

Civil Liberties and Baptists: William Winterbotham of Plymouth in prison and thinking of America

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Baptists have had a long and proud history of campaigning for civil and religious freedom, certainly in England and America. In 1612 Thomas Helwys wrote the first English argument for freedom for all religions and, from this point on, other Baptists defended the same position. Roger Williams, the founder of the first Baptist church in the American colonies, had argued for the separation of church and state from the 1630s. A Baptist chaplain in Cromwell's New Model Army even defended atheism as a position which should be legally tolerated. It is true that, more often, Baptists defended the civil liberties only of other Protestants, rather than a wider spectrum of belief; Nevertheless, this was still a much more libertarian position than most of their fellow-citizens held during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ Even after the Toleration Act of 1689, which granted freedom of worship to other Protestant traditions, allegiance to the Church of England was an essential qualification for holding local and national political offices.² It was this religious discrimination which led to the formation of the body known as the Protestant Dissenting Deputies in around 1732, consisting of delegates from congregations of Baptists, Presbyterians and Independents in and near London, whose task it was to 'protect their civil rights'.³

In the second half of the eighteenth century, as the crisis in Britain's American colonies began to develop, many Dissenters in Britain were stimulated by the arguments for political

¹ See John Coffey, 'From Helwys to Leland: Baptists and Religious Toleration in England and America, 1612-1791', in David W. Bebbington (ed.), *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies* (Carlisle, 2002), pp.13-37; David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco, Texas, 2010), pp.197-214.

² See Bernard Lord Manning, *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, ed. O. Greenwood (Cambridge, 1952), pp.3-7 for other restrictions upon Dissenters which remained after 1689.

³ Ibid.

representation put by the colonists, and they began to extend their demands for liberty of conscience into demands for political rights. All men had been created equal by God, and all had an equal right to worship God according to their own consciences. Churches should therefore be voluntary associations, with no civil penalties or privileges being attached to particular religious opinions. Religious freedom was a natural right of man, which required political representation to safeguard it.⁴ These political arguments were more often voiced by ‘rational’ Dissenters (that is, those who were more liberal theologically, often Unitarians).⁵ However, in the Rev. William Winterbotham we have a fascinating example of an orthodox, Trinitarian, Evangelical pastor who was jailed in Newgate Prison in London, for four years, between 1793 and 1797, for his politically radical views. Other politically radical Baptist ministers of this time include Robert Robinson and Robert Hall of Cambridge, Thomas Davis of Reading, Mark Wilks and Rees David of Norwich, Caleb Evans of Bristol and James Hinton of Oxford; they often suffered harassment and persecution for their radical politics, but only Winterbotham was prosecuted for his political opinions.⁶ It is difficult to understand why Mark Wilks, for instance, escaped prosecution for preaching much more explicitly radical sermons than Winterbotham did.

While Winterbotham was imprisoned in Newgate, he wrote and published, among other books and pamphlets, a four-volume *Historical, Geographical, Commercial, and Philosophical View of the American United States*. Like many other British radicals in the 1790s, he was

⁴ H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: political ideology in eighteenth-century Britain* (London, 1977), pp.202-3.

⁵ See, for example, Joseph Priestley, *A Letter of Advice to those Dissenters who conduct the application to Parliament for relief from certain Penal Laws* (London, 1773), in J.T. Rutt (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, 25 vols (New York, 1972), vol. 22, pp.441-4. For the argument that orthodox Evangelical ministers tended to be less politically vocal than their heterodox counterparts, see Deryck Lovegrove, ‘English Evangelical Dissent and the European Conflict 1789-1815’, in W.J. Sheils (ed.), *The Church and War: papers read at the Twenty-First Summer Meeting and the Twenty-Second Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Oxford, 1983), 263-76.

⁶ See Gina Luria Walker, “Brief Encounter”: Robert Robinson and the Right to Private Judgement’, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 24 (2008), 54-70; C.B. Jewson, *Jacobin City: a portrait of Norwich in its reaction to the French Revolution* (Glasgow, 1975), esp. pp.26-7, 29, 52, 63-4, 68-70, 79-80, 138; Timothy Whelan, *Politics, Religion and Romance: the Letters of Benjamin Flower and Eliza Gould Flower, 1794-1808* (National Library of Wales: Aberystwyth, 2008). Benjamin Flower is an example of a lay member of a Baptist congregation who was prosecuted, but Winterbotham remains an unusual example of an orthodox minister in this position.

clearly fascinated by the new republic across the Atlantic. This article begins with a brief biography of Winterbotham, to explain why he was incarcerated in Newgate. It proceeds to examine his political radicalism up till 1793, and then to concentrate on his *View of America*, the major work he published from prison, to pursue his ideas about civil and religious liberty.

I **The Rev. William Winterbotham of Plymouth**

William Winterbotham was born in London in 1763, the sixth of fifteen children, to a fuller. He lived with his maternal grandparents in Cheltenham between the ages of seven and eleven, and he credited his grandfather with his political reformism and his interest in the American colonies.⁷ He returned to London in 1774, left school after a short while, having argued with the schoolmaster, and was then apprenticed to a silversmith for nearly eight years. He began his own silver buckle-making business in London in 1784, but he had to give this up quite quickly because of illness brought on by his hedonistic lifestyle. Despite a family prejudice against Dissent, his brother was converted to evangelical Christianity through the preaching of ‘an African then preaching in London amongst the Calvinistic Methodists’, and Winterbotham himself eventually went along with him, out of curiosity, and was shortly afterwards also converted.⁸ He began occasional preaching in 1787, and became a Baptist in 1789; in December that year, he was appointed assistant minister to Rev. Philip Gibbs at the Baptist Church in How’s Lane, Plymouth.

On Monday 5 November, 1792, he preached a sermon on the national fast-day held annually throughout Britain on that date to commemorate the foiling of the Gunpowder Plot on 5 November 1605 and the landing of William of Orange at Torbay on 5 November 1688. The 1790s were a decade of great political and religious alarmism in Britain, because it was feared

⁷ Susan J. Mills, ‘William Winterbotham (1763-1829)’, *ODNB*; W.H. Winterbotham, *The Rev. William Winterbotham: a sketch*, privately printed (1893) [hereafter Winterbotham, *Sketch*], pp.2-3.

⁸ Winterbotham, *Sketch*, pp.12-13.

that the political ideas and atheism of the revolutionary, regicidal French would cross the Channel and infect British people, and the autumn of 1792 was one of the peaks of this political panic. Winterbotham's sermon caused 'considerable excitement' in Plymouth, and prosecution was threatened. He therefore preached again, on Sunday 18 November, apparently to rebut inaccurate reports of what he had said on the 5th, but, far from pouring oil on troubled waters, this sermon was also included in the indictment which was eventually brought against him. He was tried at the Assizes in Exeter in July 1793 for both sermons, and sentenced in November 1793 to two years' imprisonment and £100 fine for each sermon. He was originally sentenced to the New Prison, Clerkenwell, but conditions there were poor, and his friends managed to have him transferred to the state side of Newgate prison, where he had better accommodation and free access to visitors.

II The radical Mr Winterbotham

The sermons for which Winterbotham was convicted would hardly raise an eyebrow today, and they were not obviously seditious even by the standards of his own time. The witnesses who helped to convict him were clearly questionable,⁹ and it is possible that his downfall may have been caused partly by his earlier interference in local politics.¹⁰ Whether or not that is the case, the sermons were 'certainly imprudent', as his grandson later said;¹¹ the first sermon, in particular, makes his advanced political radicalism apparent. In this sermon, Winterbotham stated that the Revolution in France was a cause for rejoicing. He also argued, in terms highly

⁹ Durey, 'Winterbotham's Trumpet of Sedition', 152-3. See also the *Critical Review*, 11 (1794), 224-5.

¹⁰ W.H. Winterbotham, *Sketch*, p.25 hints at this, and Serjeant Rooke, summing up for the prosecution in his first trial, said that Winterbotham did not try to obtain the mayor of Plymouth's support for his case, which may reinforce it as a possible explanation (William Cobbett and T.J. Howell (eds), *Trial of William Winterbotham, 25 July 1793, Complete Collection of State Trials, continued from the year 1783 to the present time*, 28 vols (1817), vol. 22, col. 871) [hereafter Cobbett and Howell, *State Trials*]. G.E. Welch, 'Municipal Reform in Plymouth', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 96 (1964), 325, discusses an ongoing struggle for borough representation which flared up in early 1792 and may possibly have been the cause of Winterbotham's local difficulties, given his views on reform.

¹¹ W.H. Winterbotham, *Sketch*, p.25.

reminiscent of Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), that the implications of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had been that:

First, all government originates with the people.
Secondly, The people have a right to cashier their governors for misconduct.
Thirdly, The people have a right to change the form of their government if they think it proper to do so.¹²

While he made it clear that he believed that the worst political evils of the present day were caused by the abuse of 1688 principles, he was also unambiguous in his view that the Revolution settlement itself was imperfect.¹³ The title page of the published version of the two sermons, throwing caution to the winds now that he was already convicted, carried an epigram which honoured the radical Whig scourges of the Stuart kings, John Hampden and Algernon Sidney, gave warning of the potential downfalls of monarchs from the examples of Charles I and James II, and concluded that, 'The people make the laws and laws were made for kings'.

Moreover, although his name has faded from view historically, his case was noticed and honoured by some of the leading radicals during the 1790s. Thomas Paine, no less, cited his *View of America* in his *Letter to George Washington* (1797).¹⁴ Major John Cartwright bracketed him with the more harshly treated, and more lastingly famous, Thomas Muir and Thomas Fysshe Palmer in writing about the worst radical 'martyrdoms' of the period.

Who have these [government] Ministers represented as enemies of their country, and traitors? Who have they persecuted throughout the country? What was it

¹² Cf. Price: 'First; the right to liberty of conscience in religious matters. Secondly; the right to resist power when abused. And, Thirdly; the right to chuse our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves.' *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789), pp.28-9. It is interesting that, of Price's triangle, Winterbotham excluded religious liberty.

¹³ W. Winterbotham, *The Commemoration of National Deliverances, and the Dawning Day: Two Sermons, preached November 5th and 18th, 1792: at How's Lane Chapel, Plymouth* (1794) [hereafter Winterbotham, *Two Sermons*], pp.32, 16, 25-6. See Durey, 'Winterbotham's Trumpet of Sedition', 152, on possible divergence between the published copy of the sermons and the words Winterbotham actually spoke from the pulpit, suggesting credibly that, if anything, the spoken version may have been more seditious than the printed account.

¹⁴ Thomas Paine, *Letter to George Washington, on the subject of the late treaty concluded between Great-Britain and the United States of America, including other matters* (1797), p.28 note.

exposed to their vengeance men so exemplary in their lives and moral as Winterbottom [sic], Palmer, and Muir?¹⁵

Joseph Priestley, the Unitarian minister and eminent scientist whose cause Winterbotham had defended in the first of his two offensive sermons, a year after Priestley's property had been destroyed in the Birmingham riots, supported Winterbotham staunchly during his four-year prison sentence. In the preface to the Fast Day sermon he preached in February 1794, Priestley explained why he had finally decided to emigrate to the United States.

I own that I am not unaffected by such unexampled punishments as those of Mr Muir and my friend Mr Palmer, for offences, which, if, in the eye of reason, they be any at all, are slight, and very insufficiently proved; a measure so subversive of the freedom of speaking and acting, which has hitherto been the great pride of Britons. But the sentence of Mr. Winterbotham, for delivering from the pulpit what I am persuaded, he never did deliver, and which, similar evidence might have drawn upon myself, or any other dissenting minister, who was an object of general dislike, has something in it still more alarming.¹⁶

Priestley added a footnote urging Dissenters 'to do every thing in their power to make Mr. Winterbottom's confinement, and also the sufferings of Mr. Palmer and his companions, as easy as possible', despite the fact that, as he acknowledged, he disagreed very greatly with Winterbotham on theological grounds. Winterbotham was in fact supported generously by Dissenters of various denominations during his imprisonment, perhaps because of Priestley's appeal, and perhaps also because of his defence of Priestley and of Price's political principles.¹⁷ The Unitarian minister Theophilus Lindsey, Priestley's great friend, provided critical moral and spiritual support to him, and, through a wealthy member of his congregation, Mrs Rayner,

¹⁵ John Cartwright, *The Constitutional Defence of England, Internal and External* (1796), p.98. See also idem, *The State of the Nation; in a series of letters to His Grace the Duke of Bedford* (Harlow, 1805), pp.30-1.

¹⁶ Joseph Priestley, *The Present State of Europe compared with Antient Prophecies; a sermon, preached at the Gravel Pit Meeting in Hackney, February 28, 1794, being the day appointed for a General Fast* (1794), pp.xvii-xviii. Cf. his letter of 2 December 1793 to John Wilkinson, stating that Winterbotham's case showed that no man was safe, however innocent (cited in R.E. Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley: A study of his life and work from 1773 to 1804* (University Park, PA, 2004), p.323 n.17).

¹⁷ Durey, 'Winterbotham's Trumpet of Sedition', p.155; W.H. Winterbotham, *Sketch*, pp.37-40.

substantial financial support as well. The list of subscribers printed at the front of the *View of America* includes such well-known radical Dissenting names as Dr John Aikin, Benjamin Flower, the Rev. [Andrew] Kippis and Gilbert Wakefield.¹⁸

These were mainly leading Unitarians and Presbyterians with Arian sympathies, but Anglicans and orthodox Dissenters also supported him materially, not least his own Baptist congregation in Plymouth, who provided witnesses in his defence and also his lawyer, John Saunders. They also opened a voluntary subscription for him within weeks of his imprisonment, led by his senior pastor, Philip Gibbs.¹⁹ A Mr T. Opie of Plymouth is also found on the list of subscribers to the *View of America*. However, the years 1792-93 were politically extremely tense, and Winterbotham's case showed how dangerous it could be to put one's head above the parapet. Leading radical Dissenters, such as Priestley and Lindsey, were more used than orthodox Dissenters to political notoriety, if not immune to its discomforts.

III Winterbotham's *View of America* (1795): publication and authorship

While Winterbotham was confined, he entered into various publishing ventures with three of his fellow political prisoners, the publishers James Ridgway, Daniel Holt and Henry D. Symonds.²⁰ Some of these books were works written by others, but several cheap forms of his own report of

¹⁸ Winterbotham, *View of America*, I, viii.

¹⁹ Winterbotham, *Sketch*, p.40. It was not uncommon for Particular Baptists to shift towards Arianism and Unitarianism in the later eighteenth century – for instance, Robert Robinson of Cambridge; see Whelan, *Politics, Religion and Romance*, pp.373-5. It is therefore not surprising that many of Winterbotham's political supporters were Unitarian rather than Baptist.

²⁰ Ralph A. Manogue, 'The Plight of James Ridgway, London Bookseller and Publisher, and the Newgate Radicals 1792-1797', *The Wordswoth Circle*, 27:3 (1996), 158-66; idem, 'James Ridgway and America', *Early American Literature*, 31 (1996), 264-88.

his trial were published in 1794: the *Sketch* of his life written by his grandson to mark the centenary of his trial claimed that more than 40,000 copies of a two-penny edition of the trial had been circulated in the large manufacturing towns.²¹ Winterbotham also published from Newgate the two sermons which had landed him there.²² More substantially, however, he also produced his *Historical, Geographical, Commercial, and Philosophical View of the American United States*, published in four volumes in 1795 by Ridgway, Symonds and Holt, as well as a one-volume *Historical, Geographical and Philosophical View of the Chinese Empire* (1796). These represented no little achievement, one might conclude, for a journeyman silversmith, the son of a fuller, who had had little formal education.²³

It is not surprising that British radicals continued to admire and be fascinated by the American political example after American independence, especially during the oppressive 1790s.²⁴ The radicals had sympathised with the colonial case against British government policy in the years before the War of Independence, and they had applied these arguments to the British situation, supporting reform at home as well as independence for America. They had opposed the British war against the revolutionary Americans, and they now found in the new United States of America a totem, an inspiration, and, in some cases, an asylum from the increasingly politically repressive Britain of the 1790s. While the French Revolution was exciting but unpredictable, not yet stabilised, and, increasingly, as it spiralled into a vortex of violent Terror, a dangerous model

²¹ William Winterbotham, *The Trial of Wm. Winterbotham, assistant preacher at How's Lane meeting, Plymouth; before the Hon. Baron Perryn, and a special jury, at Exeter, on the 25th of July, 1793, for seditious words. Taken in short hand by Mr. Wm. Bowring* (1794); W.H. Winterbotham, *The Rev. William Winterbotham: a sketch*, privately printed (1893) [hereafter W.H. Winterbotham, *Sketch*], p.54.

²² Winterbotham, *Two Sermons*.

²³ W.H. Winterbotham, *Sketch*, pp.1, 5-6.

²⁴ See, for instance, Arthur Sheps, 'The American Revolution and the Transformation of English Republicanism', *Historical Reflections*, 2 (1975), 3-28; David A. Wilson, *Paine and Cobbett: The Transatlantic Connection* (Kingston / Montreal, 1988), ch.3. Note, however, Mark Philp, 'The Role of America in the "Debate on France" 1791-5: Thomas Paine's Insertion', *Utilitas*, 5:2 (1993), 221-37 for the argument that America was largely ignored during the British war of ideas on the French Revolution until the publication of Paine's *Rights of Man, Part Two* (1792), which employed the example of America substantially. Colin Bonwick also points out Joel Barlow's *Advice to the Privileged Orders in the Several States of Europe* (1792) in this regard, in his *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (1977), p.225.

to espouse, the case of America could much more easily be employed to demonstrate the viability of representative government. However, much of the historical literature examining British radical connections with and opinions upon the United States has tended to concentrate on those who eventually emigrated there.²⁵ Winterbotham's *View of America* offers an opportunity to consider the views of one of those who remained in Britain. Although his trial and imprisonment have been previously discussed in the context of 1790s alarmism, notably by Michael Durey and Ralph Manogue,²⁶ his *View of America* has generally only been the subject of passing comment. It demonstrates the fascination that America held for British radicals beyond the Paines, Priestleys and Prices, although Winterbotham did come into prolonged contact with several leading radicals through his Newgate imprisonment.²⁷

Moreover, as one historian has said, by the late eighteenth century the Baptists 'regarded themselves as a global and, in particular, a transatlantic denomination'. Emigration from Baptist strongholds such as Wales was common, supported by a network of personal contacts and correspondence which was often denominational based.²⁸ Winterbotham therefore had various reasons to pursue an interest in America, and he no doubt knew that there was a ready market for publications offering information to prospective emigrants, which, he said, was the purpose of his work. The *View of America* was first published in London in 1795; a second British edition

²⁵ See, for example, Frank Thistlethwaite, *The Anglo-American connection in the early nineteenth century* (1959); Richard J. Twomey, *Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American radicalism in the United States, 1790-1820* (New York, 1989); Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1997). Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* is a seminal exception.

²⁶ Michael Durey, 'William Winterbotham's Trumpet of Sedition: Religious Dissent and Political Radicalism in the 1790s', *Journal of Religious History*, 19:2 (1995), 141-57; for Manogue, see note 2.

²⁷ Michael T. Davis, Iain McCalman and Christina Parolin, 'Introduction: "Patriots in Prison": Newgate Radicalism in the Age of Revolution', in idem (eds), *Newgate in Revolution: an anthology of radical prison literature in the age of revolution* (London, 2005), e.g. p.xvi.

²⁸ H.M. Davis, '“Very Different Springs of Uneasiness”: Emigration from Wales to the United States of America during the 1790s', *Welsh History Review*, 15 (1990-91), 393.

was published as soon as 1799, also in four volumes. Winterbotham had not misjudged the British demand for publications on America.²⁹

What has been less clear, however, is the extent to which Winterbotham's *View of America* contains his own opinions. The best-known fact about the *View* is that it was heavily 'plagiarised'; the historical writings of the American Congregationalist minister, Jeremy Belknap (1744-98), who accused Winterbotham of plagiarism *in absentia* at a piracy trial in New England, are only the most famous of Winterbotham's plundered sources.³⁰ The practice of 'pirating' American publications in London was common, as other American writers could testify in the 1790s. Richard Price arranged for Jedidiah Morse's *American Geography*, another of Winterbotham's extensively used sources, to be sold in London *bona fide*.³¹ And, indeed, it is also true that most early histories of the American Revolution, on both sides of the Atlantic, as one historian has said, 'drew heavily and without specific citation' from other sources.³² Perhaps we should regard Winterbotham's work less harshly, therefore, and dismiss it less easily. In fact, he did not attempt to hide the fact, but he freely admitted in the preface that he had 'not only borrowed [the] ideas [of others], but, where he had not the vanity to conceive himself capable of correcting it, he has adopted their language', to such an extent that he was often unable to know his own 'few connecting sentences' from the work he had borrowed. He did refer to himself as the 'Editor' rather than the 'author' of the *View*, and he declared twenty-two of his major sources. He pleaded his confined situation in mitigation of such a practice, and thanked those

²⁹ An American edition was also published in New York in 1796, 'with additions and corrections'. Bonwick shows that it was difficult to sell American books in London shortly after the end of the War of Independence, but perhaps this situation had mellowed by the 1790s; certainly travel writings on America were beginning to multiply by the first decade of the nineteenth century (*English Radicals and the American Revolution*, pp.154-6.)

³⁰ Manogue, 'Ridgway and America', p.275, notes 16 and 27. Bonwick cites a broadside by Belknap publicising this, dated 22 December 1796, in the Belknap papers in the Massachusetts Historical Society (*English Radicals and the American Revolution*, p.295 n.15). Belknap wrote a three-volume *History of New Hampshire* (1784-92) and a two-volume collection of essays, *American Biography* (1794, 1798), which established him as one of America's leading men of letters.

³¹ Manogue, 'Ridgway and America', p.267; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, pp.221-2.

³² Page Smith, 'David Ramsay and the Causes of the American Revolution', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 17:1 (1960), 52, 59-60.

who had procured books and documents for him.³³ Also, in a second or later printing of the *View* in 1795, he thanked ‘several gentlemen of the society of Quakers’ for obtaining documents for him, and made it clear that these papers had caused him to revise the pejorative view he had originally published of William Penn and the original settlers of Pennsylvania, which he had derived from George Chalmers’s *Political Annals of the Present United Colonies* (1780) – so it can also be said that he compared sources as far as he could and tried to discriminate between them.³⁴ In fact, in an advertisement for the *View*, he complained that, in order to ‘gain a general acquaintance with … the UNITED STATES, … it was necessary to toil through at least One Hundred Volumes, which, at the most moderate calculation, cost the Reader from Forty to Fifty Pounds, while the greater part of their contents is either miscellaneous or foreign to the grand object’.³⁵

Furthermore, an examination of Winterbotham’s declared list of sources is instructive. It is not surprising that it includes eminent botanists, explorers, geographers and cartographers, such as the Englishmen Mark Catesby (1683-1749) and Daniel Coxe (1640-1730), the Frenchmen Georges-Louis Leclerc and the Comte de Buffon (1707-88), and the Americans Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826), John Bartram (1699-1777), John Mitchell (1711-68), John Filson (1747-88) and Manasseh Cutler (1742-1823), as well as the land speculator Gilbert Imlay (1754-

³³ He was not able to name these benefactors, because of his imprisonment, but he did particularly thank several Quakers for documents on William Penn, and Ralph Manogue suggests that Joseph Priestley, who had taken a great interest in Winterbotham’s case, was another. Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. I, pp.vi-vii; Manogue, ‘Ridgway and America’, p.269. On the issue of a second or later printing: advertisements for a slightly different form of the work were published, probably in late 1794: ‘AMERICA. To be completed in thirty-three numbers, on January 31, 1795, will be published … By the Rev. W. Winterbotham’ [London], [December 1794], p.3.

³⁴ This point was made in the printing of the complete *View* in four volumes in 1795, indicating that a second set of pages 289-96 to volume 2 had been issued to replace those in the original printing of the *View*. He also blamed ‘the authors of the Modern Universal History’ upon which another of his own sources, Jedidiah Morse, had depended in writing his *American Geography* (1789) for suggesting that Penn had held views favourable of Roman Catholicism and arbitrary government, and that violent disputes had therefore broken out among the inhabitants of Pennsylvania (*ibid.*, and also vol. 2, pp.292-4). However, Chalmers’s discussion of Penn and his followers is much more obviously critical than Morse’s.

³⁵ Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol.I, p.vii.

1828). Much of the work, whose expressed *raison d'être* was educational,³⁶ is taken up with geographical, social, physical and botanical concerns. However, history forms an important part of the study,³⁷ and here it is interesting that Winterbotham's sources represent a range of political stances. No doubt this is partly a reflection of what sources were available by 1794, and also that they represented some of the most eminent authorities. It does, however, suggest that Winterbotham must have had to make certain editorial choices in deciding whose views to reflect, where judgment, rather than plain fact, was offered. If we accept that, given the variety of political sources he plundered, the political comment contained in his *View of America* involved more than a simple work of indiscriminate plagiarism, it is worth our critical reflection.

A range of radical opinion was represented by the works of the Abbé Raynal (1713-1796), a French historian who supported the popular right to consent to taxation and the right to revolt; Benjamin Franklin (1706-90), a francophile, who supported a wide franchise, and the separation of property and the rights to vote and hold public office; Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), the Democratic-Republican leader who was elected the third United States president in 1800, and another francophile; Joel Barlow (1754-1812), the radical American poet and journalist who supported the French Revolution; and the French revolutionary, Jacques Pierre Brissot (1754-93). Federalist opinion in America – more moderate, but still liberal by British standards – was represented by the historian Jeremy Belknap, who deeply distrusted democracy; John Adams (1735-1826), the second President of the United States, whose works attacked French revolutionary principles and praised powerful executives, including monarchs; the

³⁶ Ibid., p.vi.

³⁷ Volume I is concerned with general description but contains 280 pages of the history of the discovery of America and of the 'rise, progress and establishment' of American independence. Volumes II and III deal with the New England and Middle States, and the Southern States respectively, offering history as well as other information, *passim*, and essays on 'Advantages peculiar to the United States' (pp.281-94) and 'Prospects and Advantages of a European Settler in the United States' (pp.295-339), both of which contain substantive political comment. Volume IV offers histories of British, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch settlements in America, before considering 'aboriginal America', Amazonia, the West Indies, and ending with a description of American animal life.

American historian David Ramsay (1749-1815); and Benjamin Rush (1746-1813), the great friend and correspondent of many British radicals. Rush nonetheless criticised the 1776 constitution of Pennsylvania because it gave too much power to popular rule, preferring the 1790 Pennsylvania constitution, which replaced the unicameral assembly with a bicameral legislature, and the executive council with a single executive.³⁸ The Scottish historian, William Robertson (1721-93), might be described as a conservative liberal, who supported the gradual spread of civil liberty but always subject to social hierarchy. Winterbotham's sources also represented both sides of the divide over slavery, if not very evenly, with Raynal, Franklin, Belknap, Ramsay, Rush and Brissot being vocal abolitionists; Jefferson, who, though he famously proclaimed all men to be 'created equal' and professed to detest slavery, nevertheless kept slaves; and Bryan Edwards (1743-1800), the British politician and historian of the West Indies, who was a planter and defender of his interest group against the abolitionist lobby in the British Parliament.

While, therefore, as one critic of his *History* put it, Winterbotham had 'never [been] out of this kingdom in his life',³⁹ he had gathered a range of information and opinion despite his imprisonment, and it seems likely that his own political views were reflected in his work. In fact, most of his published sources offered relatively little in the way of sustained discussion of the political condition of America after 1782, and there is little if any obvious overlap or 'plagiarism' from them in this regard. However much his substantial geographical sections and lengthy historical narratives stole from the work of others, therefore, it seems fair to treat his political comments on independent United States of America as his own, though they were no doubt much influenced by the discussions he had with his fellow political inmates in Newgate, many of them followers of Thomas Paine. (It is hard to believe that he had not read Paine's

³⁸ The American botanist, Manasseh Cutler, also served as a Federalist Congressman between 1800 and 1804. On Rush, for example, see his 'Address to the People of the United States', *American Museum* (Philadelphia, January 1787).

³⁹ *Look Before You Leap or, a few hints to such Artizans, Mechanics, Labourers, Farmers and Husbandmen, as are desirous of emigrating to America* (1796), p.xiv.

Rights of Man, although he did not list that as a source for his work: Part Two in particular pays a great deal of attention to America as a model government, and much of Winterbotham's political thinking is very Paineite.) The remainder of this paper discusses Winterbotham's observations on the American constitution, on social equality, on religious liberty and, finally, on America's place in the world. What kind of civil and religious liberties did a Plymouth Baptist minister in 1795 think were appropriate in an ideal society, and indeed, may have been worth going to jail for four years for?

IV Winterbotham's *View of America*: ideas and opinions

The American constitution and the creation of the Senate

Clearly, for Winterbotham, the American example demonstrated the enormous advantages of popular sovereignty – the accountability of government to the people – as against parliamentary sovereignty in Britain. He acknowledged that Scripture did not prescribe any one form of government, and that monarchy could be benign and reformist. However, he believed that it was easily corrupted, and that aristocracy was idle and prone to ‘vice, ignorance, and folly’.⁴⁰ Popular sovereignty, on the other hand, he thought might be called ‘the *Panacea* in politics.’⁴¹ ‘[H]ere then we contemplate the government springing from its right source; originating with the people, and exercised under the guidance of a constitution formed agreeable to their sovereign will.’⁴² By contrast, European constitutions all originated in governments which had been established by conquest and usurpation, and the traditional bulwarks and symbols of British liberties – Magna

⁴⁰ Winberbotham, *Two Sermons*, p.41; idem, *View of America*, vol. 1, pp.iv-v; ibid., vol. III, p.286. Winterbotham's views that the monarch was chosen by Parliament on behalf of the people, and that King, Lords and Commons alike should be regarded as but men, and accountable to the laws as any other man, formed one of the grounds for his prosecution in 1792-3 (Winterbotham, *Two Sermons*, pp.20, 37; Cobbett and Howell, *State Trials*, vol. 22, cols 825, 845-6, 869-70).

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. I, p.232.

⁴² Ibid., p.238.

Carta, Habeas Corpus and the Bill of Rights – had all been won gradually and with difficulty by the people.⁴³ The proof of the practical benefits of a properly representative form of government could be seen, he believed, in the ‘rising importance, and rapid improvements of the United States’.⁴⁴ More immediately for the citizens of the United States, popular sovereignty ensured that their constitution was based upon

the natural and imprescriptible rights of man: liberty, security of person and property, resistance against oppression, doing whatever does not injure another, a right to concur, either personally or by their representatives, in the formation of laws, and an equal chance of arriving to places of honour, reward, or employment, according to their virtues or talents.⁴⁵

Since the powers of both state and federal legislatures derived from popular sovereignty, there should be no fundamental disharmony between them. It also produced much cheaper government than hereditary sovereignty.⁴⁶ Such a constitution was sure to last, Winterbotham thought, perhaps wishing to contrast the American experience silently with that of France, in order to prove that republics could prove resilient.

[T]here is great probability that its duration will be longer than any empire that has hitherto existed: for it is a truth universally admitted, that all the advantages which ever attended any of the monarchies of the old world, all center in the new; together with many others, which they never enjoyed. The four great empires,⁴⁷ and the dominions of Charlemagne and the Turks, all rose by conquests, none by the arts of peace.

⁴³ Ibid., pp.238-9. Contrast with David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, 2 vols (1791), vol. I, p.356, where Ramsay’s emphasis is rather on those who granted the concessions in Europe than on those who won them: ‘The freedom of modern European governments was, for the most part, obtained by the concessions, or liberality of monarchs, or military leaders. In America alone, reason and liberty concurred in the formation of constitutions.’

⁴⁴ Winterbotham, pp.238-9. Cf. also vol. III, pp.283, 299.

⁴⁵ Ibid., vol. III, p.281.

⁴⁶ Ibid., I, pp.235, 239-60; ibid., III, pp.283-4, 294-5

⁴⁷ The Assyrian, Roman, Persian and Greek empires.

‘On the contrary,’ he continued, without so much as a sideways glance to the native American and African slave populations, ‘the territory of the United States has been planted and reared by a union of liberty, good conduct, and all the comforts of domestic virtue.’⁴⁸

The American willingness to keep reforming their constitution could only add to its longevity and merits. It was not surprising that articles of confederation which had been formulated ‘during the rage of war … by men who could have had no experience in the art of governing an extensive country’ should later have been found capable of improvement.⁴⁹ Popular sovereignty, far from being merely speculative, had allowed the uniquely peaceful and bloodless transition from one constitution to another in 1790, and it meant that the constitution could be refined again and again over time.⁵⁰ Winterbotham praised the American people for ‘discarding the contemptible [*sic*] arguments that would render innovation formidable [and] raising a new and more perfect system’.⁵¹

His judgement of the specific provisions of the new constitution of 1790 was one of cautious optimism:

Time and experience only can fully discover the effects of this new distribution of the powers of government; but in theory it seems well calculated to unite liberty with safety, and to lay the foundation of national greatness, while it abridges none of the rights of the States, or of the people.⁵²

Its principal effect was to redistribute some of the power previously held by individual states to the central government; its great merit was that it did so without reducing popular sovereignty. Winterbotham did have nevertheless criticisms of the new constitution to offer. In his judgement, the constitution, modified by the Bill of Rights, both of which were necessarily political

⁴⁸ Ibid., III, pp.573, 336.

⁴⁹ Ibid., I, p.584-5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.231-3.

⁵¹ Ibid., I, p.238. Cf. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, I (London, 1791), in Philip S. Foner (ed.), *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 vols (New York, 1945), I, 251, 274.

⁵² Ibid., p.587.

compromises, did not sufficiently safeguard liberty in a number of respects. He had strong words for what he considered to be the inadequate number of representatives: ‘Owing to the small number of members in the house of representatives, there is not the substance, but the shadow only of representation’.⁵³ Furthermore, the powers of Congress in general, and the Senate and the President in particular, were in some respects too great and unconstrained; judicial procedures between state and federal governments were not satisfactory; there was no security for the powers currently reserved to individual state governments; and there was as yet no legal preservation of the liberty of the press, or the right to trial by jury in civil causes, nor was there a legal ban of a standing army during peacetime. Nevertheless, he thought that these flaws were surprisingly few and easily remediable, and that it should be recalled that the Americans had no previously worked example in the construction of a confederate republic to guide them.⁵⁴

The issue of the creation of the Senate as the second House of Congress caused some disquiet among British radicals. It had been raised not only by the constitution of 1787, but also by the classical republican John Adams, the first American minister to Britain (1785-8), in his three-volume *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (1787-8), which was much admired by British radicals. In it, Adams threw down the gauntlet to the unicameral model of the Pennsylvania state legislature, preferring a bicameral system of checks and balances. While some British radicals, such as Granville Sharp, Catharine Macaulay and Thomas Paine, a defender of the Pennsylvania constitution since its inception in 1776, remained unconvinced of the benefits of bicameralism, thinking it insufficiently accountable to the people and preferring a ‘pure’ republican, one-chamber system, others, such as Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, were persuaded by the benefits of checks and balances which a two-chamber

⁵³ Ibid., p.224.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.585-7, 224-6.

system offered.⁵⁵ Winterbotham fell into the former camp. He was critical of the creation of a second house, though not at any great length. While he approved of the existence of various controls over the government, and explained the reason for the creation of the Senate in these terms – ‘that these enlarged powers [of the federal government] might be used only with caution and deliberation’ – he disapproved of the fact that its members were elected by the state legislatures, not directly by the people. Despite this, moreover, the Senate had the power to alter money bills, to initiate taxes, to appoint ambassadors and other public officers, to make treaties and to try impeachments. Perhaps most dangerously, he thought, as an unelected body, it had the potential to influence the President.⁵⁶

Although it is difficult to get away from the charge of his anonymous critic, that Winterbotham had never visited America,⁵⁷ he had clearly read some of the most important works on various aspects of the country published to date and he had a fairly detailed grasp of the machinery of the new constitution. However, while he was certainly aware of the beginning of the polarisation of American politics into political parties by the 1790s, and of the main issues at stake, he did not obviously take sides himself.⁵⁸

Social equality

⁵⁵ On Paine, see Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Part Two* (1792), pp.62-4; idem, *Dissertations on Government, the Affairs of the Bank, and Paper-Money* (Philadelphia, 1786), p.26; ‘To the Citizens of Pennsylvania on the Proposal for Calling a Convention’, *Aurora* (August 1805), in Philip S. Foner (ed.), *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 vols (New York, 1969), ii, 993, 1001-2. It was pointed out, however, by A. Owen Aldridge, ‘Some Writings of Thomas Paine in Pennsylvania Newspapers’, *American Historical Review*, 56 (1951), 834, 846, that Paine’s views on bicameralism may have softened as he watched the unicameral experiment in Pennsylvania. On Sharp and Macaulay, see Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, pp.177-8, 237. On Priestley, see Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, p.178; Joseph Priestley, ‘Of the Constitution of the United States of America’, *Lectures on History and General Policy* (Philadelphia, 1803), in J.T. Rutt (ed.), *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, 25 vols (1972), vol. 24, pp.255-6. On Price, see Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, p.178.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.233-5, 585, 224-6.

⁵⁷ Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, p. 231; *Look Before You Leap* (1796), p.xiv.

⁵⁸ Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. III, pp.335-6; Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, pp.236-40; Paine, *Letter to Washington* (1797).

Part of the beauty of American republicanism for Winterbotham was what he called its ‘equality of situation’. He suggested that the great majority of men in America were economically independent, with only a few who were very rich and also few who were absolutely dependent on others. This, he thought, was ‘far from being the least of the advantages which America possesse[d] over European nations’, since it relieved American society both of a servile lower order and, even more substantially, of the vices and privileges of an idle aristocracy.⁵⁹ This was partly explained by American circumstances: America was a land of second chances partly because there was physical and economic space for a man who had tripped up to rise again; ‘and the less unfortunate stumbler [there] looks round at leisure, and without dismay, for some more profitable path to be pursued’, while England was both physically and economically overcrowded.⁶⁰ However, it was also explained by the American republican tendency, as he put it, to estimate ‘a man more at what he *is*, and less at what he *seems*’, perhaps echoing the title and egalitarian philosophy of Robert Bage’s novel, *Man As He Is* (1792). He may also have been influenced by William Godwin, a regular visitor to the political prisoners in Newgate in 1793 and 1794, and the full title of whose 1794 novel, *Caleb Williams*, was *Things as they are, or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794).⁶¹ Winterbotham’s own artisan background was doubtless a factor in his support for a greater degree of social equality. But his Baptist worldview may also have contributed, with its non-hierarchical ecclesiastical structures – he himself had had no formal training before being accepted as assistant pastor in Plymouth. There is perhaps also a resonance of 1 Samuel 16:7: ‘for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart’. He warned European manufacturers of luxury goods not to emigrate to the

⁵⁹ Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. III, pp.285-6.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.302.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.301. It does not seem, however, as though Godwin and he spent much time together: Godwin mentioned seeing him only twice in his diary for this period, on 28 March and 7 April 1794, whereas, by contrast, he visited Joseph Gerrald nearly sixty times. I am grateful to Dr Mark Philp for this information.

United States with plans to continue these trades there; republican manners, he explained, meant that these goods ‘have few wearers there’.⁶²

Winterbotham was therefore also highly critical of the institution of slavery, the obvious exception to social egalitarianism in America. (He also criticised the treatment of native Americans in during the period of the founding of the colonies, but he laid the blame for this at the doors of the European nations who had arrogantly invaded and seized their lands.)⁶³ On slavery, he wrote: ‘It is impossible to be temperate and to pursue this subject through the various considerations of policy, of morals, of history, natural and civil. We must be contented to hope they will ultimately force their way into every one’s mind ...’.⁶⁴ However, while he had emphasised its African victims in his second November 1792 sermon, he spent as much space in the *View of America* expounding the damage that slavery did to civil society in general as he did lamenting its cruelty to the slaves themselves.⁶⁵ Moreover, he betrayed his own prejudice in promoting the view that silk production was not well suited to the nature of labourers in the most southerly States, ‘who, being blacks, are not careful or skilful’.⁶⁶ He also claimed that the presence of a sufficient number of anti-slavery Americans even in the slaveholding states, mitigated against the evil effects of slavery on the general *mores* in America:

In countries where slavery is encouraged, the ideas of the people are, in general, of a peculiar cast; the soul often becomes dark and narrow, and assumes a tone of savage brutality. Such at this day are the inhabitants of Barbary and the West-Indies. But, thank God! nothing like this has yet disgraced an American State. We may look for it in Carolina, but we shall be disappointed.

⁶² Ibid., p.328.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.396-8. A few pages later, however (pp.401-2), Winterbotham made it clear that although Britain was of course implicated in these crimes as much as other European nations, still he thought that its colonies had been much better governed than those of Spain, Portugal, France and Holland.

⁶⁴ Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. III, p.110.

⁶⁵ Idem, *Two Sermons*, p.51; idem, *View of America*, vol. I, pp.206-7.

⁶⁶ Idem, *View of America*, vol. III, p.292.

– and he hoped, quoting Jefferson, that it would not be long before slavery was discarded by society as impolitic and immoral, and abolished by the Federal government officially by the emancipation of all slaves.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, despite these qualifications, his position against slavery was quite clear, while many other British radicals were surprisingly quiescent on the subject during the 1790s, although, strangely, many of them had taken a leading role in the abolitionist campaign in the 1770s and 1780s. There are various possible explanations for their silence – perhaps some were embarrassed by such a glaring flaw in what they wished to present as a real-life utopia. It is likely that some did not wish to offend their American friends, nor contribute to destabilising what was as yet a very fragile Union of States.⁶⁸ Perhaps some were too preoccupied by campaigning for political rights in Britain to pay attention to slavery in America (they were accustomed to describing the position of the unrepresented masses in Britain as ‘political slavery’). On the other hand, some who emigrated to America, in adapting to their new environment, found themselves becoming slave-owners themselves. Of thirty-two emigrant radicals whose views on slavery have been traced, only thirteen had remained inflexibly opposed to slavery, while as many as eleven owned slaves themselves.⁶⁹ Michael Durey found that emigrants influenced by Calvinism and evangelical theology were more likely to continue to condemn slavery.⁷⁰ Moreover, British Baptists in the late eighteenth century strongly opposed slavery and the slave trade.⁷¹ This, together with his remaining in Britain, and his artisan

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.254; vol. I, pp.207-8.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Anthony Page, “A Species of Slavery”: Richard Price, Rational Dissent and Antislavery’, forthcoming in *Slavery and Abolition*; Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (London, 2002), ch.3.

⁶⁹ Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, p.283.

⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, pp.284-7.

⁷¹ Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century (1689-1815)* (London, 1986), pp.102, 118, 121-2, 127, 136; Timothy Whelan, ‘Robert Hall and the Bristol Slave-Trade Debate of 1787-1788’, *The Baptist Quarterly*, 38:1 (2000), 212-25; Roger Hayden, ‘Caleb Evans and the Anti-Slavery Question’, *ibid.*, 39:1 (2001), 4-14; John H.Y. Briggs, ‘Baptists and the Campaign to Abolish the Slave Trade’, *ibid.*, 42:4 (2007), 260-83; Brian Stanley, ‘Baptists, Anti-Slavery and the Legacy of Imperialism’, *ibid.*, pp.284-95.

background, may help to explain Winterbotham's opposition. It was easier for a radical living in Britain to be unblinkingly opposed to slavery. It is also possible that the fact that his brother had been converted by the preaching of an African man in London influenced his position.⁷² It may be, however, that Winterbotham's slightly more qualified position had been influenced by reading the publications of Jefferson, Ramsay and others.

Religious liberty

The disproportionate representation of Dissenters among the ranks of British radicals, and the enshrining of religious freedom in the American federal and state constitutions, meant that American religious liberty was featured enthusiastically in radical writings on the new republic. It has been suggested that, 'Of all the [radical] exiles' expectations of their new home, their religious hopes were the most nearly fulfilled', although in fact neither the typical American practice of religion nor some state rights to religious liberty were quite so liberal as many British radicals imagined or immigrants expected.⁷³ Baptist ministers, in particular, had been supportive of the American struggle for political liberty – Caleb Evans in Bristol, Rees David in Norwich and both John Rylands, father and son, in Northampton and Bristol, all preached and published sermons in support of the Americans during the war, and Winterbotham reflected this tradition.⁷⁴ However, as a minister of orthodox Christian beliefs, Winterbotham was atypical in becoming a victim of the political repression of the 1790s.⁷⁵ Radical political sermons from Dissenting

⁷² Winterbotham, *Sketch*, pp.12-13.

⁷³ Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, p.188-9ff.; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, ch.7.

⁷⁴ I wish to thank Dr Timothy Whelan for advice on this point. See also Henry P. Ippel, 'British Sermons and the American Revolution', *Journal of Religious History*, 12:2 (1982), 191-205, *passim*.

⁷⁵ Durey, 'William Winterbotham's Trumpet of Sedition', p.144. He was not quite the only minister to be prosecuted for preaching sedition from a pulpit in England in the 1790s, however, *pace* Durey: Jeremiah Joyce, the Kent Unitarian minister, suffered similar judicial harassment in 1794 for his preaching in favour of the French Revolution, though he was more fortunate in the outcome of events. See G.M. Ditchfield, 'Jeremiah Joyce (1763-1816)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004-).

pulpits were increasingly rare during the 1790s, probably at least in part because of Winterbotham's arrest and conviction, which were designed to be exemplary.⁷⁶

Winterbotham thoroughly approved of the separation of church and state in America. 'The day is at hand', he had prophesied in his second offensive sermon of November 1792, 'when men will no more be persecuted for their religious opinions, farther than they are destructive of morality'.⁷⁷ In America, he explained in 1795, this liberty of conscience had been secured to the people:

Religion, or what is called an establishment in Europe, has had and continues to have its share in rivetting in the fetters of ignorance. ... What can be a greater presumption, or a higher pitch of arrogance, than presuming to arraign or judge of the sentiments of men, the propriety of which is to be determined before a tribunal in Heaven? It is an insult too gross to merit a comment.

In America this evil has ceased to exist, the monster is destroyed, the unnatural alliance ... is broken....⁷⁸

Moreover, the clergy in America, deprived of all privileges 'but those which are the reward of piety and virtue', would naturally fulfil their educational, moral and spiritual responsibilities.

Winterbotham continued to practise what he preached in Britain long after his release from prison, signing petitions for Catholic emancipation as well as supporting the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts for Protestants.⁷⁹ In this, he reflected the tradition of Baptist argument and

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp.156-7; J.E. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace: Anti-war liberalism in England, 1793-1815* (Cambridge, 1982), p.135; Lovegrove, 'English Evangelical Dissent and the European Conflict 1789-1815'; John Stephens, 'Robert Robinson (1735-1790)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). See also Paul Langford, 'The English Clergy and the American Revolution', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), pp.275-307 for Dissenting hesitancy to publish anti-government sermons during the American War of Independence. Benjamin Flower, the editor of the liberal *Cambridge Intelligencer*, wrote that Joseph Priestley had taken care to read his February 1794 Fast Day sermon from a printed copy 'to secure himself from the consequences of such gross misrepresentation as sent Mr. Winterbotham to Newgate'. *Cambridge Intelligencer*, 15 March 1794, cited in Jenny Graham, 'Revolutionary Philosopher: The Political Ideas of Joseph Priestley (1733-1804): Part One', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 8 (1989), p.46.

⁷⁷ Winterbotham, *Two Sermons*, p.50.

⁷⁸ Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. iii, p.282.

⁷⁹ W.H. Winterbotham, *Sketch*, p.48. Durey notes that Winterbotham had abandoned his previous anti-Catholic views in Newgate ('Winterbotham's Trumpet of Sedition', 154-5); certainly he still thought that one of the benefits

campaigning for religious liberty, appearing at the liberal end of the Baptist spectrum in arguing for religious liberty beyond Protestants. The Welsh Baptist emigrant, Theophilus Harris, also praised the American freedom of inquiry and absence of political pressure in religious matters.⁸⁰

Winterbotham, however, unusually for an orthodox Dissenter, wanted complete freedom not only for all ‘church sects’ but also, potentially radically, for any ‘society of religious persons whatsoever’, though he did not specify the breadth of liberty he demanded more precisely than this.⁸¹

America's place in the world

Winterbotham had little but contempt for the British attempt to counter the American revolution:

Thus ended a long and arduous conflict, in which Great Britain expended near an hundred millions of money, with an hundred thousand lives, and won nothing. America endured every cruelty and distress from her enemies; lost many lives and much treasure; but delivered herself from a foreign domination, and gained a rank among the nations of the earth.⁸²

He was not above writing about the American republic with what might be read as a certain air of British condescension: ‘Judging … from its present promising infancy, we are encouraged to hope, that, at some future period, not far distant, it will, in every point of view, be respectable.’⁸³

However, in common with the other British radicals writing on independent America, he wished

of the French Revolution had been its ‘blow … to popery’ when he preached the November 1792 sermons (*Two Sermons*, p.33).

⁸⁰ Theophilus Harris, ‘Thoughts on Emigration’, printed in John Hammond Moore, ‘Theophilus Harris’s Thoughts on Emigrating to America in 1793’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 36:4 (1979), 613. On Welsh Baptist emigration to America, see also H.M. Davis, “Very Different Springs of Uneasiness”: Emigration from Wales to the United States of America during the 1790s’, *Welsh History Review*, 15 (1990-91), 368-98.

⁸¹ Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. iii, p.281. See John Coffey, ‘From Helwys to Leland: Baptists and Religious Toleration in England and America, 1612-1791’, in David W. Bebbington (ed.), *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies* (Carlisle, 2002), pp.13-37.

⁸² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.573.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.204.

mainly to promote the United States of America as an example to Britain and the other European nations, as an asylum for political refugees, and as a good prospect for economic migrants:

[T]he glorious struggle which the United States sustained, and the inquiries to which that eventful period gave rise, did much to raise mankind from that state of abject slavery and degradation, to which despotism, aided by superstition, had sunk them: from that period the rights of man began to be understood, and the principles of civil and religious liberty have been canvassed with a freedom before unknown, and their influence has extended itself from the palace to the cottage: in short, the revolution in the late British American colonies bids fair ultimately not only to occasion the emancipation of the other European colonies on that continent, but to accomplish a complete revolution in all the old governments of Europe.⁸⁴

A practical, worked example, as Paine had pointed out in his *Rights of Man*, Part Two, had much more force than books on the subject. ‘It renders this truth evident,’ Winterbotham wrote, ‘that the people have a right to do what they please, with regard to the government’.⁸⁵ Princes, he suggested, would be forced to grant some measure of liberty to their peoples in order to preserve their positions.⁸⁶ It had already inspired revolutions in Poland and France (where ‘a perjured despot’ had ‘expiat[ed] his crimes on the scaffold’), and should other nations not follow suit, their commerce, agriculture and populations would surely decline.⁸⁷

Moreover, while Winterbotham defended America stoutly (though with discrimination) against those who derided it as a suitable destination for economic emigrants – indeed, he stated that he had written his book in order to provide such emigrants with detailed information about America as an adoptive country – he also praised it as ‘an asylum’ for ‘the persecuted in France or England, … where their lives, property and liberty are secure; where they may almost say, the

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.iv. See also, for instance, Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution*.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.232; Paine, *Rights of Man*, Part Two, p.1; cf. Philp, ‘Role of America’.

⁸⁶ Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. III, p.283.

⁸⁷ Ibid., vol. I, pp.iv-v..

wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest'.⁸⁸ This was a well-established British radical conception of the American republic: the radical Dissenter John Jebb, for example, described it as an 'asylum for suffering humanity' in 1780.⁸⁹ The radicals also, following Paine's *Common Sense* in 1776, saw America as an asylum for the very principle of liberty. 'Suffice it for England', Winterbotham observed,

that she will have been the origins of a commonwealth greater and more durable than any former monarchy; that her language and manners will flourish among a people who will one day become a splendid spectacle in the vast eye of the universe. This flattering idea of immortality no other nation can hope to attain.⁹⁰

While radical emigrants to the American republic gradually recognised that they were living in a reality rather than a utopia, those such as Winterbotham who remained in Britain had often fewer constraints on their vision.⁹¹ Like Winterbotham, other radicals in Britain expressed mild concern with some aspects of life in America, but these were the anxieties of those who wished keenly to see perfection in the new republic, and the dominant opinion of radicals in Britain was one of deep admiration for the new system of government established across the Atlantic, especially once they had become disillusioned with the Revolution in France in the aftermath of the Terror.

American influence was frequently cited by British state prosecutors in the treason and sedition trials of 1793-95, and for most radical emigrants to America their removal was a matter not of their own choosing but caused by their defeat at home.⁹² For Winterbotham, however, who had not mentioned it in either of his offensive sermons, it was perhaps rather an intellectual

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.v-vi; vol. III, pp.295-331. This incorporates a slightly oddly placed quotation from Job 3:17.

⁸⁹ John Jebb, *The works, theological, medical, political and miscellaneous of John Jebb*, ed. J. Disney, 3 vols. (London, 1789), vol. iii, p.321, quoted in Arthur Sheps, 'The Edinburgh Reform Convention of 1793 and the American Revolution', *Scottish Tradition*, 5 (1975), 25-6.

⁹⁰ Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, p.253; Winterbotham, *View of America*, vol. III, p.338.

⁹¹ On the emigrants, see Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, p.211 and chapters 6-7.

⁹² Sheps, 'The American Revolution and the Transformation of English Republicanism', pp.17-18; Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, pp.134, 163, 165.

escape from his confinement in Newgate. It did not lead him to comment directly on the British system of government in the *View of America*, but his advanced radical opinions were none the less made very plain in it, courageously so from his imprisoned circumstances. After Winterbotham was released from Newgate on 26 November 1797, he did not himself emigrate to America. Rather, having married on the day of his release Mary Brend of Plymouth, a defence witness at his trial, he returned to minister at the Baptist chapel in Plymouth until 1804, when he moved to Shortwood Baptist Church in Gloucestershire, where, according to his grandson, he maintained a keen interest in campaigns for religious liberty, parliamentary reform, free trade and the abolition of slavery.⁹³ His *View of America*, despite its perhaps extensive plagiarism, had managed to propose his own radical, yet discriminating, approval of the new United States of America. It is also apparent that his Baptist worldview contributed, along with his artisan social background, to the shaping of his opinions on America in the 1790s – in particular, his admiration for America's muting of social hierarchy, his opposition to chattel slavery, and his applause for America's separation of church and state.

⁹³ W.H. Winterbotham, *Sketch*, pp.48-9. It is intriguing that the *New York Times* obituary of Ann Sophia Stevens, the American novelist and magazine editor, stated that she was Winterbotham's grand-daughter and the daughter of John Winterbotham (*New York Times*, 21 August 1886). However, Stephens was born in Derby, Connecticut in 1810, and there is no record of Winterbotham having had children before his marriage, nor of his brother John having emigrated to America, so the connection remains mysterious.