



Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution

By Benjamin L. Carp

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The cities of eighteenth-century America packed together tens of thousands of colonists, who met each other in back rooms and plotted political tactics, debated the issues of the day in taverns, and mingled together on the wharves or in the streets. In this fascinating work, historian Benjamin L. Carp shows how these various urban meeting places provided the tinder and spark for the American Revolution.

Carp focuses closely on political activity in colonial America's five most populous cities--in particular, he examines Boston's waterfront community, New York tavern-goers, Newport congregations, Charleston's elite patriarchy, and the common people who gathered outside Philadelphia's State House. He shows how--because of their tight concentrations of people and diverse mixture of inhabitants--the largest cities offered fertile ground for political consciousness, political persuasion, and political action. The book traces how everyday interactions in taverns, wharves, and elsewhere slowly developed into more serious political activity. Ultimately, the residents of cities became the first to voice their discontent. Merchants began meeting to discuss the repercussions of new laws, printers fired up provocative pamphlets, and protesters took to the streets. Indeed, the cities became the flashpoints for legislative protests, committee meetings, massive outdoor gatherings, newspaper harangues, boycotts, customs evasion, violence and riots--all of which laid the groundwork for war.

Ranging from 1740 to 1780, this groundbreaking work contributes significantly to our understanding of the American Revolution. By focusing on some of the most pivotal events of the eighteenth century as they unfolded in the most dynamic places in America, this book illuminates how city dwellers joined in various forms of political activity that helped make the Revolution possible.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The great cities of colonial America—New York, Boston, Newport, Philadelphia and Charleston—were in the forefront of revolutionary agitation before the War of Independence, but once the fighting began, says Carp (an assistant professor of history at Tufts), the politics of liberty moved to the countryside. The British concentrated on occupying the cities, centers of commerce and transport, in order to supply their army; the patriots reluctantly abandoned them so as to avoid being defeated in battle, and shifted their forces inland. It was no coincidence, then, that the most important American victories (Saratoga, Yorktown, Trenton and Cowpens) occurred away from the major population hubs. After the British defeat, some cities, like New York and Boston, went on to marvelous things, while others, such as Newport and Charleston, never quite recovered from their devastating occupation. Carp argues that political power shifted to the rural South as attitudes toward urban irreligion, culture, unrest and ethnic mixing soured. When the site of the new national capital was chosen, it was located on a remote riverbank midway between South and North. Carp's account of the forgotten cities that fomented the Revolution is intriguing and will be mainly of interest to readers looking for an alternate explanation of this most remarkable of rebellions. (*Sept.*)

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Review

"A superb piece of scholarship, covering a vast landscape in literal and temporal terms."--Jon Latimer, *Journal of American Studies*

"An important analysis of both colonial cities and the origins of the American Revolution."--David Goldfield, *American Historical Review*

"A fresh analysis of the role of colonial cities in the earliest phase of the contest with Parliament and the Crown.... A learned and carefully crafted study."--Richard D. Brown, *Interdisciplinary History*

"This risk-taking book reopens for discussion a range of important subjects.... an innovative work based on an impressive number of manuscript collections and newspapers and the absorption of a generation of social and cultural history.... *Rebels Rising* is a short book written with zest; it is vivid and jam-packed. It should prove inviting to students and general readers, and it will dazzle scholars."--Alfred F. Young, *William and Mary Quarterly*

"Carp's account of the forgotten cities that fomented the Revolution is intriguing."--*Publishers Weekly*

"Benjamin Carp's intensively researched and elegantly crafted book is easily the most important study of the coming of the American Revolution to appear in nearly three decades."--John M. Murrin, Princeton University

"*Rebels Rising* is a tour de force. Carp re-energizes the study of revolutionary political mobilization by taking mobility--the movement of people in particular spaces--seriously. A terrific book!"--David Waldstreicher, Temple University

"Carp's book is the result of seemingly indefatigable research; the range of primary and secondary sources he draws on is stunning. He also engages, fearlessly, the several generations of scholars who precede him, and links his project with a wide variety of approaches and methods, all in highly readable prose."--Jane Kamensky, Brandeis University

"What Carl Bridenbaugh's *Cities in Revolt* and Gary Nash's *Urban Crucible* were to their generations of historians, Benjamin Carp's fascinating study of the revolution in the five major colonial cities is to the present time. Looking at different spaces for each city--the Boston waterfront, the New York taverns, the Newport congregations, the Charleston households, and Philadelphia's State House and Square--he shows how mobilization for resistance progressed as it did because of the way these locations were employed by leaders and crowds. Carp's exciting narrative concludes with a moving epilogue demonstrating how the cities were displaced during the revolution itself in both practice and in the American mind as the main focal points of civic life."--William Pencak, Pennsylvania State University

"Massively researched and elegantly written. One of the most important studies of the American Revolution in recent years and deserves to be read by any scholar or general reader who is interested in understanding the compelling story of how the British colonies in the 1760s and 1770s were mobilized *against* the mother country and *for* their own political identity."--Paul David Nelson, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*

"Better than any writer...[Carp] evokes here the tangled, ocean-spanning, class-riven, open-ended complexity that distinguished all colonial port cities from any of their hinterlands." --*The Historian*

"A three-dimensional history that triangulates people, places, and protest, to produce a ground-breaking narrative of the Revolution." --*H-Net Reviews*

"Intriguing...Carp's contribution lies in revealing not only the distinctive experience of early American urban life but also how cities managed to play such a crucial role in the coming of the American Revolution."
--*Journal of the Early Republic*

"Carp's thoroughly documented study represents the most significant elaboration of this very important subject to date." --*Journal of Social History*

About the Author

Benjamin L. Carp is Assistant Professor of History at Tufts University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Pearlie Henry:

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