

*David Hume and
Eighteenth-Century
America*

Mark G. Spencer

David Hume and Eighteenth-Century America

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To Kelly

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FOREWORD

Writing to Benjamin Franklin in 1772, David Hume said he was keen to see an American edition of his works, remarking “I fancy that I must have recourse to America for justice.” Sadly, modern scholars have been less than attentive to Hume’s reception in early America. It frequently is supposed that early Americans ignored Hume’s philosophical writings and, even more so, that they rejected out-of-hand his “Tory” *History of England*. Scholars have long assumed that Hume’s books had insignificant influence on American political writers. James Madison, if he used Hume’s ideas in *Federalist* No. 10, it is commonly argued, thought best to do so silently — for open allegiance to Hume was a liability. Despite renewed debate about the impact of Hume’s political ideas on Madison and a select few other Americans, existing scholarship is often speculative, narrow, and oblivious to the more complete story attempted below.

This book explores the reception of David Hume’s thought in eighteenth-century America by drawing upon a wide assortment of evidence. The story revealed in those sources presents a challenge to standard interpretations that assume Americans rejected Hume’s works. Early American book catalogues, periodical publications, and the writings of lesser-light thinkers are used to describe Hume’s impact on the social history of ideas, an essential context for understanding the classic texts of early American political thought, where Hume’s influence is especially evident. Hume’s thought circulated earlier and more widely than scholars have assumed, largely through his collected works, the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. But most popular of all Hume’s writings was his *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*, a book that was read early, often, and in distinctive ways. Hume’s *History of England* informed the intellectual origins of the American Revolution in ways that modern scholars have not hitherto recognized. Hume’s text remained influential in early America until well after the close of the eighteenth century. Readers such as the 326 subscribers to the overlooked first American edition of Hume’s *History* (published in Philadelphia in 1795/96) were more representative of the *History*’s friendly reception in enlightened America than are its few critics. Thomas Jefferson’s latter-day rejection of

Hume's political thought may foreshadow Hume's falling reputation in nineteenth-century America. But Jefferson's reading of Hume was a long way away from the typical eighteenth-century American reading it has so often been made out to be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has benefited from the assistance of many people. It is with great pleasure that I thank Roger L. Emerson, Jean V. Matthews, and David Allan for their guidance with the dissertation which was the book's departure point. That version benefited from close readings by Chandos M. Brown, Douglas G. Long, and Ian K. Steele. As the book manuscript took shape, Robert Alley and Kenneth F. Barber, referees for the University of Rochester Press, provided helpful comments. Richard B. Sher generously gave the entire manuscript a close reading at a late, but crucial, stage.

The staffs at numerous libraries and repositories have obliged many requests, even curious ones. At home, in Canada, I have relied most heavily on the D. B. Weldon Library of the University of Western Ontario and the John P. Robarts Library of the University of Toronto. In the United States, parts of summers were spent at the American Antiquarian Society, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Library of Congress, the Pennsylvania Historical Society, the Presbyterian History Society, the University of Michigan's Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library, the Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania, and the Widener Library, Harvard University. While living in Britain, I relied primarily on the libraries at the University of St. Andrews and the University of Edinburgh, but also the British Library, Cambridge University Library, Glasgow University Library, the Mitchell Library, the National Library of Scotland, and at Oxford University, the Bodleian Library. I am also grateful to the American Philosophical Society for granting me permission to quote from the David Hall Letter Books and the Nathaniel Greene Papers; to the Library Company of Philadelphia for permission to quote from marginalia in two copies of Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* held in their collection; to the Lilly Library, Indiana University, for permission to quote from their Benjamin Rush journal; and to the Royal Society of Edinburgh for permission to quote from the Royal Society of Edinburgh's *David Hume Bequest*, held on deposit at the National Library of Scotland.

Several of the book's themes were pursued in presentations at scholarly seminars, including the International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World at Harvard University, the Seminar on Early Modern Intellectual History at the University of Edinburgh, and the Interdisciplinary Seminar on the

18th Century at the University of Western Ontario. Other parts of the project were improved by being presented at conferences held at Newnham College of Cambridge University, the University of Guelph, and the University of Michigan, as well as before annual meetings of scholarly societies such as the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies/Société canadienne d'études dix-huitième siècle, the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society, Midwest American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, and the Hume Society. Small parts of this book have appeared in print heretofore. An earlier version of chapter 6 was published as "Hume and Madison on Faction," in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, a short piece on Hume and Franklin was published in the *Franklin Gazette*, and a summary of Hume's reception in Philadelphia will appear as a chapter in Peter Jones, ed. *Hume's Reception in Europe* (London, 2005).

Among those friends, colleagues, and scholars who have kindly and openly assisted in numerous ways are Bernard Bailyn, A. Owen Aldridge, Laurence L. Bongie, Alexander Campbell, Joanne Chaison, H. Trevor Colbourn, James E. Crimmins, John W. Danford, John Patrick Diggins, Frederick A. Dreyer, Roger Fechner, James Fieser, Christopher Grasso, James Green, James T. Kloppenberg, Ned C. Landsman, Donald W. Livingston, Donald S. Lutz, Ralph Lerner, Warren McDougall, James Moore, David Fate Norton, Mark Phillips, Adam Potkay, John V. Price, Jack N. Rakove, Nina Reid-Maroney, John Sainsbury, Robert T. Sansom, M. A. Stewart, Frederic L. van Holthoon, and David A. Wilson.

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At the University of Rochester Press, I am grateful to Suzanne E. Guidod, Timothy J. Madigan, and Sue Smith and to Alban Harvey for his careful and caring copyediting. My new colleagues in the Department of History at Brock University have offered a congenial environment in which to complete this project.

Finally, without Kelly's stoic support and the long term encouragement of my parents, this book could not have been completed. Without Thomas and William it could have been completed much quicker, but in times far less rich.

Mark G. Spencer
St. Catharines, Ontario
2005

CHAPTER ONE

HUME'S WORKS IN COLONIAL AND EARLY REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA

If one wants, systematically, to investigate the reception and impact of Hume's thought in eighteenth-century America, then it makes sense first to think about the availability and dissemination of Hume's works there. Were Hume's works available in eighteenth-century America? If so, which ones? Where? When? And to whom? Surprisingly, modern scholarship lacks satisfactory answers to those basic empirical questions — a deficiency the present study will attempt to remedy. Having determined parameters for the dissemination of Hume's works, one may then better consider how his thought was received and what impact it had in eighteenth-century America. Existing scholarship on American book history says little of direct relevance about Hume's works, but that growing historiography does offer a context in which the availability and dissemination of Hume's works might be situated.¹

¹ For introductions to the history of the book in America, see Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2000), vol. 1 in *A History of the Book in America* (5 vols., Cambridge, 2000–); Ezra Greenspan and Jonathan Rose, “An Introduction to *Book History*,” *Book History*, vol. 1 (1998), ix–xi; David D. Hall, “The History of the Book: New Questions? New Answers?” *Journal of Library History*, vol. 21 (1986), 27–36; David D. Hall, “Readers and Reading in America: Historical and Critical Perspectives,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 103 (1994), 337–57; David D. Hall and John B. Hench, eds., *Needs and Opportunities in the History of the Book: America, 1639–1876* (Worcester, 1987); John B. Hench, “Toward a History of the Book in America,” *Publishing Research Quarterly*, vol. 10 (1994), 9–21; Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles, eds., *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America* (Amherst, 1996); Paul M. Spurlin, “Readership in the American Enlightenment,” in Charles G. S. Williams, ed., *Literature and History in the Age of Ideas: Essays on the French Enlightenment Presented*

BOOKS IN COLONIAL AMERICA

A common complaint of prominent book buyers in colonial America was that they could not get books readily. The colonial statesman and scholar, James Logan, for instance, regularly lamented, in his book collecting days during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century, that he was unable to procure the books he desired to fill the shelves of his renowned Philadelphia library.² Similar complaints were made by hopeful book owners later in the eighteenth century as well. Hugh Simm, a Scot who had emigrated to America with John Witherspoon in 1768, wrote home to his brother: "Be careful to give my service to all those who have sent Books this is a very grateful present in this part of the world where books are so very scarce."³ More famously, Benjamin Franklin griped in his *Autobiography* that "there

to George R. Havens (Ohio, 1975), 359–74. See also John P. Feather, "The Book in History and the History of the Book," in Donald G. Davis, Jr., ed., *Libraries, Books & Culture: Proceedings of Library History Seminar VII, 6–8 March 1985, Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Austin, 1986), 12–26; Haydn T. Mason, ed., *The Darnton Debate: Books and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998). American book history draws on a long historiography. See, for instance, Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, ed., *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (1939; revised New York, 1952), esp. Part I, Laurence C. Wroth's "Book Production and Distribution from the Beginning to the American Revolution," 1–59; and Chester T. Hallenbeck, "Book-Trade Publicity Before 1800," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 32 (1938), 47–56. There, at 47, Hallenbeck wrote, more than half a century ago (if with premature optimism) that the "importance of the study of book distribution as an approach to the interpretation of the culture-patterns of an age has become axiomatic with historians. Research scholars more and more are turning their attention to early library records, book catalogues, and other similar materials in an effort to determine what books circulated in a given period, how widely they were disseminated, and to what extent they were influential in moulding thought." Modern knowledge of which books were available in eighteenth-century America, how widely available those books were, and how their availability changed with geography and time, is yet inchoate.

² Edwin Wolf, 2nd, *The Library of James Logan of Philadelphia, 1674–1751* (Philadelphia, 1974), xviii, summarized that from Logan's "first arrival in Philadelphia until his death his constant complaint was the dearth of books." Logan thought he lived in "a bookless desert on the frontier of British America."

³ Cited in Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study in Cultural Relations, 1750–1835* (Glasgow and London, 1975), 39. Jonathan Edwards made similar complaints to the ones registered here and below: see Harold P. Simonson, "Jonathan Edwards and his Scottish Connections," *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 21 (1987), 353–76, esp. 356.

was not a good Bookseller's Shop in any of the Colonies to the Southward of Boston."⁴ Contemporaneous reports of that sort lend support to the claim that colonial America was a provincial backwater. Historians of a generation ago frequently argued that eighteenth-century Americans were "behind the times" because books that were popular in eighteenth-century Britain "did not make it to [the] shores" of colonial America.⁵ But one should be wary of uncritically accepting the possibly jaundiced assessment of book-hungry bibliophiles such as Logan and Franklin. After all, Logan amassed a library of over 2,000 titles, and Franklin had twice as many.⁶ We need not rely exclusively on the accounts left by prominent American book buyers to ascertain the extent to which books were available in colonial America. The general picture that clearly emerges from various sources in recent years is far less bleak than Logan, Simm, or Franklin would have us believe.

One particularly fruitful source for the study of the availability and diffusion of books in the colonies has been the business transactions of American booksellers.⁷ A good deal is known about the book dealings of David Hall who, a one-time printing partner of Franklin, was one of Philadelphia's most

⁴ Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1964; 2nd ed., New Haven, 2003), 141.

⁵ D. H. Meyer, "The Uniqueness of the American Enlightenment," *American Quarterly*, vol. 28 (1976), 165–86, passages quoted from 173. See also Benjamin Fletcher Wright, Jr., *American Interpretations of Natural Law: A Study in the History of Political Thought* (New York, 1962), 62: During the colonial era, "[l]ibraries were few in number, of limited content, and, until well into the eighteenth century, rarely contained any works on the principles of government"; Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976), 41: "The time lag in colonial reading was considerable."

⁶ For an inventory of Logan's library see Wolf, *Library of James Logan*. No complete inventory of Franklin's library is known to survive, but he is thought to have collected over 4,200 volumes. See Edwin Wolf, 2nd, "The Reconstruction of Benjamin Franklin's Library: An Unorthodox Jigsaw Puzzle," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 56 (1962), 1–16, and "A Key to Identification of Franklin's Books," *Manuscript*, vol. 8 (1956), 211–14; George S. Eddy, "Dr. Benjamin Franklin's Library," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 34 (1924), 206–26; and M. B. Korty, "Franklin's World of Books," *Journal of Library History*, vol. 2 (1967), 271–328.

⁷ See, for instance, Stephen Botein, "The Anglo-American Book Trade before 1776: Personnel and Strategies," in William L. Joyce, et al., eds., *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester, 1983), 48–82; H. W. Boynton, *Annals of American Book-selling, 1638–1850* (1932; reprinted New Castle, 1991); John Edgar Molnar, "Publication and Retail Book Advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette*, 1736–1780" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978); James Southall Wilson, "Best-Sellers in Jefferson's Day," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 36 (1960), 222–37.

renowned eighteenth-century book personalities.⁸ Henry Knox,⁹ proprietor of the "London Book-Store," and his fellow Bostonian, Jeremy Condry,¹⁰ have been the subjects of similar studies; as have the collective dealings of colonial booksellers of particular American cities¹¹ and regions.¹² These and other studies have found substantial evidence of a flourishing trade in books in colonial America.

⁸ See J. A. Cochrane, *Dr. Johnson's Printer; The Life of William Strahan* (London, 1964), esp. chap. 6, "David Hall and America," 60–91; Robert Harlan, "Colonial Printer as Bookseller in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia: The Case of David Hall," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 5 (1976), 355–69; Robert Harlan, "David Hall's Bookshop and Its British Sources of Supply," in David Kaser, ed., *Books in America's Past: Essays Honoring Rudolph H. Gjelsness* (Charlottesville, 1966), 1–24.

⁹ W. C. Ford, "Henry Knox and the London Book-Store in Boston, 1771–1774," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 61 (1927–1928), 225–303.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Carroll Reilly, "The Wages of Piety: The Boston Book Trade of Jeremy Condry," in Joyce, et al., eds., *Printing and Society in Early America*, 83–131. See also Elizabeth Carroll Reilly and David D. Hall, "Practices of Reading. Part Two. Customers and the Market for Books," in Amory and Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 387–99.

¹¹ Carl Bridenbaugh, "The Press and the Book in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 65 (1941), 1–30; Carl Bridenbaugh and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (1942; reprinted New York, 1962); J. M. Goudeau, "Booksellers and Printers in New Orleans, 1764–1884," *Journal of Library History*, vol. 5 (1970), 5–19; Howard Mumford Jones, "The Importation of French Books in Philadelphia," *Modern Philology*, vol. 32 (1934), 157–77; R. P. McCutcheon, "Books and Booksellers in New Orleans, 1730–1830," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 20 (1937), 606–18; Edwin Wolf 2nd, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen and Booksellers* (Oxford, 1988).

¹² See Hugh Amory, "The New England Book Trade, 1713–1790," in Amory and Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 314–46; James N. Green, "The Middle Colonies, 1720–1790. Part One. English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin," in Amory and Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 248–98; Vincent Kinane, "'Literary Food' for the American Market: Patrick Byrne's Exports to Mathew Carey," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 104 (1994), 315–32; Cynthia A. Stiverson and Gregory A. Stiverson, "The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth Century Virginia," in Joyce, et al., eds., *Printing and Society in Early America*, 132–73; Gregory A. Stiverson, "Books Both Useful and Entertaining: Reading Habits in Mid-Eighteenth Century Virginia," *Southeastern Librarian*, vol. 25 (1975), 52–58; Calhoun Winton, "The Colonial South Carolina Book Trade," *Proof*, vol. 2 (1972), 71–87; Calhoun Winton, "The Southern Book Trade in the Eighteenth Century," in Amory and Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 224–46.

Another approach has been to study the supply side of the colonial book trade. Most colonial booksellers' stock came from overseas suppliers. Britain, London in particular, was the most important source for that stock; and William Strahan, a London Scot, was the most important purveyor. Strahan supplied Hall in Philadelphia, but he also sent books to other notable American booksellers including Franklin's bookselling nephew, Benjamin Mecom, and Hall's bookselling brother-in-law, James Read. With none was he as successful as with his favorite, "Davie" Hall. From 1748 to 1772, Strahan supplied Hall with books valued at an estimated £30,000.¹³ Of the colonial booksellers with London connections historians have discussed Richard King, James Rivington, and Robert Wells, among many others. Yet, not all books that came to colonial America passed through the hands of London agents. Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Madrid, and Paris mattered, if to a lesser extent. There was an eighteenth-century American market in Irish reprints,¹⁴ and, more important, booksellers in Hume's homeland supplied various networks of colonial American booksellers.¹⁵ One such Scottish supply was the publishing firm of Alexander Kincaid and John Bell. Some of their "Letter Books" survive at the Bodleian Library and show Kincaid and Bell's American book buyers to have included Jeremy Condry, David Hall, Hyslop & Company, William Millar, James Taylor, and John Witherspoon.¹⁶ Kincaid and

¹³ Giles Barber, "Books from the Old World and for the New: The British International Trade in Books in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 151 (1976), 198. See also James Raven, "The Atlantic World. Part Three. The Importation of Books in the Eighteenth Century," in Amory and Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 183–98.

¹⁴ Richard Cargill Cole, *Irish Booksellers and English Writers 1740–1800* (London, 1986), esp. chap. 3, "Irish Booksellers in America Phases I and II, 1750–1794," and M. Pollard, *Dublin's Trade in Books, 1550–1800* (Oxford, 1989). See also Warren McDougall's review of Pollard, *Dublin's Trade in Books*, in *The Library*, vol. 15 (1993), 60–62, where he argued, 61, that "Irish books came to America regularly."

¹⁵ Warren McDougall, "Scottish books for America in the mid 18th Century," in Robin Myers and Michael Harris, eds., *Spreading the Word: The Distribution Networks of Print, 1550–1850* (Winchester, 1990), 21–46; Warren McDougall, "Gavin Hamilton, John Balfour and Patrick Neill: a study of publishing in Edinburgh in the 18th century" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1974); Richard B. Sher, "Charles V and the book trade: an episode in Enlightenment print culture," in Stewart J. Brown, ed., *William Robertson and the Expansion of Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), 164–95.

¹⁶ For letters concerning the American interests of Kincaid and Bell see Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. Letters c 20, letters dated 27 March 1765 (f.14), 12 April 1766 (f.24), 22 April 1767 (f.35), 24 April 1767 (f.38–39), 15 Sept. 1767 (f.62), 17 Sept. 1767 (f.61, 64–65), no date (f.63), 5 August 1768 (f.102–3), 6 August 1768 (f.104), 26 March 1769 (f.120); Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. Letters c 21, letters dated 22 Feb. 1770 (f.21),

Bell's most frequent American correspondent was John Mein, a bookseller who had come to Boston from Edinburgh in 1764 and about whom we will have more to say in the course of this study. Despite his mounting debt, Mein continued to be supplied with books from Kincaid and Bell and in April 1766 was shipped a number of new editions — including David Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.¹⁷ From the supply side of the American book trade, too, the trend of recent scholarship has been to call attention to an extensive traffic which supplied a multitude of books to eighteenth-century Americans.

For the duration of the eighteenth century a significant source of books for Americans continued to be individual overseas booksellers. Agents such as Peter Collinson eagerly supplied institutions such as the Library Company of Philadelphia, which also bought books by subscription. So did the Library Company at Charles Town, South Carolina, when in 1757 it signed on for a Birmingham imprint of *Publii Virgilii Maronis Bucolica, Georgica, ed Aeneis*. And so did individuals. William Strahan's hopeful solicitation of New York's Caldwellader Colden in 1744 is typical: "I likewise sell all sorts of books," wrote Strahan to Colden, "so if any of your acquaintances want any I shall be obliged if your will direct them to me, in Wine Office Court in Fleet Street."¹⁸ Prominent American colonists frequently purchased books directly from Strahan and other British booksellers. Books often piggy-backed on the substantial tobacco trade carried on between the new world and the old.¹⁹ Many a shipment of books found its way into barrels and onto tobacco ships heading west across the Atlantic.²⁰

24 August 1770 (f.46), 25 August 1770 (f.47), 7 Feb. 1771 (f.64), and 27 August 1771 (f.84).

¹⁷ See letter to Mein, 22 April 1767, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. Letters c 20.

¹⁸ *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden* (9 vols., New York, 1973), vol. 3: 59.

¹⁹ See, for instance, George Washington to Capel and Osgood Hanbury, 25 July 1769, where Washington remarked that he has "Shipd you eight Hnds of Mast'r Custis's Tobo" and placed a book order for forty-seven titles, including "Hume's History of England the 4th Edtn," see John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799* (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944), vol. 2: 515-17.

²⁰ For instance, the tobacco merchants Semple, Jamieson, and Lawson received books from the London merchant John Gilmour with which to supply their store in Portobacco, Charles County, Maryland in the 1750s and 1760s. See Scottish Record Office (West) MSS CS96/1179/1 and McDougall, "Scottish books for America in the mid 18th Century," 21-46, which used these and other sources. There is an extensive literature on the tobacco trade; see Barbara Crispin, "Clyde Shipping and the American War," *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 41 (1962), 124-34; T. M. Devine, *The Tobacco Lords: A Study of the Tobacco Merchants of Glasgow and their Trading Activities c.*

Many a colonial student who traveled to Britain returned home with a package of British books testifying to his new found knowledge gained studying law at the Middle Temple in London or medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Those students and other colonists continued to secure books from British booksellers through American agents or middlemen such as Hall. In short, traffic in books was part and parcel of broader cultural and trade networks that united the British Atlantic World.

The books possessed by colonists provide one of the clearer measures of the availability and diffusion of books in the colonies. Most often studies based on book ownership have been rooted in the analysis of surviving inventories of private libraries. Much of that scholarship has been in case studies. The tendency has been, not unnaturally, to draw conclusions about the reading of an individual or his circle from an examination of the books in a particular library. Traditionally, those studies have spoken most often about the reading taste of a very specific audience, furnishing snapshots of the book holdings of particular readers, in one geographic location, at one point in time.²¹ Others have used private libraries to shed light on the availability and diffusion of books in particular colonies,²² or in

1740–90 (Edinburgh, 1975); T. M. Devine, *A Scottish Firm in Virginia 1767–1777: W. Cunningham and Co.* (Edinburgh, 1984); J. H. Saltow, "Scottish Traders in Virginia, 1750–1775," *Economic History Review*, ser. 2, vol. 12 (1959), 83–98.

²¹ See Susan Stanton Brayton, "The Library of an Eighteenth-century Gentleman of Rhode Island," *New England Quarterly*, vol. 8 (1935), 277–83; H. J. Cadbury, "Anthony Benezet's Library," *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Association*, vol. 23 (1934), 63–75; H. J. Cadbury, "More of Benezet's Library," *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Association*, vol. 25 (1936), 83–85; Carl L. Cannon, *American Book Collectors and Collecting in Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, 1941); F. B. Dexter, "Early Private Libraries in New England," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, new ser., vol. 28 (1907), 135–47; J. E. Fields, "A Signer and His Signatures; or the Library of Thomas Lynch, Jr.," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, vol. 14 (1960), 210–52; Gordon W. Jones, "The Library of Doctor John Mitchell of Urbanna," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 76 (1968), 441–43; M. Maurer, "The Library of a Colonial Musician, [Cuthbert Ogle] 1755," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 7 (1950), 39–52; Edwin Wolf 2nd, "The Library of Ralph Assheton: The Book Background of a Colonial Philadelphia Lawyer," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 58 (1964), 345–79; G. Yost, "The Reconstruction of the Library of Norborne Berkeley Baron de Botetourt, Governor of Virginia, 1768–1770," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 36 (1942), 97–123.

²² Walter B. Edgar, "Some Popular Books in Colonial South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol. 72 (1971), 174–78; William D. Houlette, "Books of the Virginia Dynasty," *Library Quarterly*, vol. 24 (1954), 226–39; E. V. Lamberton,

larger regions.²³ Those disparate pictures can be aggregated and a colonial American reading public discerned. It is one that took advantage of their access to a wide assortment of books.

"Colonial Libraries of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 17 (1918), 193–234; William Peden, "Some Notes Concerning Thomas Jefferson's Libraries," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 1 (1944), 265–72; W. S. Simpson, "A Comparison of the Libraries of Seven Colonial Virginians, 1754–1789," *Journal of Library History*, vol. 9 (1947), 54–65; George Smart, "Private Libraries in Colonial Virginia," *American Literature*, vol. 10 (1938), 24–52; N. J. Talbert, "Books and Libraries of the Carolina Charter Colonists, 1663–1763," *North Carolina Libraries*, vol. 21 (1963), 68–69; Helen R. Watson, "The Books They Left: Some 'Liberies' in Edgecombe County, 1733–1783," *North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. 48 (1971), 245–57; S. B. Weeks, "Libraries and Literature in North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century," *American Historical Association Annual Report for the Year 1895* (Washington, 1896), 169–77; Joseph T. Wheeler, "Booksellers and Circulating Libraries in Colonial Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 34 (1939), 111–137; Wheeler, "Books Owned by Marylanders, 1700–1776," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 35 (1940), 337–53; Wheeler, "Literary Culture in Eighteenth-Century Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 38 (1943), 273–76; Wheeler, "Reading Interests of the Professional Classes in Colonial Maryland, 1700–1776: The Clergy," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 36 (1941), 184–201; Wheeler, "Reading Interests of the Professional Classes in Colonial Maryland, 1700–1776: Lawyers and Doctors," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 36 (1941), 281–301; Wheeler, "Reading Interests of Maryland Planters and Merchants, 1700–1776," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 37 (1942), 26–41, 291–310; Wheeler, "Reading and Other Recreations of Marylanders, 1700–1776," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 38 (1943), 37–54, 167–80; Louis B. Wright, "The Gentleman's Library in Early Virginia," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1937), 3–61; Wright, "The Purposeful Reading of Our Colonial Ancestors," *ELH: A Journal of English Literary History*, vol. 4 (1937), 85–111.

²³ Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585–1763* (3 vols., Knoxville, 1978), vol. 2, chap. 1, "Books, Libraries, Reading, and Printing"; Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, 1979); Franklin B. Dexter, "Early Private Libraries in New England," 135–47; William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835* (Knoxville, 1989); T. E. Keys, "Popular Authors in the Colonial Library," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, vol. 14 (1940), 726–27; Margaret Barton Korty, "Benjamin Franklin and Eighteenth-Century American Libraries," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 55 (1965); Joe W. Kraus, "The Book Collections of Early American College Libraries," *Library Quarterly*, vol. 43 (1973), 142–59; Joe W. Kraus, "Private Libraries in Colonial America," *Journal of Library History*, vol. 9 (1974), 31–53; Michael Kraus, *The Atlantic Civilization: Eighteenth-Century Origins* (Ithaca, 1949), 81–82; Louis B. Wright, *An American Bookshelf, 1755* (Philadelphia, 1934); Wright, *The First Gentlemen of America: Intellectual*

Conclusions about the contents of colonial libraries have implications for the emerging picture of the availability and diffusion of books in colonial America similar to the studies of colonial bookselling discussed above. Far from seeing colonial America as a provincial “bookless desert,” historians increasingly have been struck by the number of books in the colonies and by the importance of these books to the intellectual life of the colonists. We can no longer conclude that “It is more than likely that their provincial experience led Americans into the habit of not taking the intellectual life seriously.”²⁴ Much remains to be uncovered about colonial book culture, but enough is now known to see that the story’s principal plot revolves around the availability of books, rather than their scarcity. In short, while the comments of Americans such as Logan and Franklin suggest that not all colonists were always satisfied with their ability to secure the books they wanted, modern scholarship uncovers a series of channels through which an assortment of books — even unpopular ones — actually found their way to early America. The more we learn about the intricacies of the book trade and book ownership of colonial Americans, the more it seems certain that books were available, sought after, purchased, and read in an eighteenth-century America that was not as far out of step with European cultural centers as has been thought. This applies to the works of David Hume.

Still, scholarship has not addressed the specific questions we have asked about the American diffusion of Hume’s works. And we are told by some scholars that Hume’s works were not available to colonial American readers,²⁵ from which they and others infer an insignificant influence for his writings. Scouring the existing studies of general reading tastes and book-availability in the eighteenth century suggests that Hume’s works were more commonly found in the colonies than some historians have assumed, but more than this it cannot establish. Stray references to Hume’s works in this body of secondary literature are not infrequent, but they are far too sporadic to inform a systematic assessment of Hume’s impact.

Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class (San Marino, 1940), esp. chap. 5, “Books and Their Place in Plantation Life,” 117–54; Wright, *Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607–1763* (New York, 1957), esp. the chap. on “Books, Libraries and Learning.”

²⁴ Meyer, “The Uniqueness of the American Enlightenment,” 173.

²⁵ See, for instance, Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America*, 41: “Examinations of the contents of private American libraries in the colonial period [with the exception of Thomas Jefferson’s library] seem to confirm that Scottish books [like those of Hume] remained relatively rare.”

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN BOOK CATALOGUES

What evidence do we have from which to reconstruct a more detailed image of the dissemination of Hume's works in eighteenth-century America? Surviving correspondence is often valuable. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, for instance, an early and astute reader of Hume who figures prominently in a later chapter, wrote to his father in 1758, "Be pleased to send me Sr David Hume's essays 4 volu: in 12."²⁶ By 1760, his thoughts had turned to Hume's *History of England*:

As M^r Hume is continuing his history of England, I thought it wou'd be better to buy the whole entire work at once than by peace meals: this is the reason of my not sending by the fleet the 2 volus. already published. Pray let me have a list of yr. English books to prevent buying the same books over again.²⁷

In 1761 he wrote, "I have bought Hume's History, wh is now compleated" and "I shall send this . . . [by] the fleet."²⁸

Sometimes, too, the actual copies of books which belonged to colonial Americans and colonial American libraries have survived and can still be found in libraries today.²⁹ Instances of surviving books, and their marginalia,

²⁶ Ronald Hoffman, ed., *Dear Papa, Dear Charley: The Peregrinations of a Revolutionary Aristocrat, as told by Charles Carroll of Carrollton and his father, Charles Carroll of Annapolis, with sundry observations on bastardy, child-rearing, romance, matrimony, commerce, tobacco, slavery, and the politics of Revolutionary America* (3 vols., Chapel Hill and London, 2001), vol. 1: 68. The Carroll library contained Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (4 vols., London, 1758).

²⁷ Hoffman, ed., *Dear Papa, Dear Charley*, vol. 1: 199 (see also 1: 217); see also "Extracts from the Carroll Papers," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 10 (1915), 339.

²⁸ Hoffman, ed., *Dear Papa, Dear Charley*, vol. 1: 239.

²⁹ For instance, the Library Company of Philadelphia has Joseph Hopkinson's copy, and Benjamin Rush's two copies, of Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*; the Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania has F. A. Muhlenburg's copy of Hume's *History of England*; the Library of Congress has Thomas Jefferson's copy of Hume's *Essays and Treatises*; and Princeton University Library has John Witherspoon's copy of Hume's *A concise and genuine account of the dispute between Mr. Hume and Mr. Rousseau* (bound in a volume with 15 tracts with spine title of *Pamphlets* and scorched corners evidencing its near destruction). No doubt other private libraries contain items such as the one referred to in the "Genealogical Notes and Queries," section of the *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 2, vol. 16 (1936), 100: "I have a book, vol. 2 of Hume's History of England, published in 1767 containing a bookplate: 'Robert Turnbull, Petersb. Virg. Lex et Grex' and on the title page, two signatures: 'Thomas Crawford (or Craufurd) Blandf. 1769' and 'Robert Turnbull, 1775'."

are often serviceable for what they reveal about Hume's impact on particular American readers, but their anomalous nature makes them far less useful for writing the story of the larger diffusion of Hume's thought. Fires, floods, vermin, wars, and most of all, time, have taken their toll on those books which circulated in eighteenth-century America.³⁰ It is fortunate, then, that for one reason or another, contemporaries often took inventories of their books. Unlike the collections of books they recorded, many catalogues of books have survived intact.

Surviving catalogues from the eighteenth century record the books that were in prominent social libraries, such as the Library Company of Philadelphia, and those in Baltimore, Boston, Charleston, New York, and Salem. They also record the books held in less well-remembered social libraries such as those in Albany, New York; Burlington and Bridgetown, New Jersey; the Juliana Library Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and the library in Sag-Harbour, Massachusetts. We have catalogues of the books in university and college libraries of the day; including (in order of publication of their first catalogues) Yale, the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), and Harvard University. Likewise, we have the early nineteenth-century catalogues of many of these universities' student society libraries — the contents of which often differed considerably from the affiliated institution's library. There are catalogues of various private libraries — some printed in the eighteenth century, others printed since, and still others that have not been printed at all, but survive as manuscripts. Finally, there are catalogues of the books that were available for sale by auction and by booksellers. To date, research has uncovered over 700 early American book catalogues for the period 1740–1830.³¹

Book catalogues are one of the surer sources for charting the availability and diffusion of an author's works over time in early America. The entries in these catalogues refer to actual books, most of which were read by more than one person or circle. Documenting inventories for eighteenth-century

³⁰ More than half of the books in Harvard University Library, for instance, were destroyed by fire in 1764. After the devastating fire of 1778 in Charleston, South Carolina, perhaps only 185 volumes survived of the Charleston Library Society's collection of 6,000 to 7,000 volumes. The Revolutionary War was particularly devastating to New York's colonial libraries. See Austin Baxter Keep, *History of The New York Society Library* (1908; reprinted Boston, 1972), 119–20, who documents that major collections such as those at the New York Society Library and the Union Library Society of New York “were prostrated by the war.”

³¹ See Mark G. Spencer, “The Reception of David Hume's Political Thought in Eighteenth-Century America” (2 vols., Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario), Vol. 2, 397–473, “American Book Catalogues Consulted for this Dissertation, 1740–1830.”

readers, these catalogues offer the present-day historian of ideas a uniquely revealing perspective on the dissemination of Hume's works in America. The catalogues of individual colonial libraries have been used anecdotally to assess the reading of individuals and to argue, in general terms, for the availability of books in colonial America. But, systematic study of book catalogues is, as yet, regrettably uncommon in secondary works of the history of ideas in America.³²

One notable (and hence frequently cited) exception to the general disregard for American book catalogues as a primary resource for historians of ideas is a well-known study by David Lundberg and Henry F. May, "The Enlightened Reader in America." Published almost thirty years ago in a special issue of the *American Quarterly* devoted to the American Enlightenment, Lundberg and May attempted to provide a statistical assessment of the relative popularity in America of the works of 63 different Enlightenment writers (including Hume) by cumulating the data from the holdings of 291 American book catalogues for the period of 1700 to 1813.³³

What did Lundberg and May say about Hume? Hume's *History of England* and his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, they said, were available in enlightened America, being frequently found in the libraries of the day. In overall terms, Hume's *History* emerged as the second-most-popular title of the 206 considered. Lundberg and May suggested that Hume's *History* was to be found in 44% of the libraries surveyed. It was second only, and only just, to John Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* which was found in 45% of all libraries. But Lundberg and May's general findings have been questioned by some, and a closer examination shows the study to be far less than definitive.³⁴ The study has been criticized, in part, for using an insufficient number of book catalogues. Moreover, although the authors themselves described their essay as a "preliminary report," it has never been followed up with the "fuller form" which was said to be

³² This neglect is attested to by the lack of published works employing book catalogues and by the large number of uncut pages this author encountered in his research into those book catalogues.

³³ David Lundberg and Henry F. May, "The Enlightened Reader in America," *American Quarterly*, vol. 28 (1976), 262–71 + 22 unnumbered pages of graphs. That essay has been reprinted, prominently, as the lead essay in the concluding volume to Peter S. Onuf, ed., *The New American Nation, 1775–1820* (New York, 1991), vol. 12: 2–33.

³⁴ See Ronald Hamowy, "Jefferson and the Scottish Enlightenment: A Critique of Garry Wills's *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 36 (1979), 503–23, esp. 511. Hamowy does not always criticize Lundberg and May's study for the best reasons.

forthcoming.³⁵ Although ground breaking, their published findings are less detailed than one would like. At other times, the presentation of their data is downright deceptive.

For Hume's works, Lundberg and May are particularly deficient. First, not even all of Hume's major works were considered. Lundberg and May gave no indication of the availability of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), *Political Discourses* (1752), *Four Dissertations* (1757), or *The Life of David Hume, Esq. Written by Himself* (1777). Those omissions make it virtually impossible to judge the relative popularity of Hume's other major works. Omitting these works also leaves the impression that they had an insignificant American reception — an impression which, although it reinforces the commonplace supposition that Hume's writings were unpopular in colonial America, is far from accurate. Finally, the data for the Hume titles which were included in the study is highly deceptive.

The graph meant to represent the American availability of *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, for instance, shows that title was to be found in only 2% of all libraries studied — suggesting, as the authors point out, it was one of the least popular of the 206 works surveyed, since it “appears in only four libraries.”³⁶ What Lundberg and May fail to appreciate, however, is that *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* was to be found in every edition of Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. The *Essays and Treatises* was Hume's collected (non-historical) works and contained almost all of his post-*Treatise* philosophy and essays. Printed with at least eight different imprints during Hume's lifetime, the contents of these various editions varied significantly only as new works were incorporated. Always revising his writings, Hume fiddled with particular pieces, changed the titles of some essays³⁷ and excised a few others;³⁸ but the bulk of the contents remained unchanged, especially after 1758.

³⁵ Lundberg and May, “The Enlightened Reader in America,” 263–64. In the case of Hume's works, even this proposed expanded version would not rectify the insufficiency of the data as discussed below.

³⁶ Lundberg and May, “The Enlightened Reader in America,” 268.

³⁷ “Of Liberty and Despotism” was changed to “Of Civil Liberty” in the 1758 and subsequent editions; “Of Luxury” was changed to “Of Refinement in the Arts” in the 1760 and subsequent editions; “Of the Dignity of Human Nature” was changed to “Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature” in the 1770 and subsequent editions.

³⁸ Dropped from the 1764 and subsequent editions were “Of Impudence and Modesty,” “Of Love and Marriage,” and “Of the Study of History.”

Every edition of the collected works included *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, as well as *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, the *Essays Moral and Political* of 1741 and of 1742,³⁹ and the *Political Discourses*.⁴⁰ When the *Four Dissertations* was published in 1757, it too was added to the collected works.⁴¹ Lundberg and May are not alone in their confusion over the contents of the *Essays and Treatises*. In discussions of the impact of Hume's works in the eighteenth century, it is often not appreciated, even by specialists, that post-1753 references to "Hume's *Essays*" almost always signified the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, not the *Essays Moral and Political* of 1741 or 1742 (all of which were, however, included in the *Essays and Treatises*).⁴² To have access to a copy of Hume's *Essays and Treatises* gave an American reader passage to

³⁹ A first volume with that title was published in Edinburgh in 1741; a second, separate volume was published in 1742; and in 1748, a third, similarly titled volume contained the essays of the first 1741 edition plus three essays which had been published separately in the meantime. For a more complete story of these various editions see Eugene F. Miller, foreword to the Liberty Classics edition of Hume's *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis, revised ed., 1987), xi–xviii.

⁴⁰ The 1754 edition of which contained, "Of Commerce," "Of Luxury," "Of Money," "Of Interest," "Of the Balance of Trade," "Of the Balance of Power," "Of Taxes," "Of Public Credit," "Of some Remarkable Customs," "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations," "Of the Protestant Succession," and "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth."

⁴¹ The four were: "The Natural History of Religion," "Of the Passions," "Of Tragedy," and "Of the Standard of Taste." On the contents of the successive editions of the *Essays and Treatises* see T. E. Jessop, *A Bibliography of David Hume and of Scottish Philosophy from Francis Hutcheson to Lord Balfour* (London, 1938), esp. 5–11; William B. Todd, "David Hume: A Preliminary Bibliography," in William B. Todd, ed., *Hume and the Enlightenment: Essays Presented to Ernest Campbell Mossner* (Edinburgh and Texas, 1974), esp. 194–96; and the *Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue*. May was only slightly less confused about the contents of Hume's *Essays and Treatises* when he wrote in *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976), 120, that after 1758 "most" editions of the *Essays and Treatises* included the "'Enquiry concerning Human Understanding,' the essay 'Of Miracles,' and the 'Natural History of Religion.'" After 1758 all of those items (and others) were included in every edition of the *Essays and Treatises*.

⁴² That eighteenth-century references to "Hume's *Essays*" usually referred to the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* can be established in a number of ways, including the context of the reference. In book catalogues, references to "Hume's *Essays*" are often accompanied by additional information about the edition (i.e. date and place of publication and the size of the volume) that show the book in question to have been the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.

almost all of Hume's philosophy and essays.⁴³ Very little was omitted, since the listed pieces contained Hume's revision of what he thought valuable in *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Lundberg and May's findings are misleading in other ways too. This is the case for the colonial availability of Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* and especially so for Hume's *History of England*. While Lundberg and May suggested that Hume's *History of England* was to be found in 44% of all libraries studied, they reported that it was in only 24% of colonial libraries. Hume's *History*, their study suggested, was not popular in America during the Revolutionary era. At very least, Lundberg and May would have us believe that the *History* was much less popular before 1776 than it was afterwards — they find it in 41% of the library catalogues consulted for the period 1777–1790, 49% of those from 1791–1800, and 69% of those catalogues dating from 1801–1831. But is that an accurate image? Closer inspection shows not.

The data Lundberg and May used to establish the *History's* colonial popularity were gleaned from book catalogues ranging in date from 1700 to 1776.⁴⁴ Published in six volumes between 1754 and 1762,⁴⁵ references to Hume's *History* could not, of course, be found in any book catalogue printed prior to 1754, the year in which the first volume of the *History* was published. The *History's* actual popularity in colonial America (i.e. its post-publication popularity) is not, then, accurately disclosed by Lundberg and May. While on the surface their figures might seem to substantiate May's claims made elsewhere that "the most challenging and radical writers

⁴³ As even their own figures (although we shall see these figures are under-representative) suggest Hume's *Essays and Treatises* was found in large numbers of American libraries. According to their own data, then, Hume's *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* was not one of the least available works in eighteenth-century America as they incorrectly suggest but rather one of the most widely available. See also Richard C. Sinopoli, *The Foundations of American Citizenship: Liberalism, The Constitution, and Civic Virtue* (Oxford, 1992), 58, who wrongly argued that Hume's "political essays were far more widely available than his *Enquiries*."

⁴⁴ One of the more significant problems with the Lundberg and May study is the time periods used are of extremely long duration (i.e. 1700–1776, 1777–1790, 1791–1800, 1800–1813). These lengthy periods are especially deceptive when it comes to the implied image of change-over-time as they blur distinctions which might be drawn within these periods — depending on the date of publication of the work in question, the distortion can be worse for some than others. Lundberg and May's study (for the colonial period) is biased towards the popularity of works published earlier in the eighteenth century. A similar criticism might be leveled at all of their chronological periods.

⁴⁵ Not between 1753 and 1768 as indicated by Lundberg and May.

of the Enlightenment [among whom he lists Hume] were little known in America before the Revolution,” the very data on which that conclusion is based, with respect to Hume’s works, are faulty, and the conclusion, on this supposed evidence at least, clearly unsubstantiated.⁴⁶ We are very much in need of a more careful assessment of the availability and dissemination of Hume’s works in colonial America.⁴⁷ To the solution of that problem, I wish now to turn.

HUME’S WORKS IN COLONIAL AMERICAN BOOK CATALOGUES

For the present study, 708 early American book catalogues have been consulted.⁴⁸ Sixty-five of those date between 1740 and 1775. In the book catalogues surviving from the 1740s, there are no references to works by our David Hume. The earliest located reference to a work by Hume is found in the Charleston Library Society’s catalogue of 1750 which recorded “Hume’s Philosophical Essays.”⁴⁹ By 1757, the Library Company of Philadelphia held Hume’s *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* and his *Political Discourses*.⁵⁰ And, by the time of the publication of its first catalogue in 1758, the New York Society Library had secured a copy of *An Enquiry*

⁴⁶ May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 19. That the data in Lundberg and May, “The Enlightened Reader in America,” should substantiate the claims made in May’s book on the American Enlightenment is not surprising. As is admitted in the essay, 262, “[t]he categories used emerged directly from Henry May’s work on the Enlightenment in America.”

⁴⁷ The urgency of this reassessment is heightened by the degree to which Lundberg and May’s faulty story has been accepted by the scholarly community. Daniel Walker Howe in his essay, “Why the Scottish Enlightenment Was Useful to the Framers of the American Constitution,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31 (1989), 573, suggested with reference to Lundberg and May’s study that the “data have been compiled; the connections have been made.” Howe’s project is somewhat optimistically premature when he wrote that “I shall not be presenting a body of new research but reordering and rearranging what we know already.”

⁴⁸ See Appendix A, below, for a tabulation of Hume’s works in those catalogues.

⁴⁹ *A catalogue of the books belonging to the Charles-town library society* (London: W. Strahan, 1750). The reference is to Hume’s *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, being the original title (used until changed by Hume in 1758) of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

⁵⁰ *The charter, laws, and catalogue of books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Communitur bona profundere deum est* (Philadelphia, 1757).

concerning the *Principles of Morals*.⁵¹ In the 1750s, then, Hume's works were to be found in colonial America's most prestigious social libraries in cultural centers such as Charleston, Philadelphia, and New York.

These references confirm that Hume's books were not absent from colonial libraries of the 1750s, but they apparently were far from being popular, even among America's elite.⁵² Hume titles are conspicuously absent from the important Library Company of Philadelphia's early holdings as evidenced by its catalogues of 1741 and 1746.⁵³ That Hume's philosophical works were not widely available to the colonial reading public of the 1740s and 1750s becomes even clearer when one considers the dearth of references to his works in the catalogues of America's booksellers. While Noel Garret advertised for sale "Hume's Principles of Morals" in 1754,⁵⁴ more representative of the 1740s and 1750s is the notable absence of Hume titles from the catalogues of the colonial booksellers Benjamin Franklin,⁵⁵ David Hall,⁵⁶ and William Bradford.⁵⁷ The book catalogues which survive for early colonial college libraries tell a similar story. Yale's catalogues of 1743⁵⁸ and 1755,⁵⁹ and the College of New Jersey's catalogue of 1760,⁶⁰ list no works by David Hume.

⁵¹ *A catalogue of the books belonging to the New-York Society Library* (New York, [1758]).

⁵² Besides the references in the book catalogues considered in detail here, references to Hume's works are also to be found in bookseller advertisements placed in colonial newspapers such as the *South Carolina Gazette*. See 5 February 1753: "Hume's Political Discourses"; 24 April 1755: "Hume's Essays"; 13 May 1756: "Hume's History"; 1 July 1756: "Hume's Works."

⁵³ *A catalogue of books belonging to the Library Company of Philadelphia. Communiter bona profundere deum est* (Philadelphia, 1741) and *Books added to the Library since the year 1741* (Philadelphia, 1746).

⁵⁴ *Catalogue of books sold by Garrat Noel, at the Bible in Dockstreet* (New York, [1754?]).

⁵⁵ See *A catalogue of choice and valuable books, consisting of near 600 volumes* ([Philadelphia, 1744]).

⁵⁶ See *Imported in the last ships from London, and to be sold by David Hall, at the New-Printing-Office, in Market-street, Philadelphia, the following books, viz.* ([Philadelphia, 1754?]). Hall did, however, advertise "Hume's enquiry into morals, and philosophical essays" in a *Pennsylvania Gazette* advertisement on 16 April 1752.

⁵⁷ *Books just imported from London, and to be sold by William Bradford, at his shop, adjoining the London Coffee-House in Market-Street* (Philadelphia, 1755).

⁵⁸ *A catalogue of the library of Yale-College in New-Haven* ([New] London, 1743).

⁵⁹ *A catalogue of books in the library of Yale-College in N Haven* (New Haven, 1755).

⁶⁰ *A catalogue of books in the library of the College of New-Jersey, January 29, 1760. Published by order of the trustees* (Woodbridge, 1760).

By 1752 Hume had published a significant portion of his major philosophical and political works including *A Treatise of Human Nature*, three different volumes of *Essays, Moral and Political*, the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, and the *Political Discourses*. None of those appeared frequently in American book catalogues before 1760. Altogether, the pre-1760 American book catalogues consulted contain only five references to Hume's works. No references are found to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* and multiple references are found to only *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, which contained Hume's infamous essay, "Of Miracles." In the following two decades, however, the fortune of Hume's works in colonial America underwent a rapid and sustained transformation.

It is difficult now to illustrate in precise terms the dramatic increase in the American availability of Hume's works brought about in the 1760s and 1770s, but something of the magnitude of that change can be captured by tracing and comparing the Hume holdings of various libraries' successively printed catalogues of books.⁶¹ For instance, the New York Society Library's catalogue of 1758 listed only "Hume on Morals," but its catalogue of 1773 referred to that work, Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, and the six volume *History of England*.⁶² The Union Library Company of Philadelphia listed no Hume works in its catalogue of 1754,⁶³ but its patrons had access to most of Hume's philosophy and essays by 1765.⁶⁴ In 1750 the Charleston Library Society held only "Hume's Principles of Morals"; by 1770 it had added "Hume's philosophical essays," "Hume's political discourses," and "Hume's History of England."⁶⁵ During these years colonial libraries were increasingly likely to hold multiple copies of Hume's works. The Library Company of Philadelphia contained no works by Hume in 1746 and

⁶¹ In fact, one might say that book catalogues, by their very nature, are a uniquely equipped source from which to illuminate this change — a library's successive catalogues were printed for the very purpose of displaying changes to its holdings.

⁶² *The charter, and bye-laws, of the New-York Society Library; with a catalogue of the books belonging to the said Library* (New York, 1773). At a meeting of the Library's trustees held on 9 March 1764, "Humes Political Discoveries" [sic] was one of the books recorded as "being sent for." See Keep, *History of the New York Society Library*, 172.

⁶³ *A catalogue of books belonging to the Union-Library-Company of Philadelphia. To which is prefixed, the articles of the Company, with the names of the present members, and rules observed by the clerk in letting out books, &c* (Philadelphia, 1754).

⁶⁴ *A catalogue of books, belonging to the Union Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1765).

⁶⁵ *A catalogue of books, belonging to the incorporated Charlestown Library Society, with the dates of the editions* (Charleston, 1770).

only two in 1764.⁶⁶ In the next six years to those Hume holdings were added a 1764 edition of the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, a first edition of the *History of England under the house of Tudor*, and two separate London editions of Hume's complete *History of England*.⁶⁷

The changing availability of Hume's writings for these years can be traced in increased references to his works in other types of libraries as well. The earliest American college library catalogue to refer to Hume is that of Harvard University which, in 1773, recorded Hume's *History of England*.⁶⁸ And the earliest circulating library catalogue consulted in this study, that for Mein's New York Circulating Library of 1765, contained references to both the *Essays and Treatises* and the *History of England*.⁶⁹ A 1768 manuscript catalogue of the books belonging to Thomas Coombe (one of the customers for whom David Hall ordered books from William Strahan in London⁷⁰) lists an 8 volume edition of Hume's *History of England*.⁷¹ But the bulk of book catalogues surviving from colonial times are those of American booksellers.

Following the publication of his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* and his *History of England*, bookseller catalogues show a marked increase in

⁶⁶ *The charter, laws, and catalogue of books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Communiter bona profundero deum est* (Philadelphia, 1764).

⁶⁷ *The charter, laws, and catalogue of books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia. With a short account of the library prefixed. Communiter bona profundero deum est* (Philadelphia, 1770). One suspects that a number of these items were purchased for the library by David Hall from William Strahan. See Hall to Strahan, 14 May 1763: "Among other books ordered in these Letters, I sent for . . . the Philadelphia Library Company, who propose to make use of me for the future, instead of sending for what they may want (which no Doubt, will be considerable) themselves; I must therefore beg of you that you will take all Pains to get every Thing for them the latest and best Editions; which will be a great Inducement for them to continue with us." The list of books Hall requested included, "Hume's History of England complete, Octavo" (American Philosophical Society, David Hall Letter Books, B/H 142.1).

⁶⁸ *Catalogus librorum in Bibliotheca Cantabrigiensi selectus, frequentiore in usum Harvardinatum, qui gradu baccalaurei in artibus nondum sunt donati* (Bostoniae, M,DCC,LXXIII).

⁶⁹ See *A catalogue of [John] Mein's Circulating Library; consisting of above twelve hundred volumes* (Boston, 1765). On circulating libraries see David Kaser, *A Book for Sixpence, The Circulating Library in America* (Pittsburgh, 1980).

⁷⁰ See book order placed with William Strahan dated 10 December 1765 (David Hall Letter Books, American Philosophical Society, B/H 142.1).

⁷¹ See Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Coombe Papers, "Catalogue of Books belonging to Thomas Coombe, Feb' 1768," 13.

Hume entries.⁷² William Bradford's catalogues for 1760 were the first to offer Hume's *Essays and Treatises*, but others, such as James Rivington and Samuel Brown, soon followed.⁷³ Also advertised was Hume's *History of Great Britain*, showing that the early volumes of the *History* were available in America even before the complete set was published. Readers of those first published volumes would have found more of Hume's complete historical narrative than we find in the later editions of those same volumes. Writing his story backwards through time, as volumes dealing with England's earlier history were published, Hume excised material from his first published volumes, particularly from the Stuart volumes. He did so in interests of elegance of style, but also in order not to be repetitive. So the essential Hume of the *History* was before its earliest readers even prior to the publication of its last volume in 1762.⁷⁴

Hume's *History of England* and his *Essays and Treatises* were, overwhelmingly, the most widely disseminated of Hume's writings in eighteenth-century America. Together they would provide colonial readers with a nice balance of Hume's economic, literary, political, and religious thought, as well as his philosophy and history. Both the *History* and the *Essays and Treatises* increasingly were advertised by colonial booksellers in multiple sets and in various formats. John Mein's catalogue of 1766, for instance, contained three

⁷² Along with the evidence presented below, it is interesting to note that Hume titles were also found in newspaper advertisements in the early 1760s. See, for instance, David Hall's advertisements for Hume's *History* in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* issues for 18 March 1762, 11 November 1762, and 30 December 1764.

⁷³ See *A catalogue of books. Just imported from London, and to be sold by W. Bradford, at the London-Coffee-House, Philadelphia, wholesale and retaile. With good allowance to those that take a quantity* [Philadelphia, 1760(?)]; *William Bradford, printer, bookseller, and stationer, at his store adjoining the London Coffee-House: has imported a collection of books among which are . . .* [Philadelphia, 1760(?)]; *A catalogue of books, sold by Rivington and Brown, booksellers and stationers from London, at their stores, over against the Golden Key, in Hanover-Square, New-York: and over against the London Coffee-House, in Philadelphia* [Philadelphia, 1762]. Bradford's bookseller catalogue of 1755 listed no Hume titles, but beginning with the two catalogues from 1760 cited above, Hume was on frequent offer in his catalogues of the 1760s and 1770s. In December of 1760 Hall wrote to Strahan asking for books, including Hume's *Essays*, with which to supply an unidentified library company. Exactly which library Hall was acting as the agent for is not clear. However, the first recorded reference to Hume's *Essays* in an American book catalogue is in *A catalogue of books, belonging to the Association Library Company of Philadelphia: alphabetically digested. To which is prefixed, the articles of the said Company, &c.* (Philadelphia, 1765).

⁷⁴ See Frederic L. van Holthoon, "Hume and the 1763 Edition of His *History of England*: His Frame of Mind as a Revisionist," *Hume Studies*, vol. 23 (1997), 133–52.

separate references to Hume's *Essays and Treatises* and two references to the *History of England*.⁷⁵ Some colonial booksellers accompanied their references to Hume's works with puffs of one sort or another. Rivington and Brown, in their catalogue of 1762 advertised for sale "The Essays and Miscellaneous Works of the Ingenious Mr. David Hume" and "Hume's History of Britain, a Work of the first Class."⁷⁶ The same booksellers puffed Hume's *History* in their *Pennsylvania Gazette* advertisement for 30 September 1762 as "a Work universally admired for the Elegancy of Language, and Impartiality of Sentiment." Descriptions of that character add shades of color to the bare facts that establish the growing prominence of Hume's works with his expanding colonial American audience of the 1760s.

A notable exception to this story of availability is found in the work for which Hume is most often remembered today. In colonial America, as in eighteenth-century Britain, there is little to suggest the wide circulation of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. This is not to say that no copies of the *Treatise* found their way across the Atlantic. Surprisingly, on 4 November 1771, Henry Knox placed the following advertisement in the pages of the *Boston Gazette*:

LONDON BOOK-STORE, Opposite Williams's Court, Cornhill
Boston, Henry Knox Has just received from London by the
Lydia, Capt. Hall, A General Assortment of the most celebrated
BOOKS in all Branches of Literature. Among which are,
HUME's History of England, 8 Vols. 8vo.
on Human Nature, 3 Vols. 8vo
's Essays, 4 Vols. 8vo

If the *Treatise* was to be found on any colonial American bookshelves, however, it could not have been on many. With respect to its reception in America, Hume was close to the mark when he reported that the *Treatise* "fell *dead-born from the press*."⁷⁷ Importantly, American book catalogues also announce that the absence of the *Treatise* should not be interpreted to suggest that eighteenth-century Americans were shut off from Hume's

⁷⁵ *A catalogue of curious and valuable books, to be sold at the London Book-Store* ([Boston, 1766]), which advertised two 2 vol. sets and a 4 vol. set of the *Essays and Treatises*, and two 8 vol. sets of the *History*.

⁷⁶ *A catalogue of books, sold by Rivington and Brown, booksellers and stationers from London, at their stores, over against the Golden Key, in Hanover-Square, New-York: and over against the London Coffee-House, in Philadelphia. At both which places will be found, a constant supply of books, with all the new articles as they are published in Europe; and from whence all orders directed to them from the country, whether in a wholesale or retail way, will be punctually complied with* ([Philadelphia?], 1762).

⁷⁷ Hume, "My Own Life," in Miller, ed., *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, xxxiv.

philosophical ideas. Hume recast the *Treatise*, as essays contained in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, both of which circulated widely as a result of their inclusion in the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.

Hume's ideas also circulated in print in other vehicles besides editions of his books. Reprintings of Hume's short essays and excerpts from his longer works circulated in the colonies when they appeared in eighteenth-century British periodicals which were imported in some numbers. In 1741, the *Scots Magazine* reprinted Hume's essay "Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic."⁷⁸ In 1742 it reprinted Hume's "*A character of Sir ROBERT WALPOLE. Taken from the Essays moral and political, vol. 2. lately published at Edinburgh,*" an essay which reportedly circulated widely in Britain in the 1740s.⁷⁹ As a "Preface" to its volume for 1754, the *Scots Magazine* reprinted Hume's "Of the Liberty of the Press," explaining that,

FOR a preface to this volume we have chosen one of the many ingenious essays writ by our learned countryman, DAVID HUME, Esq; The subject will appear of great importance to every one who sets a just value on a privilege by which the people of this island are happily distinguished, and on which depends the preservation of their liberties, civil and religious. It is by the exercise of this privilege that such works as this subsist; and by such works as this the privilege is preserved, and strengthened.⁸⁰

In 1762 the *Scots Magazine* reprinted Hume's essay, "Of Money."⁸¹ No adequate study exists of the circulation of British periodicals in eighteenth-century

⁷⁸ *Scots Magazine*, "Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic," vol. 3 (1741), 456–58.

⁷⁹ *Scots Magazine*, "A character of Sir ROBERT WALPOLE, Taken from the Essays moral and political, vol. 2. lately published at Edinburgh," vol. 4 (1742), 38–39. In an article of 1742, the *Scots Magazine* reported that "The character of Sir Robert Walpole, in our Magazine for January last, p. 38. was inserted in most of the newspapers of *G. Britain*." On the British circulation of this piece and the controversy it raised, see James Fieser, ed., *Early Responses to Hume's Moral, Literary and Political Writings, II. Hume's Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (Bristol, 1999), esp. 9–10.

⁸⁰ *Scots Magazine*, "Of the Liberty of the Press," vol. 16 (1754), iii–vi, passage quoted from iii.

⁸¹ *Scots Magazine*, "Of Money," vol. 24 (1762), 33–39. On the *Scots Magazine* reprinting of "Of Money" see Istvan Hont, "The 'rich country-poor country' debate in Scottish classical political economy," in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds.,

America, but indications are that they were disseminated widely.⁸² That is especially so for popular English magazines, many of which are known to have reprinted Hume material. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Country Journal: or the Craftsman*, and the *London Magazine* all reprinted Hume's essays, as did some of their lesser known kin.⁸³ In 1772 Hume's "On impudence and modesty," "An essay on love and marriage," and "An essay on avarice," were all reprinted in *The Beauties of the Magazines, and other Periodical Works, Selected for a series of Years: consisting of Essays, Moral Tales, Characters, and other Fugitive Pieces, in Prose; By the most eminent Hands . . . also some Essays by D. HUME, Esq; Not inserted in the last Editions of his Works: With many other miscellaneous Productions of equal Merit* (2 vols., London, 1772). We will want to consider the further significance for Hume's American reception of these and other British reprintings and discussions of Hume's works in British periodical literature of the day. But first, what of reprintings of Hume's works in colonial America?

EARLY PUBLISHING OF HUME IN THE COLONIES

While most books available to colonial readers were imported, the history of the indigenous publishing of Hume's works is another avenue to explore

Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment (Cambridge, 1983), 294n, 295n.

⁸² On the circulation of British periodicals during the first half of the eighteenth century see Norman S. Fiering, "The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 33 (1976), 642–60. On colonial reading of the *Gentleman's Magazine* at Harvard see Albert Goodhue, Jr., "The Reading of Harvard Students, 1770–1781, as shown by the Records of the Speaking Club," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, vol. 73 (1937), 107–29, esp. 120. Further evidence that British magazines circulated in America during the second half of the eighteenth century might be gleaned from William Strahan's invoices to David Hall which contain numerous entries for periodicals such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, *London Magazine*, *Universal Magazine*, *New Universal Magazine*, and the *Monthly Review*. Similar orders for British magazines are found in the less well-known manuscripts which survive for Benedict Arnold's bookstore purchases from Thomas Longman during the period c. 1763–1766 (see MSS "List of books bought by Benedict Arnold from Thomas Longman," at Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

⁸³ See, for instance, "Whether the British Government Inclines More to an Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic," in the *Country Journal: or the Craftsman*, no. 797 (10 October 1741), and in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 11 (1741), 536–38; "An Essay on Love and Marriage," in the *Universal Magazine*, vol. 3 (July 1764), the *Sentimental Magazine* (1777), and the *Lady's Magazine* (1779).

when considering the circulation and impact of his ideas in America. Colonial periodicals frequently reprinted essays and excerpts of longer works which originally had been published overseas. The first significant American journal reprintings of Hume's works date from the 1760s, coinciding with the increased reference to Hume in American book catalogues. In January of 1765, the *South Carolina Gazette* reprinted, on its front page, Hume's essay of 1741, "Of the Liberty of the Press."⁸⁴ Soon thereafter another southern paper, the *Virginia Gazette*, reprinted the same essay, also on its front-page, where it identified the author with the simple credit, "Hume."⁸⁵ The editors of the *Virginia Gazette* expected their readers to be sufficiently familiar with "Hume" to know that he was David, the Scottish historian and philosopher. They were no doubt right in thinking so. Besides the reprinting of his essays in the journals and newspapers of colonial America, were there more substantial efforts to publish Hume's works in colonial America?

Hume himself, we have seen, expressed interest in being printed in America. Given the familiarity of colonial Americans with Hume's thought, we ought not be surprised that Hume wrote to Franklin in February of 1772, "You told me, I think, that your Countrymen in that part of the World intended to do me the Honour of giving an Edition of my Writings; and you promised that you should recommend to them to follow this last Edition, which is in the Press. I now use the freedom of reminding you of it."⁸⁶ Hume was likely referring to his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, a two-volume 8vo edition of which was published in Britain in 1772. Constantly revising his works, Hume in his letter to Franklin reveals a keen interest to have the best edition of his work reprinted in America. If an American edition of the *Essays and Treatises* was published during Hume's lifetime,

⁸⁴ *South Carolina Gazette* (12–19 January 1765), 1–2.

⁸⁵ *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), "Of the Liberty of the Press" (25 December 1766), 1.

⁸⁶ Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner, eds., *New Letters of David Hume* (Oxford, 1954), 194. See Franklin's letter to Hume, 27 September 1760, in Labaree, et al., eds., *Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven and London, 1959–), vol. 9: 227, "I assure you, it often gives me Pleasure to reflect how greatly the *Audience* (if I may so term it) of a good English Writer will in another Century or two be encreas'd, by the Increase of English People in our Colonies." It is interesting to consider Hume's recommendation in J. Y. T. Greig, ed., *Letters of David Hume* (2 vols., Oxford, 1932), vol. 2: 171, that Edward Gibbon publish his *Decline and Fall* in English rather than French: "Let the French, therefore, triumph in the present diffusion of their tongue. Our solid and increasing establishments in America, where we need less dread the inundation of Barbarians, promise a superior stability and duration to the English language."

no evidence of it now survives. The first American edition of any of Hume's books was not published until after the American Revolution, and his philosophical works did not see American editions until the second decade of the nineteenth century. Concurrent with this ostensible intended American edition of the *Essays and Treatises*, however, was a more concrete attempt to publish a work by David Hume in colonial America.

In 1771, Robert Bell, a Philadelphia bookseller and publisher, thought colonial interest in Hume's *History of England* sufficiently strong to warrant its first American edition. Bell's printed proposals for the project survive in at least five different versions.⁸⁷ Those show that the planned edition was to be published by subscription as soon as 300 customers were secured. The manner in which Bell marketed his edition of Hume's *History* is telling of Hume's colonial American reception and impact.

Bell's proposals are interesting for what they reveal about Hume's prospective colonial readers. While Bell claimed to be "encouraged by several Gentlemen of eminence, in the different provinces" and he wanted his edition of the *History* to be "worthy of a place in the most elegant and well chosen libraries," he also aimed to attract a much wider American readership.⁸⁸ His *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* proposal, for instance, was pitched at both "Gentlemen" and "Ladies." Echoing Hume himself, Bell thought the *History's* potential audience included elite patrons, but also those "persons in the middle walk" who might take advantage of his periodic subscription "to purchase and to read at an easy and convenient rate."⁸⁹ Also interesting is the manner in which Bell actively mingled the American-ness of the material aspects of the proposed edition with the intellectual aims of the work being produced. A common theme of all Bell's proposals was that Hume's American edition was to be a patriotic event. In the proposal printed in the *Virginia Gazette*, Bell remarked that "Gentlemen who wish prosperity to the means for the enlargement of the human understanding in *America* will greatly contribute towards this

⁸⁷ The earliest located "Proposal" was printed as a broadside and dated 4 April 1771. Similar, but differently worded, proposals appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal and the Weekly Advertiser* for 18 April 1771, the *Virginia Gazette* for 2 May and 30 May 1771, and the *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* for 22 July 1771.

⁸⁸ Robert Bell, *Proposals, addressed to those who possess a Public Spirit* (Philadelphia, 1771).

⁸⁹ An interesting sales pitch in light of Hume's remark, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688* (6 vols., Indianapolis, 1983), vol. 5: 154, that literary tastes had diminished with the invention of the printing press "which has rendered books so common, that even men of slender fortunes can have access to them."

beneficent purpose” by subscribing to this edition of Hume’s *History*. He addressed the first of his proposals to “those who possess a PUBLIC SPIRIT” and “THE real friends to the progress of literary entertainment, and the extension of useful Manufactures in an Infant-Country.” This “handsome American Edition,” he said, will enrich “THE LAND WE LIVE IN.” A colonial American edition of Hume’s *History*, wrote Bell, will “demonstrate the excellence of NATIVE FABRICATIONS.” The “goodness of the type, and the neatness of the artist’s manual-exercise at the PRINTING PRESS,” he argued “shall durably support the honour of that glorious vehicle of KNOWLEDGE AND LIBERTY.”⁹⁰

Sadly, Bell’s efforts to bring out a colonial edition of Hume’s “glorious vehicle of KNOWLEDGE AND LIBERTY” failed. The first American edition of the *History* was yet twenty-five years in the offing when it would emerge under the direction of another expatriate Scot residing in Philadelphia, Robert Campbell. But why did Bell’s edition fail? Historians unanimously see Bell’s failure as Hume’s failure. Scholars of early American political thought have long argued that the edition failed because Hume’s *History* was singularly unpopular in America. The evidence in colonial American book catalogues suggests clearly that Bell’s failure should not hastily be interpreted as Hume’s failure. To the contrary. Bell’s proposed edition provides further evidence of the remarkably strong colonial interest in the *History*. The very fact that an American edition of the *History* was considered at all in 1771 certifies its swelling popularity in the colonies, and, ironically, so does the fact that it was abandoned. Bell’s edition was abandoned not because Hume’s book was unpopular, but because it was so popular the American market was flooded with good editions imported from Britain.

That Bell aimed at a subscription edition is indicative of the difficulties that colonial printers faced in raising financial capital for expensive printing projects such as this one.⁹¹ Bell was concerned — and rightly so — to advertise his American edition as being priced well below its British competitors. In his broadside proposal, Bell pointed out that his Hume would be sold “at the moderate price of one Dollar each volume, sewed in blue boards, *although the quarto edition is sold at thirty Dollars.*”⁹² He drew similar attention to the low cost of his edition in the *Virginia Gazette* proposal of 30 May 1771, writing that it would be sold at “the moderate price of 7s

⁹⁰ Bell, *Proposals, addressed to those who possess a Public Spirit*.

⁹¹ See James N. Green, “From Printer to Publisher: Mathew Carey and the Origins of Nineteenth-Century Book Publishing,” in Michael Hackenberg, ed., *Getting the Books Out: Papers of the Chicago Conference on the Book in 19th-Century America* (Washington, 1987), 27.

⁹² Bell, *Proposals, addressed to those who possess a Public Spirit*.

6d Virginia currency, each volume, sewed in blue boards."⁹³ Bell accurately perceived that the most significant threat to the success of his project was not an insufficient colonial interest in the *History*, but rather a colonial market saturated with British editions of Hume's popular book. Not even Bell's nationalistic language was sufficient to overcome that obstacle.⁹⁴

Hume was not the only author whose work was imported in sufficient quantities to preempt colonial editions. The ready supply of imported editions of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* similarly led to the failure in 1775 of the proposed subscription publication (also calling for 300 subscribers) of its first American edition.⁹⁵ Even the demand for popular books has its economic limits. In 1768 a subscription reprinting of John Dickinson's spectacularly popular *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* was abandoned,

⁹³ Bell's "Proposal" in *Virginia Gazette*, 30 May 1771. In his *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* proposal, Bell argued that by buying American the colonists would "positively be saving thousands of Pounds to and among the Inhabitants of the British Empire in America." "The Importation of one thousand Sets of Blackstone's Commentaries," Bell explained by ingenious example, "manufactured in Europe at ten Pounds per Set, is sending very near ten thousand Pounds across the great Atlantic Ocean. Whereas, one thousand Sets manufactured in America and sold at the small Price of three Pounds per Set, is an actual Saving of seven thousand Pounds to the Purchasers, and the identical three thousand Pounds which is laid out for our own Manufactures is still retained in the Country, being distributed among Manufacturers and Traders, whose Residence upon the Continent of Course causith the Money to circulate from Neighbour to Neighbour, and by this Circulation in America there is a great Probability of its revolving to the very hands from which it originally migrated."

⁹⁴ On later eighteenth-century linkings of American "commercial nationalism" with American printing see Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge and London, 1990), esp. 118–21, 118: "That rhetoric of nationalism burgeoned everywhere in the 1780s and 1790s, but nowhere more than in the printing trade. Writers began to talk of making specifically American books. So did printers, typographers, binders, paper-makers, and lawmakers." But for the colonial period see T. H. Breen, "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690–1776," *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 25 (1986), 467–99, 497: "Students of the book trade . . . have discovered that the colonists demanded volumes printed in England." As a commentator wrote in 1810, quoted in Charles L. Nichols, "The Literary Fair in the United States," in *Bibliographical Essays, A Tribute to Wilberforce Eames* (1924; reprinted New York, 1967), 85, "for many years after the peace of 1783, books could be imported into the United States and sold cheaper than they could be printed here and indeed until 1793 nothing like a competition with English printers and booksellers could be maintained."

⁹⁵ See Spurlin, "Readership in the American Enlightenment," 366.

probably for similar reasons of market saturation.⁹⁶ Failed subscription editions of the works of Montesquieu and Dickinson have not been cited as evidence for a poor eighteenth-century American reception for these authors.⁹⁷ Nor should Bell's deserted edition of Hume.

It is appropriate that Hume's *History of England* was nominated for publication in colonial America: the evidence in book catalogues recommends it as the most popular of all of Hume's works in eighteenth-century America. By 1770 colonial interest in Hume had reached a heightened pitch. The best known published study of the availability of Hume's works in America, Lundberg and May's, distorted that picture when it seriously under-represented the pre-Revolutionary circulation of Hume's works. Contrary to the received interpretation, the evidence documented in this chapter suggests a very warm reception for Hume's works in colonial America. To show that Hume's *History of England* and his *Essays and Treatises* were not only available in colonial America but well on their way to becoming American classics is, therefore, to go part of the way towards a reassessment of the reception of Hume's political thought in eighteenth-century America. Tracing in detail the diffusion of Hume's works adds a piece to the developing puzzle depicting reading tastes in eighteenth-century America. Counting references to Hume's works in American book catalogues cannot, on its own, tell the story of Hume's colonial American impact. When interpreted intelligently, however, these data provide an essential background and illuminating context for discussing the influence of Hume's ideas in America. They inform the larger story by helping the historian of ideas to set its real boundaries and contours, its limits and possibilities.

⁹⁶ See Donald Farren, "Subscription: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century American Book Trade" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1982), 105.

⁹⁷ Using American publication figures as an indicator of the popularity of any European author in colonial America is, we see, a hazardous business. Hook, *Scotland and America*, 41, appears misguided to write, "there is little to suggest the really widespread circulation of [Scottish Enlightenment] books. (The very limited reprinting of Scottish books is particularly telling)." For the expression of similar misconceptions see Stuart Andrews, *The Rediscovery of America: Transatlantic Crosscurrents in an Age of Revolution* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London, 1998), 6–7, 23.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT FOR HUME'S RECEPTION IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

Finding evidence that Hume's *History of England* and his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* frequently were on American bookshelves in colonial times is a step towards understanding the degree and nature of Hume's impact in eighteenth-century America. Given that past commentators have often misconstrued the wide dispersal of Hume's books, that preliminary step is an essential one. Since Hume's works were readily available in colonial America as early as the mid 1760s, new questions arise. How was Hume read? What was Hume's reputation in colonial America? How did his reputation change over time? How did Hume's ideas figure in the writings of his American readers? In short, how was Hume's thought received in colonial America and what impact did it have? In this chapter and those to follow I will attempt to answer these and similar questions.

As critics of book history rightly point out, the simple presence of a book on a bookshelf is not sufficient proof that it was ever taken down from the shelf, let alone read.¹ That is especially so when dealing with the

¹ For representative statements of that point see Charles G. Steffen, *From Gentlemen to Townsmen, The Gentry of Baltimore County, Maryland, 1660–1776* (Kentucky, 1993), 126: “books owned were not necessarily books read, and vice versa. We should be exceedingly cautious in assuming that the reading tastes of the elite corresponded exactly to what we find on the shelves of their libraries”; Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America* (Glasgow and London, 1975), 17: when thinking about the influence of a book “there is still the question of whether it is taken off the shelf and read. Clearly availability is not to be automatically identified with influence; as important as availability is a receptive frame of mind, an openness to influence, on the part of the potential reader”; Andrew Hook, “Scotland and American Revisited,” in Owen D. Edwards and George Shepperson, eds., *Scotland, Europe*

book ownership and reading of an individual. As one scholar puts it, "Few people are without unread books on their shelves, and ownership of an unread volume means little."² The evidence presented in the previous chapter concerns not one bookshelf and one potential reader, but hundreds. Common sense suggests, as well, that in early America books were too expensive not to be read upon purchase. That eighteenth-century Americans tended to be readers was also a favorite brag of the times. John Adams remarked in 1765 of the "common people" of America those "who cannot read and write is as rare an appearance as a Jacobite or a Roman Catholic, i.e. as rare as a Comet or an Earthquake."³ Benjamin Franklin considered that libraries such as the Social Library of Philadelphia "improv'd the general Conversation of the Americans, made the common Tradesmen and Farmers as intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the Stand so generally made throughout the Colonies in Defence of their Privileges."⁴ More recent commentators have argued convincingly that reading in America was part and parcel of the "republican enlightenment."⁵ Given the general propensity for reading in early America and the widespread diffusion of Hume's works, it

and the American Revolution (New York, 1977), 85: "Because someone owns or has read a particular book does not mean he was influenced by it; what is needed is evidence that the book was read with understanding and sympathy."

² H. Trevor Colbourn, "The Reading of Joseph Carrington Cabell: 'A List of Books on Various Subjects Recommended to a Young Man . . .'" *Studies in Bibliography: Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia*, vol. 13 (1960), 179–88, passage quoted from 180.

³ Robert J. Taylor, et al., eds., *Papers of John Adams*, Series III, General Correspondence and Other Papers of the Adams Statesmen (Cambridge, Mass., 1977–), vol. 1 (1997), "A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law," 120. See also George A. Peek, Jr., ed., *The Political Writings of John Adams* (1954; reprinted Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2003), 12.

⁴ Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1964; 2nd ed. New Haven, 2003), 130–31.

⁵ See Douglass Adair, "The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, the Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1943), 58: "There can be no doubt that these men [enlightened Americans] took their books most seriously; if ever individuals read with a purpose they did"; Richard D. Brown, "Bulwark of Revolutionary Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's and John Adams's Programs for an Informed Citizenry," in James Gilreath, ed., *Thomas Jefferson and the Education of a Citizen* (Washington, 1999), 92–94; and Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge and London, 1990).

would be strange indeed if Hume's *History of England* and the *Essays and Treatises* were not read regularly. But I need not be so speculative.

There is ample evidence that proves Hume's books were not only taken down from bookshelves to be read widely in colonial America, but read in interesting ways. The first posthumous reference to David Hume in the newspapers of Revolutionary America offers a point of departure for showing how that is so:

That celebrated David Hume, esq; the philosopher and historian, lately deceased, it is asserted, in his last moments exhorted his friend governor Johnston to persevere in supporting the American cause, it being, in his opinion, founded on the true principles of the constitution.⁶

What is to be made of that report? One wonders first of all, is it true? Did Hume say what this celebratory announcement in the *Virginia Gazette* says he did? Hume and Johnstone are known to have been acquainted, but insufficient evidence survives to judge of the truth of the *Gazette's* report.⁷ However, the very fact that a leading American newspaper cast Hume as a defender of the Revolutionary cause, being "founded on the true principles of the constitution," is a sufficient puzzle on its own. That puzzle is even more intriguing in light of existing historiography.

HUME AND AMERICA: MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

While Hume's impact on a few, select eighteenth-century Americans (and James Madison in particular) has been the subject of intense debate,⁸

⁶ *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), 4 April 1777, p. 2, col. 1. The "governor Johnston" referred to was Commodore George Johnstone (1730–1787), Governor of West Florida from 1763 to 1767. On Johnstone see Robin F. A. Fabel, *Bombast & Broad-sides: The Lives of George Johnstone* (Tuscaloosa, 1987).

⁷ In the Hume papers at the National Library of Scotland is a letter (MS 23155, vol. 5, f.94) from Johnstone to Hume. Johnstone, replying to an earlier (non extant) letter from Hume, wrote that he had "often delighted" himself "by reading again & again your discriptions of the Higher Scenes of Life, But that you could descend with equall ease from that elevation of thought into the simple engaging & domestick Situations of Mankind of this I was Ignorant before." In a letter to Hugh Blair, dated 6 October 1763, Hume referred to the likelihood that James Macpherson would go to Florida as Johnstone's secretary: see J. Y. T. Greig, ed., *The Letters of David Hume* (2 vols., Oxford, 1932), vol. 1: 403–04.

⁸ For a detailed discussion of that historiography see Chapter 6 below.

students of the American Enlightenment have most often been asked to accept as an unsubstantiated truism, that Hume's works were a markedly unimportant element in the reading and thought of a wider eighteenth-century American audience. Historians have assumed that Hume's books had little circulation in America and that Hume's ideas had only slight appeal to an early American audience. The core monographs on the American Enlightenment regularly have by-passed systematic discussion of Hume and his thought. Hume is virtually absent from the pages of standard accounts such as Ernest Cassara's *The Enlightenment in America*⁹ and Morton White's *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*.¹⁰ In Henry Steele Commager's *The Empire of Reason*, Hume is mentioned only in passing.¹¹ The most detailed account of the American Enlightenment, Henry F. May's *The Enlightenment in America*, has little to say about Hume and the few words it does offer are concerned mostly to proclaim that Hume's scepticism and supposed atheism made him a minor player in the intellectual games of the colonies. Hume's thought, wrote May, "was usually rejected" and "it is hard to find any American who adopted [Hume's] opinions."¹² For J. G. A. Pocock, Hume, one of "the philosophical historians," was "rejected by the American grain."¹³ In short, most accounts

⁹ Ernest Cassara, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1975).

¹⁰ Morton White, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* (New York, 1978).

¹¹ Henry Steele Commager, *The Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment* (New York, 1977). Commager's cavalier treatment of Hume is grounded on his intention to distance the American Enlightenment from European sources, 131: "Where a Montesquieu, a Bolingbroke, a Hume, a Rousseau, a Filangieri, a Kant formulated political philosophies for some ideal society or some remote contingency, the Americans dashed off their state papers to meet an urgent crisis or solve a clamorous problem."

¹² Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976), 120. May noted Douglass Adair's claim for Hume's impact on Madison and suggested the possibility of Hume's influence on Alexander Hamilton but qualified all with the remark, 120–21, that "this is a long way, however, from making Hume's thought in general a profound influence in America, or even on Madison." In May's account of a four-part American Enlightenment, "The Skeptical Enlightenment," the period in which "the profoundest skeptic" Hume was cast as the archetypal representative, was felt least of all in America. For May, Hume's influence was precluded by his scepticism and his "Toryism." See also May, "The Problem of the American Enlightenment," in *Ideas, Faiths, and Feelings: Essay on American Intellectual and Religious History* (New York, 1983), 119: "Hume, though he was sometimes read, was usually rejected."

¹³ J. G. A. Pocock, review of Lester H. Cohen, *The Revolutionary Histories: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, 1980), in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 68 (1982), 920–21, passage quoted from 921.

of the American Enlightenment have been dismissive of Hume's place therein. American political thought especially, it is commonly supposed, had little time for Hume who was crowded out of a world dominated by John Locke and/or classical republicanism.¹⁴

There is a long-standing myth that Hume's *History of England*, in particular, was rejected by Revolutionary Americans. That myth encompasses a number of related suppositions but at its heart is the assumption that Revolutionary Americans cast aside Hume's *History* as a Tory tract. This is not a myth that inhabits the fringes of scholarship. It has infected some of the best and most influential writings concerned with the history of ideas in early America, for it is a myth that sits comfortably with the accepted paradigms of the ideological origins of the American Revolution.

In Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Hume's reception is figuratively and literally reduced to a footnote. Bailyn shrugged off any significant impact for Hume's political thought in America, writing as an aside below his main text that Hume's *History*, "was commonly believed to be, in Daniel Dulany's words, 'a studied apology for the

¹⁴ See Vincent Buranelli, "Colonial Philosophy," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 16 (1959), 343–62, esp. 361; Daniel J. Boorstin, "The Myth of An American Enlightenment," in *America and the Image of Europe* (Cleveland, 1960), 65–78; William Seal Carpenter, *The Development of American Political Thought* (New York, 1968); Robert A. Ferguson, "'What is Enlightenment?': Some American Answers," *American Literary History*, vol. 1 (1989), no. 2, 245–71; Jack P. Greene, "America and the Creation of the Revolutionary Intellectual World of the Enlightenment," in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville and London, 1992), 348–67; Oscar and Lilian Handlin, *Liberty in Expansion, 1760–1850* (New York, 1989), vol. II in *Liberty in America 1600 to the Present*, 388–89: where the "case" for Hume's impact in America is characterized as "flimsy" because Hume's name apparently did not "appear frequently in the chains of great names that embellish colonial controversy." "Such searches for influence fail" because no "European writer exercised a determinative influence on American Revolutionary ideology. The motives that moved the rebellious colonists were products of their native soil"; Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution* (1987; reprinted 5 vols., Indianapolis, 2000), vol. 1: 337: Hume's "science of politics" as detailed in the *Essays* offered "little by way of solution to their [Enlightened Americans'] problems"; Cathy Matson, "Liberty, Jealousy, and Union: The New York Economy in the 1780s," in Paul A. Gilje and William Pencak, eds., *New York in the Age of the Constitution, 1775–1800* (New York, 1992), 113: "few revolutionists and few newly empowered state leaders stopped to consult Hume's essays"; Robert A. Ferguson, "The American Enlightenment, 1750–1820" in Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume One: 1590–1820* (Cambridge, 1994), 345–538.

Stuarts, and particularly Charles I’.”¹⁵ Bailyn was not the first to write off Hume in that way. Nineteenth-century scholars frequently were dismissive of Hume’s *History* and early twentieth-century historians of ideas frequently assumed that Hume’s thought was out of step with Revolutionary America. As one historian put it in 1937, Hume’s “political ideas” were “anathema to the Americans.”¹⁶ In 1952 Louis Hartz thought Hume was “almost invariably ignored” in Revolutionary America.¹⁷ For Caroline Robbins, writing just before Bailyn, Hume’s “political prejudices,” his Toryism, had been sufficient to exclude him from her list of influential Commonwealthmen.¹⁸

¹⁵ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967; enlarged edition, Cambridge and London, 1992), 28n. Bailyn made the same point in another footnote, in the “General Introduction” to his *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* (Harvard, 1969), 24n. But nowhere does Bailyn give evidence to show that this was a “commonly held” opinion of Hume. It is curious, too, that Dulany’s reading of Hume is noted, but the opposing comments of Charles Carroll, in that debate, are ignored. That Bailyn, in his book on the intellectual origins of the American Revolution, should not discuss Hume’s impact on Carroll is especially curious given that it was Carroll, not Dulany, who would side with the Revolution. For a more thorough discussion of the debate between Carroll and Dulany see Chapter 5 below.

¹⁶ Herbert Lawrence Ganter, “The Machiavellianism of George Mason,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 2, vol. 17 (1937), 239–64, passage quoted from 254. See also David S. Lovejoy, “Henry Marchant and the Mistress of the World,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 12 (1955), 391, who referred to “the Tory Hume,” even though Marchant nowhere did.

¹⁷ Louis Hartz, “American Political Thought and the American Revolution,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 46 (1952), 321–42, passage quoted from 336.

¹⁸ Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (1959; reprinted Indianapolis, 2004), 8–9. Robbins wrote, 360, that “Hume’s bias was Tory” and, 380, Hume was “a Tory.” However, Robbins appears to have been uneasy with her decision to exclude Hume, 217–18: “It would be pleasant to dwell on Hume, on his Cromwellian parliament without bishops or Scottish peers, his nonhereditary second chamber, his insistence that government may be changed as the good of society demands, his wish to control the variable and uncertain arrangement that prevailed with regard to royal prerogative, his views on party — all these seem to place him near to the Commonwealthmen. Moreover, suggestions about law and conquest seem to have echoed Hutcheson’s lectures. The examination of the durability of large republics, once achieved, was penetrating, as were the original economic ideas. His support of the colonists is well known. Party prejudice, as shown in the *History*, was a surface irritation, a taste. Hume’s Toryism was more superficial than that of a Burke or a Bolingbroke, even if his writing strengthened Tory sentiments about English history for a long time to come.”

Others around the same time claimed that Hume "enjoyed little popularity in America."¹⁹ Trevor Colbourn, in his book *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution*, argued that Hume's *History* had a negative reception and slight impact in Revolutionary America because Hume was "considered a tory historian."²⁰

Bailyn, Robbins, and Colbourn set the stage for the next fifty years. Even by 1972, John M. Werner could write in his often-cited essay on "David Hume and America," published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, that it was "ironic that Hume, who had expressed approval of the American experiment and who had sided emotionally with them in their struggle, should have suffered so much abuse for his *History of England* from some Americans." Werner concluded that "[c]onsidering the harsh nature of their criticism of this work, it is questionable whether any of Hume's writings exerted substantial influence upon these men."²¹ Richard Beale Davis summarized the tenor of scholarship when he wrote in 1979 that "there is little evidence that Hume was a profound or (from a liberal point of view) pernicious influence anywhere in America."²² In 1992, Paul A. Rahe in a broad survey wrote that "Many of the American founders," found Hume's *History* "distasteful."²³ Second editions of Bailyn, Robbins, and Colbourn have been published in recent years and the myth of the rejection of Hume's *History* remains intact for a new generation of scholars.

Revolutionary American rejection of Hume's *History* has become an entrenched "fact" seemingly beyond question. In the most recent accounts,

¹⁹ Robert McCluer Calhoun, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760–1781* (New York, 1965), 203.

²⁰ H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience* (1965, reprinted Indianapolis, 1998), 28. That Colbourn considered Hume to be a Tory historian is clear; see his review of Samuel Klinger, *The Goths in England: A Study in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1952) in *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 10 (1953), 473: "It might be noted in passing that Dr. Klinger appears to have fallen into pitfalls regarding the views of the arch-Tory historian David Hume."

²¹ John M. Werner, "David Hume and America," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 33 (1972), 439–56, passage quoted from 456. See also Henry F. May, "The Decline of providence?," *Studies on Voltaire and the 18th Century*, vol. 154 (1976), 1401–16, where Hume's irrelevance to the American Revolutionary era is implied when he is described as "anti-revolutionary" (1414); Peter J. Stanlis, "British Views of the American Revolution: A Conflict over Rights of Sovereignty," *Early American Literature*, vol. 11 (1976), 191–201, see 193.

²² Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, 1979), 44.

²³ Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 1058n.

the rejection myth is casually floated as the commonplace it is. "Jefferson and many early American patriots," one critic assumes, "saw Hume as a royalist reactionary and scorned him."²⁴ Another writes in a book published in 2003 that "the leaders of the American Revolution were critical of Hume's allegedly Tory perspective."²⁵ For the past century, historians, political scientists, and philosophers repeatedly have endorsed the myth that Hume's *History* was rejected by Americans of the Revolutionary era.

But what proof has been offered to support that claim? Surprisingly little, beyond the weight of the historiography itself. Looking closely at that body of scholarship shows nothing in the way of substantial evidence to suggest that Revolutionary Americans, in general, rejected Hume's *History of England*. However, like most myths, this one is sustained by some grains of near truth. Oftentimes aspects of Hume's reception in nineteenth-century America are cited as evidence for his rejection in Revolutionary America. That is the case, for instance, when Trevor Colbourn noted that John Adams described Hume as a "conceited Scotchman" and complained of Hume's "elegant Lies" which "had nearly laughed into contempt Rapin[,] Sydney and even Lock[e]."²⁶ Those statements are informative of Adams's perception of Hume in the 1810s, when they were delivered, but they tell us little if anything about how Hume was received by Adams (or anyone else) in colonial days. It is puzzling why Colbourn, in his book concerned with American Revolutionary ideology, makes no mention of Adams's very different use of Hume's *History* in the decades of the 1760s and 1770s.

Even more has been made of Thomas Jefferson's negative comments about Hume's *History*, of which there are many. It is debatable, of course, whether one can extrapolate from Jefferson to make claims for all Revolutionary Americans as commentators have done.²⁷ And, that issue aside, not one of Jefferson's negative comments about Hume's *History* was written before 1807. Jefferson is highly quotable but in quoting him, historians have been blind to the fact that his comments are hardly relevant to Hume's reception in the 1770s.

²⁴ Peter S. Fosl, "Critical Study: Donald Livingston's *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy*," *Hume Studies*, vol. 24 (1998), 355–66, passage quoted from 355.

²⁵ Claudia M. Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2003), 297.

²⁶ Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience*, 86, 104.

²⁷ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, is typical, referring to Jefferson's "dislike of Hume's *History*" as a "widely shared" view, without offering evidence to establish the truth of that statement (42n).

In the absence of solid evidence, historians have sometimes invented proofs. Richard Beale Davis, after discussing Jefferson's legendary nineteenth-century rejection of Hume's *History* wrote: "[n]eedless to say, Hume's *History* is not on any of Jefferson's many lists of recommended readings."²⁸ Had he bothered to consult those lists, as we will below, Davis would have found that Jefferson did include Hume's *History* in recommended readings drawn up in the eighteenth century — and he did so more than once.

There are other false legs propping up the myth that Revolutionary Americans rejected Hume's *History*. A favourite one is the failure of Bell's American edition of Hume's *History* discussed in the previous chapter. For fifty years, historians have assumed that Bell's abandoned edition reflected the American rejection of Hume's supposed "Tory" *History of England*. For Earl Burk Braly "the colonists of 1771" were "wary of underwriting publication of a 'Tory' history, however, 'elegant'."²⁹ Trevor Colbourn wrote that "Bell was unable to secure support for an American imprint of Hume's pro-Stuart *History of England*, but made up for this misjudgment with an edition of John Cartwright's whiggish pamphlet *American Independence the Interest and Glory of Great Britain* in 1776."³⁰ Werner wrote that the *History*'s "unfortunate tory reputation probably limited somewhat its popularity with whiggish-minded Americans. In 1771, Robert Bell, a colonist who had become very successful in the reprint trade, was unable to secure support for an American edition of the *History*."³¹ More recently, Peter S. Fosl summarized the received opinion: "The severity of early American disapprobation for Hume's text was in 1771 so severe that the colonial reprinter Robert Bell was unable to interest booksellers in an American edition of the *History*."³²

That explanation makes sense within the myth of Hume's American rejection. But it does not stand up against the facts as we have come to know them. The *Virginia Gazette*'s 1777 matter-of-fact celebration of Hume's expressed support of the American Revolutionary cause makes just as little sense against the historiography considered above. It is especially thorny if we see Hume's *History*, as modern commentators have, as the work of a Tory historian who actively set out to offer an apology for

²⁸ Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf*, 44.

²⁹ Earl Burke Braly, "The Reputation of David Hume in America" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas, 1955), 27–28.

³⁰ Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience*, 23.

³¹ Werner, "David Hume and America," 443.

³² Peter S. Fosl, "Hume Skepticism, and Early American Deism," *Hume Studies*, vol. 25 (1999), 171–92, passage quoted from 172.

Charles I. While that interpretation had its inception in the eighteenth century, it was only stated in categorical and full-blown terms in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³³ By 1941 Hume's reputation as a partisan Tory historian had become sufficiently ubiquitous that E. C. Mossner offered his somewhat revisionist account as "An Apology for David Hume, Historian."³⁴ It is this image of Hume as a Tory historian that scholars of American cultural and intellectual history have unreflectively brought to their works. It haunts accounts of Hume's reception and impact in eighteenth-century America.³⁵ As Melvin Buxbaum recently said in his version of the received account: Hume's *History* "revealed deep rooted feelings that were essentially . . . in line with Tory views," so much so that "nothing could bring him around to the American side against England."³⁶

³³ See John Wingate Thornton, ed., *The Pulpit of the American Revolution: or, the Political Sermons of the Period of 1776* (Boston, 1860), 45, who read Hume's *History* as a "fallacious apology, in which he varnished over the crimes of the Stuarts"; see also, for instance, Henry Calderwood, *David Hume* (1898; reprinted Bristol, 1989), esp. 67–68. For a discussion of some of that historiography see David B. Horn, "Hume as Historian," in *David Hume: University of Edinburgh 250th Anniversary of the Birth of David Hume 1711 : 1961 A Record of the Commemoration Published as a Supplement to the University Gazette* (Edinburgh, 1961), esp. 25–28.

³⁴ E. C. Mossner, "An Apology for David Hume, Historian," *Papers of the Modern Language Association*, vol. 66 (1941), 657–90. See also E. C. Mossner, "Was Hume a Tory Historian? Facts and Reconsiderations," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 2 (1941), 225–36; and E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Austin, 1954), chap. 23, "The History of England," 301–18.

³⁵ Along with the numerous sources discussed above, see also James F. Conniff, "The Enlightenment and American Political Thought: A Study of the Origins of Madison's *Federalist Number 10*," *Political Theory*, vol. 8 (1980), 383: "Hume was not particularly popular in America: he was considered a Tory, his religious views were suspect, and he defended wealth, luxury, and corruption," and, 386, "Hume's sceptical, historical-minded Toryism"; Lucy Martin Donnelly, "The Celebrated Mrs. Macaulay," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 6 (1949), 174–75: Hume's *History* was a "Tory classic" and Macaulay "was a godsend against Hume in the conflict of the early years of George III that divided the English world quite simply between those who loved liberty and those who did not"; Dalphy I. Fagerstrom, "Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 3, vol. 11 (1954), 259; Herbert Lawrence Ganter, "Jefferson's 'Pursuit of Happiness' and some forgotten Men," *William and Mary Quarterly*, ser. 2, vol. 16 (1936), 581, who thought it appropriate to refer to Hume as "the Scotch Tory" from 1751, even before Hume had published the first volume of his *History*.

³⁶ Melvin H. Buxbaum, "Hume, Franklin and America: A Matter of Loyalties," *Enlightenment Essays*, vol. 3 (1972), 93–105; passages quoted from 98 and 105.

Scholarship on Hume's eighteenth-century American reception and impact has been slow to pick up on the nuanced Hume who gradually has been recovered in the literature of recent years. Although the *History* is still considered by some to be little more than the rampage of a partisan, Tory historian,³⁷ a growing number of interpreters have begun to show how superficial that interpretation of Hume is. They have offered more sophisticated and subtle readings of the *History* and of Hume's attempt therein to explode what he took to be the Whig myth of an ancient English constitution. David Fate Norton and Richard Popkin suggested that, rather than a Tory historian, we might better think of Hume as a "philosophical historian."³⁸ For others, such as Leo Braudy, Hume is best portrayed as an "historian above party."³⁹ Duncan Forbes has argued that the Hume of the *History* and essays is a "Scientific or Sceptical Whig."⁴⁰ The best modern interpretations are not agreed about how to read the particulars of Hume's *History*, but they do agree that the simple epitaph, "Tory historian," will not do.⁴¹ These more complex readings of Hume's *History* have launched new historiographical debates; they also introduce new problems for uncovering Hume's historical reception and impact in colonial America.

Which of the modern "Humes" should we look for in the eighteenth century? The answer to that question is that we should be wary of reading

³⁷ See, for instance, John J. Burke, Jr., "Hume's *History of England*: Waking the English from a Dogmatic Slumber," in Roseann Runte, ed., *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Madison, 1978), 235–48; Godfrey Davies, "Hume's History of the Reign of James I," in H. J. Davis and H. L. Gardner, eds., *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies Presented to Frank Percy Wilson* (Oxford, 1959), 231–49; Marjorie Greene, "Hume: Sceptic and Tory," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 4 (1943), esp. 334; Jerry Z. Muller, *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present* (Princeton, 1997); Laird Oakie, "Ideology and Partiality in Hume's *History of England*," *Hume Studies*, vol. 11 (1985), 1–32; Victor Wexler, *David Hume and the History of England* (Philadelphia, 1979).

³⁸ David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis, 1965). See also Richard H. Popkin, "Hume: Philosophical versus Prophetic Historian," in Kenneth R. Merrill and Robert Shanan, eds., *David Hume, Many-sided Genius* (Norman, 1976), 83–95.

³⁹ Leo Braudy, *Narrative Form in History and Fiction: Hume, Fielding and Gibbon* (Princeton, 1970), 31–90, passage quoted from 37.

⁴⁰ Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975), esp. 139–40.

⁴¹ See, for instance, the essays in Nicholas Capaldi and Donald W. Livingston, eds., *Liberty in Hume's History of England* (Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1990); John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1992); and David Wootton, "Hume, 'The Historian'," in David Fate Norton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hume* (Cambridge, 1993), 296–307.

any present-day interpretation of Hume's *History of England* back into the eighteenth century. Modern historiographical debates can alert us to the possibility that Hume was read in diverse ways in the eighteenth century; but little more. A much safer approach is to formulate assessments of Hume's impact in eighteenth-century America from evidence provided by eighteenth-century readings of Hume. The evidence so far encourages us to rethink Hume's early American reception. Given the wide dissemination of Hume's writings, it makes sense to re-evaluate Hume's impact not only with reference to elite thinkers, such as Adams, Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison, but also with an eye to now-largely-forgotten eighteenth-century writers who published in early American newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. Against that broader backdrop, the *Virginia Gazette's* 1777 celebratory reporting of Hume's support of the Revolutionary cause will make far better sense than it does against an historiography which has concluded, anachronistically, that by 1776 any American who referred to the works of David Hume "was clearly running the risk of guilt by association."⁴²

HUME'S EARLY BRITISH RECEPTION

To appraise Hume's reception in early America it is useful to know the dimensions of Hume's reception in eighteenth-century Britain. While in the history of ideas Hume's thought is often taken to be exemplary of the enlightened mind,⁴³ in many ways Hume was far from being a representative thinker of the times in which he lived. Hume's sceptical thoughts about religion, in particular, meant that his writings — even when admired — were rarely praised without hesitation. That Hume's works often evoked a vocal opposition in eighteenth-century Britain ought to be kept in mind when assessing Hume's early American reception.

With the publication of his essay "Of Miracles" (in 1748, as essay 10, of the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*), hostile responses to Hume's all-too-lucid conclusions proliferated.⁴⁴ With regard to this period of his literary career, Hume wrote in his autobiographical "My Own Life," "Answers, by Reverends and Right Reverends, came out two or

⁴² Theodore Draper, "Hume & Madison: The Secrets of Federalist Paper No. 10," *Encounter*, vol. 58 (1982), 34–47.

⁴³ See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: an interpretation* (2 vols., New York, 1965, 1969), *passim*.

⁴⁴ See E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (1954, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1980), esp. chap. 22, "The Opposition Gathers."

three in a Year."⁴⁵ That opposition was concerned especially with the seeming simplicity of Hume's conclusions — for instance, Hume's maxim "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish."⁴⁶ The earliest known refutation of "Of Miracles," by Philip Skelton, was published in 1749,⁴⁷ but 1751 and 1752 saw the publication of more extended responses by William Adams,⁴⁸ Thomas Rutherforth,⁴⁹ and Anthony Ellys.⁵⁰ Even more celebrated answers were produced in following years by John Douglas,⁵¹ John Leland,⁵² Richard Hurd with William Warburton,⁵³ and George Campbell,⁵⁴ amongst others.

⁴⁵ Hume, "My Own Life," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (revised ed., Indianapolis, 1987), xxxvi.

⁴⁶ David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, eds. (3rd ed., Oxford, 1975), 115–16 [Oxford Philosophical Texts universal reference 10.13, hereafter referred to as OPT reference].

⁴⁷ Philip Skelton, *Ophiomaches; or Deism Revealed* (2 vols., London, 1749).

⁴⁸ William Adams, *Essay on Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles* (London, 1752).

⁴⁹ Thomas Rutherforth, *The Credibility of Miracles defended Against the Author of Philosophical Essays in a discourse delivered at the primary visitation of the right Reverend Father in God Thomas Lord Bishop of Ely in St. Michaels Church Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1751).

⁵⁰ Anthony Ellys, *Remarks on an Essay Concerning Miracles Published by David Hume, Esq; Amongst his Philosophical Essays* (London, [1752]).

⁵¹ John Douglas, *The Criterion: or, Miracles Examined with a view to expose the Pretensions of Pagans and Papists; to compare the Miraculous Powers recorded in the New Testament, with those said to subsist in Later Times, and to show The great and material Difference between them in Point of Evidence; From whence it will appear that the former must be true, and the latter may be false* (London, 1754).

⁵² John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the last and present century* (2 vols., London, 1755–56), esp. vol. 2.

⁵³ [Richard Hurd and William Warburton], *Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essays on the Natural History of Religion* (London, 1757). One might also judge of the impact of "Of Miracles" by the unpublished responses it elicited. See for instance Warburton's contemporary but unpublished (until 1841) response in Francis Kilvert, *A Selection from Unpublished Papers of the Right Reverend William Warburton* (London, 1841), 311–16; see also Warburton to Richard Hurd in *Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of his Friends* (Boston, 1806).

⁵⁴ George Campbell, *Dissertation on Miracles: Containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Esq; in an Essay on Miracles* (Edinburgh, 1762).

With the publication of *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* and the *Four Dissertations*, Hume attracted even more suspicion.⁵⁵ Indeed, by 1754 when the first volume of Hume's *History* was published, opponents were waiting. The first quick response was from an Edinburgh minister, the Reverend Daniel MacQueen, who published in 1756 *Letters on Hume's History of Great Britain*.⁵⁶ In 1759, Richard Hurd, an Anglican cleric, attacked Hume's history of the Tudors for its misguided attempts to expose "the absurdities of reformed religion" and to "discredit the cause of civil liberty."⁵⁷ Hume's earlier works were not forgotten but were now the subject of renewed attacks, particularly by Alexander Gerard,⁵⁸ John Bethune,⁵⁹ James Oswald,⁶⁰ and Thomas Percival.⁶¹ Hume's British reception in the years before the American Revolution might be characterized by James Beattie's celebrated and vituperative *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770), a widely read attack, but it emerged from a much larger maelstrom of similar critiques.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, [George Anderson], *An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion personally and publicly stated: Illustrated with references to Essays on Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh, 1753); [James Balfour], *A Delineation of the Nature and Obligations of Morality with Reflexions upon Mr. Hume's book, Intitled, An inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (Edinburgh, 1753); [William MacGhie], *Some Late Opinions Concerning the Foundation of Morality, Examined. In a Letter to a Friend, 1753* (London, 1753); John Bonar, *An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments containing in the Writings of Sopho and David Hume, Esq.* (Edinburgh, 1755); Caleb Fleming, *Three Questions Resolved . . . In Three Letters to—Esq. with a Postscript on Mr. Hume's Natural History of Religions* (London, 1757); Soame Jenyns, *Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (London, 1757); and [James Balfour], *Philosophical Essays* (Edinburgh, 1768).

⁵⁶ Daniel MacQueen, *Letters on Hume's History of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1756; reprinted Bristol, 1990).

⁵⁷ [Richard Hurd], *Moral and Political Dialogues between Divers Eminent Persons of the Past and Present Age* (London and Cambridge, 1759–63), passages quoted from postscript.

⁵⁸ Alexander Gerard, *The influence of the pastoral office on the character examined with a view, especially, to Mr. Hume's representation of the spirit of that office: a sermon preached before the Synod of Aberdeen, at Aberdeen, April 8, 1760* (Aberdeen, 1760).

⁵⁹ John Bethune, *Essays and Dissertations on Various Subjects* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1771).

⁶⁰ James Oswald, *An Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1766, 1772).

⁶¹ Thomas Percival, *A Father's Instructions to His Children* (Warrington, 1775).