



New Jersey Studies - 250th Anniversary of American Independence Special Issue
Editors' Introduction
Elizabeth Hyde, Kean University
Jonathan Mercantini, Kean University

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As we approach the 250th anniversary of American Independence, it seems appropriate to reflect on the meaning of the American founding then and now and also on how those meanings have changed over the past quarter-millennium. Sitting at a moment when America's place in the world and its commitments to its citizens are changing rapidly, it can be useful to re-read the Declaration of Independence, which remains the boldest and clearest statement of American ideals and principles. Now, our national identity is more complicated and more contested than it was at any time in the recent past. Returning to the founding documents and assessing the legacy and their ability to speak to Americans in this moment demands that we question those meanings. We have not, as a nation, reached those ideals, but we have advanced closer, sometimes quickly, sometimes more slowly, over the past 250 years. The question now, however, is: Will America continue that advance or will it evolve into something else?

This special issue of *New Jersey Studies* was prompted by the upcoming anniversary. An open call for papers was shared as a way to scan the most current scholarship on the era of the American Revolution in New Jersey. The six original essays contained in the issue provide an analysis and re-analysis of New Jersey's place in the revolution. Together, they offer ideas for using this heritage and its memory to advance our shared identity. The issue also offers a variety of perspectives, from two of the most important scholars of the American Revolution in New Jersey to new and emerging voices. The articles show a deep engagement with history—on the battlefield, in the classroom, in the courts, and in the court of public opinion—and in this moment of contested commemorations, restore and uplift voices and stories previously lost or ignored.

In essays that examine loyalists, the life and experiences of Richard Stockton, and the men and women enslaved to the Stevens family, these contributing authors advance our understanding of those who lived through the revolutionary moment and the costs of the revolution. These pieces reflect current historiographical trends and show how New Jerseyans positioned themselves as the revolution deepened. Maxine Lurie shows that Loyalists are especially relevant to understanding the revolution in New Jersey. This evaluation of their motivations yields a more nuanced understanding of the political, economic, social, and cultural challenges of the revolution and can reveal ways of navigating these complex moments. These challenges can be seen specifically in the case of Richard Stockton. As Robert Swanson demonstrates, Stockton serves as a model for understanding the political tensions and personal pressures the founders were compelled to grapple with. Finally, as Lindsey Swindall reveals, exploring the legacies of slavery offers scholars as well as students a way to use primary sources to launch more critical inquiry into the founding era in the classroom and beyond.

Other contributors look back at the experience of the revolutionary era and the memory of independence. Both serendipitous and contested memory were powerful forces in shaping how Americans made meaning out of the revolution and continue to do so in the current age. Articles in this issue consider the memories of those in the nineteenth century in the essay by Mark Lender and Iris De Rode, the memories of those in the twentieth century with an analysis by Joe Hammond of a portrait supposedly of one of New Jersey's signers of the Declaration of Independence, and how scholars like Sue Kozel in the twenty-first century are preserving and shaping that memory. The power of memory and commemoration and the stakes involved in what is remembered highlight the importance of the sesquicentennial as an opportunity to recast understandings of freedom and embrace a broader sense of liberty and equality.

We hope that this special issue highlights the important role of New Jersey in the national story of independence as the nation commemorates the 250th anniversary of American independence, while at the same time revealing local realities and the individual understandings essential to understanding the bigger picture.

Each of us can better understand the present by having a more complete and complex understanding of the past, particularly because the Founding Era looms so large in our national narrative and in the ongoing contest over the meaning of "America." We are proud to share the contributions in this volume on such questions and hope that these essays and this moment may inspire additional scholarship on New Jersey's history, the revolutionary era, its legacies, and the meanings of independence.



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