret and desperate hopes for a better life.



NOTES

*This paper was originally presented, in somewhat longer form as a comment on two papers read at the Organization of American Historians annual meeting in Boston, April 18, 1975. (The rich tapestry of military metaphor is best understood in context: Lexington and Concord Bicentennial commemorations were in progress.) One of these papers, Dirk Hoerder's "Grievances and Interests of the Common Man: A Case Study of Boston From the Stamp Act to the Eighties," was a condensed version of his "Boston Leaders and Boston Crowds, 1765-1776," subsequently published in Alfred F. Young, editor, The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism (DeKalb, Illinois 1976), 233-271. (Citations in parentheses in the text are to the published version of Hoerder's essay.) For publication in the RHR I have omitted the discussion of the second paper presented at the OAH session in order more precisely to focus the issues under discussion. Aside from a few revisions and clarifications in the text, the significant additions to my original paper are all in the footnotes; other than this, I have made no efforts to update. I am grateful to Gary B. Nash for his criticism.

Hoerder's essay carries us quite far in a positive direction beyond existing interpretations, and, now that it is generally available, I hope that it will be widely read. The book in which it appears should also be brought to the attention of RHR's readers. The essays assembled by Alfred Young in The American Revolution reveal the existence of a rich and varied Left to the left of eighteenth-century Whig thought; taken as a whole, the book adds up to a serious challenge to the Bailyn paradigm discussed in this paper. (For fuller comments on The American Revolution, see my review, forthcoming in the American Historical Review.)

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1. Bernard Bailyn, Professor of History at Harvard, is a member of the Administrative Committee of Harvard's Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History and is co-editor of the Center's journal, Perspectives in American History. Dirk Hoerder and Pauline Maier were among the Fellows at the Center in 1974-75. Bailyn has played a central role in advocating what he calls the "rather old-fashioned view that the American Revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups undertaken to force changes in the organization of the society or the economy." Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge,

1967), vi. For some other important works by Bailyn, see: The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson (Cambridge 1974); The Origins of American Politics (New York 1968) (see review by Jesse Lemisch, New Republic, May 25, 1968).

2. Maier's work, discussed below, stands on its own and is not to be seen as simply an extension of the scholarship of her mentor, Bailyn. Nonetheless, her writing has played a crucial role in shoring up Bailyn's collapsing paradigm at one of its weakest points: at a time when American historians were becoming more interested in non-elite groups, Maier Bailynized the crowd, attempting to demonstrate that the ideological complex which Bailyn had found in the colonial elite was present in the crowd. Although it should be clear from the following that I read the evidence differently, Maier has nonetheless asked important questions about the crowd: those who disagree with her must come to terms with her arguments and her evidence.

3. See Jesse Lemisch, On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession (Toronto 1975).

4. See Hiller B. Zobel, The Boston Massacre (New York 1970). Compare Jesse Lemisch, "Radical Plot in Boston (1770): A Study in the Use of Evidence," Harvard Law Review, LXXXIV (December 1970), 485-504.

5. Hutchinson was a Loyalist Governor of Massachusetts; victim of Stamp Act rioters, he later went into exile in England.

6. Bailyn, Ordeal, ix, 37, 38, 2, 126, 127, 32, 34. Elsewhere, Bailyn has written that his way of seeing things "makes it possible to approach that ultimate stage of maturity in historical interpretation where partisanship is left behind." Leaving his partisanship behind, in the same essay Bailyn notes that in not abolishing slavery the Revolutionary leaders refused "to allow the Revolutionary movement to slide off into fanaticism." Bailyn, "The Central Themes of the American Revolution," in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., Essays on the American Revolution (Chapel Hill, 1973), 15, 29. See review by Gary B. Nash, William and Mary Quarterly, third series, XXXI (April, 1974), 313-314. For further discussion of fanaticism and other matters, see letters to the editor from Bailyn and Nash, ibid, XXXII (January 1975), 182-185.

7. Bernard Bailyn, "Common Sense," American Heritage, December 1973, 36, 92, 37. Compare Eric Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America (New York 1976).

8. Pauline Maier, From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776 (New York 1972), vii.

9. Herbert G. Gutman, "The World Two Cliometricians Made," Journal of Negro History, LX (January 1975), 217-219. For Joseph Ernst's use of the term in connection with Bailyn, see below, footnote 18.

10. For a consideration of conflicting strategies of opposition to the Stamp Act, see Jesse Lemisch, "New York's Petitions and Resolves of December 1765: Liberals vs. Radicals," New York Historical Society Quarterly, XLIX (October 1965), 313-326.

11. ~~Maier, Resistance to Revolution, 71.~~

12. Ibid., 72.

13. Pauline Maier, "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America," William and Mary Quarterly, third series XXVII (January 1970), 17.

14. Maier, Resistance to Revolution, xiii.

15. Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen From the Bottom Up," in Barton J. Bernstein, Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History (New York 1968), 3-45.

16. Dirk Hoerder, "People and Mobs: Crowd Action in Massachusetts During the American Revolution, 1765-1780" (Ph.D. dissertation, Free University of Berlin, 1971).

17. Hoerder, ibid., Chapter III ("The Crowd in Massachusetts History--An Institution").

18. Joseph Ernst, "'Ideology' and an Economic Interpretation of the Revolution," in Young, editor, The American Revolution, 159-185, offers another important critique of Bailyn. He correctly sees in Bailyn's work "a too-simplistic consensus view of colonial behavior" (167). (Here he draws on Alfred Young's excellent "The Bailyn Thesis and the Problem of 'Popular' Ideology," unpublished paper presented at Organization of American Historians annual meeting, Denver, April 1974). I agree with Ernst's contention that "the exploration of ideas during the era of the American Revolution often has divorced thought from social reality" (161). (He is also critical of Edmund and Helen Morgan's "disembodied abstractions" (165) and of William Appleman Williams' "tendency ... to discuss economic beliefs on the same

high level of abstraction employed by Bailyn in his treatment of political beliefs...." [168]).

"There is," says Ernst, "too much analysis of the Revolution's superstructure--ideas, principles, politics, and culture--and too little of its substructure--political economy" (160). But this polarization is too simplistic and exclusive; it ignores a major missing ingredient. There has in fact been very little analysis of popular ideas, principles, and culture in Revolutionary America. Thus Ernst is--doubtless without intending to--in effect identifying the study of ideas with the study of elite ideas (of which there has been a great deal, although I cannot agree that there has been "too much"; we need better studies of elite thought, not fewer.) While it may be useful to turn in addition to political economy, we cannot afford to pass over the study of popular ideas and culture. (But see 179-181 for some exploration of economic aspects of "the mentality of the urban poor.")

Ernst seeks the "connections and interrelations" between superstructure and substructure (160). But the connections seem all to go one way: it is "economic considerations" that are of "fundamental importance" (160); "what the colonists said and did about their economic problems provided the essential impetus for what is commonly called the 'revolutionary movement'" (182). In this way of looking at things, the perfectly reasonable contention that "values shaped behavior" (165) is perceived narrowly, and is all but dismissed.

19. "Self-interest, not constitutional principle, brought the merchants and mechanics together in a common cause" (Ernst, ibid., 178). Compare Pauline Maier: "Bailyn's theory is contested in part by critics who inaccurately reduce the controversy to one between principles and interests as motivational factors" (Maier, "Why Revolution? Why Democracy?" Journal of Interdisciplinary History, VI [Spring 1976], 713).

20. See preceding footnotes concerning Ernst. For further discussion of the general problem, see Naomi Weisstein, Virginia Blaisdell, Jesse Lemisch, The Godfathers: Freudians, Marxists, and the Scientific and Political Protection Societies (New Haven 1976).

21. As left activists, a failure to look deeply at popular values, ideas, principles and culture and a resort to a simplistic class analysis will keep us out of touch with and uncomprehending the grievances and aspirations of many Americans who will quite reasonably see our analysis as unappealing, irrelevant, and possibly hostile.

For instance, much in contemporary Left thinking might well have to undergo the most serious reconsideration if historian of religion William G. McLoughlin is correct in his contention that America is "a nation of pietists," "committed to a moralistic approach to life": McLoughlin, "Pietism and the American Character," American Quarterly, XVII (1965), 186. With a Baptist elected as president, perhaps it is time for American Leftists to come to a better understanding of the role of pietistic religion in American life.

Writing in 1965, McLoughlin defined American pietism in language that inevitably resonates with the experience of those who participated in the New Left of the 'sixties:

> American pietism is the belief that every individual is himself responsible for deciding the rightness or wrongness of every issue (large or small) in terms of a higher moral law; that he must make this decision the moment he is confronted with any question in order to prevent any complicity with evil; and having made his decision, he must commit himself to act upon it at once, taking every opportunity and utilizing every possible method to implement his decision not only for himself and in his own home or community, but throughout the nation and the world (173).

If, as McLoughlin contends, pietistic-perfectionism "lies at the basis of American civilization" (164), American radicals would be wise to stop making simplistic translations to American soil of various foreign models, including the currently fashionable Italian Communist Party. A socialist party of order may appeal to Italians (I don't know), but there's very little in the historical record to indicate that so pallid a vision will arouse a nation of pietists.

22. Virginia Drachman, "The Attitudes of Male and Female Physicians Toward Women Patients: An Investigation of the Relationship of Feminism to Medical Care in Late 19th Century America" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York, Buffalo, 1976); Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," Radical America, VII (1973), No. 1, 36-68; Amy Kesselman, "Diaries and Reminiscences of Women on the Oregon Trail: A Study in Consciousness" (unpublished paper presented at Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, 1974).

23. For a suggestive study of the movement across the Atlantic of the ideas of one of the radical groups Hill deals with, see J.F. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth

Monarchy: The Quest for the Millenium in Early American Puritanism," William and Mary Quarterly, third series, XXXII (April 1975), 223-260. But note Maclear's ahistorical assumption that "the prophetic vision ... passed away" with the death of the last Fifth Monarchist (258). Ideas do not die so abruptly as people, and, also unlike people, they are generally reincarnated in some form. Even ideas that are not written down are passed on from parents to children. Tracing such submersions and re-emergences, and figuring out the workings of popular memory, overlay, and recall, are important and challenging tasks. Some of the methodological questions which oral history must be concerned with also have great relevance for periods beyond the reach of oral history.

24. See also Rhys Isaac's exciting work on evangelical religion in Virginia, including his "Preachers and Patriots: Popular Culture and the Revolution in Virginia," in Young, editor, The American Revolution, 125-156.

25. Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," William and Mary Quarterly, third series, XXV (July 1968), 317-407. (Also available in Bobbs-Merrill reprint H-431 and in Alfred F. Young, editor, Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism [DeKalb, Illinois, 1968], 37-82.)

26. Alfred F. Young, "Pope's Day, Tar and Feathers, and 'Cornet Joyce, jun.': From Ritual to Rebellion in Boston, 1745-1775," unpublished paper presented at Anglo-American Labor Historians Conference, Rutgers University, 1973. Young develops this work further in his forthcoming The Crowd and the Coming of The Revolution: From Ritual to Rebellion in Boston.

NOTE

Jesse Lemisch's Bicentennial Schlock exhibit will open at the 1199 Gallery (43rd St. and 8th Ave.) May 2 and run through the first or second week in June.