

THE MOST
**FORMIDABLE
WEAPON**
AGAINST ERRORS

THE
SID LAPIDUS '59 COLLECTION
AND THE
AGE OF REASON

FEBRUARY 19 TO JUNE 8, 2025
MILBERG GALLERY, FIRESTONE LIBRARY



Dessiné par C. N. Cochin fils, Chef de l'ordre du Roi, de l'Acad. R^o de Peinture & Sc.

Gravé par B. L. Prevost, Graveur de L. L. M. M. Imp^o n. 200 1772.

FRONTISPICE DE L'ENCYCLOPEDIE.

Benoît Louis Prévost
(ca. 1735–1804), after
Charles Nicolas
Cochin *fils* (1715–1790),
frontispiece to
L'Encyclopédie, edited
by Denis Diderot, 1772.
Reason, wearing a crown,
unveils Truth while
Imagination garlands
Truth with flowers.
The British Museum.



Sid Lapidus

T

HINKING OF THE START of his long career as a collector of rare books, Sid Lapidus recalled, “My first antiquarian book was purchased in 1959. In a bookseller’s dusty window, I noticed a small book, a 1792 edition of Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*. The principal theme of my collection was even embedded in the title of [this first purchase].”

That principal theme is the documenting of new conceptions of human liberty, political order, and scientific reasoning that emerged in the Anglo-American intellectual world between the 17th and 19th centuries. It resulted in a large book collection now dispersed in libraries on the East Coast. This exhibition attempts to provide an overview of Sid Lapidus’s overall achievement.

A dedicated philanthropist, Sid Lapidus has donated his books to several libraries, including Princeton University Library, the American Antiquarian Society, the Wolf Law Library at the William and Mary Law School, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, the Center for Jewish History, the New York Historical, and the New York University Health Sciences Library. His contributions have strengthened the existing holdings at those libraries, helping create collections of research value, with works that often are in conversation with one another.

The items on display, arranged thematically, are chiefly from Sid Lapidus’s gifts to Princeton during various years starting in 2009, and include loans from libraries listed above to show the full range of topics he collected.

CURATOR

Steven A. Knowlton

Librarian for History and African American Studies

The following pages share highlights from the exhibition

THE STAMP ACT CRISIS

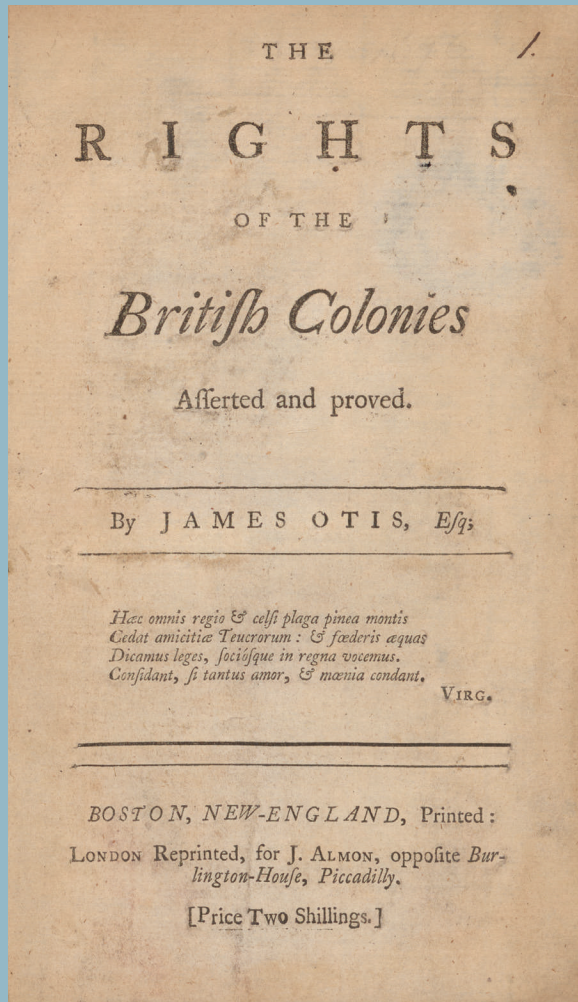
In the 1640s, the English Civil War arose from conflicts between King Charles I and Parliament about who had the power to impose taxes. Following the 1688 “Glorious Revolution” in which King James II was overthrown in reaction to his policies that many considered oppressive, many English people—including British colonists in North America—came to believe that taxation was only permissible when approved by elected representatives.

The colonists paid taxes imposed by colonial legislatures, but not direct taxes imposed by the Parliament, to which they did not elect representatives. In 1765, Parliament, led by George Grenville, imposed a tax on paper goods in the colonies, called the Stamp Act, which provoked widespread rebellion against colonial governors until it was repealed the next year.

The Stamp Act Crisis presaged disputes about the locus of authority in the American and French Revolutions.

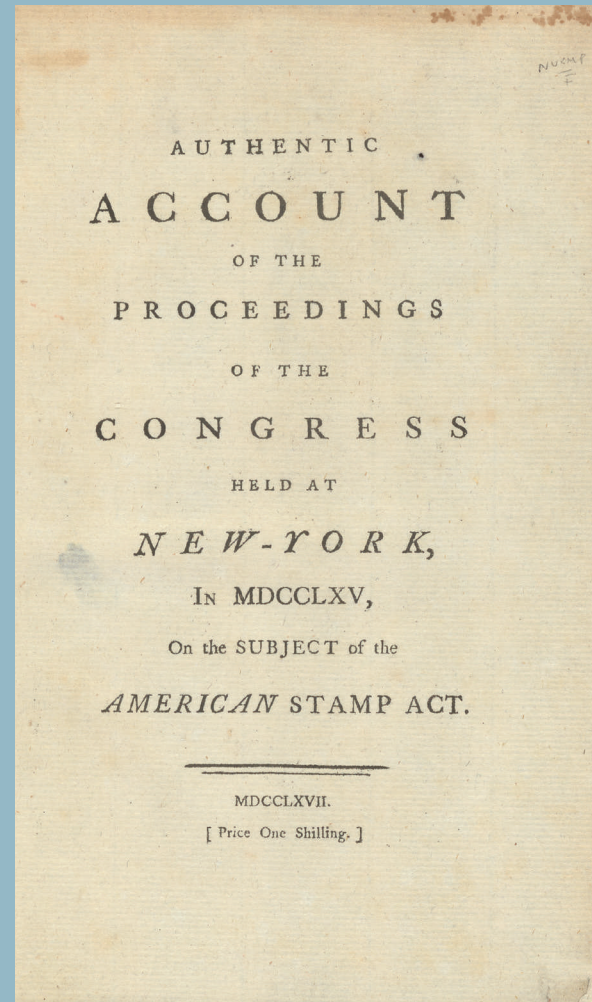


Attributed to Philip Dawe (1745?–1809?), *The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering, 1774.*
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



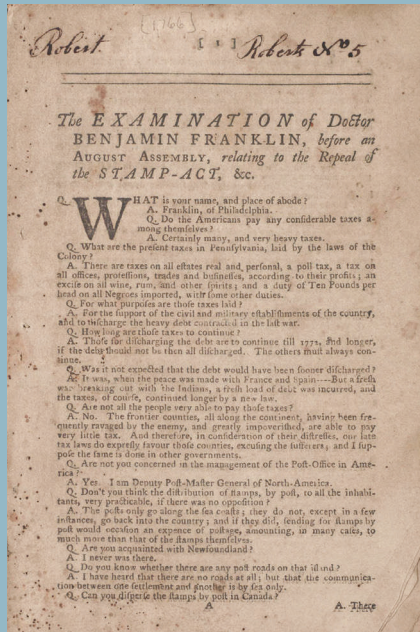
James Otis (1725–1783), *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (London: Reprinted, for J. Almon), 1764.

Even before the Stamp Act passed, James Otis lodged his pre-emptive protest in this pamphlet, which argues that taxation of unrepresented colonists is a violation of the natural rights of the colonists.



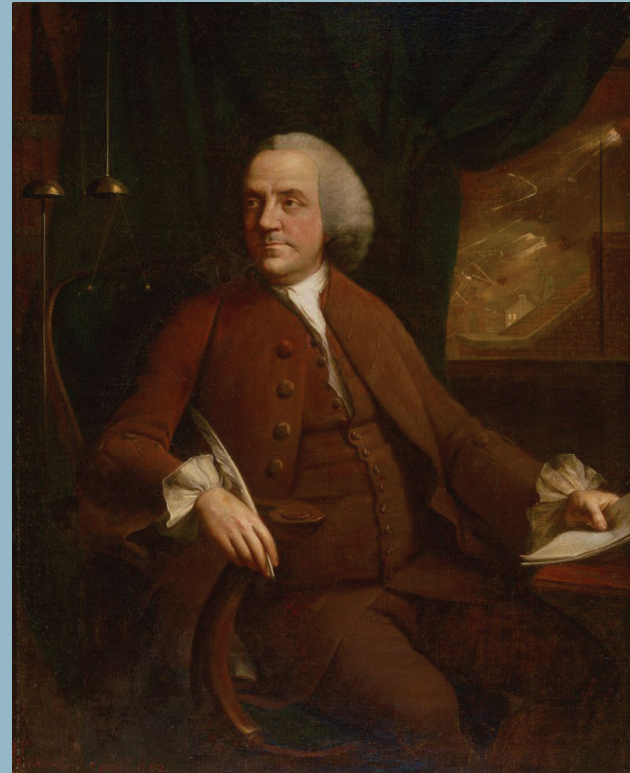
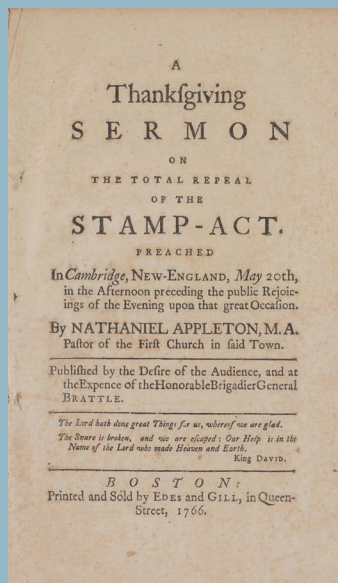
Authentic Account of the Proceedings of the Congress held at New York in MDCCLXV, on the Subject of the American Stamp Act (London: Printed for J. Almon, 1767).

Representatives gathered in October 1765 to organize protest and resistance. This irregular gathering issued an address to the king stating the principles which they understood to control Parliamentary authority.



The Examination of Doctor Benjamin Franklin, Before an August Assembly, Relating to the Repeal of the Stamp-Act, &c. (Philadelphia : Printed by Hall and Sellers, 1766).

Violent revolts prevented the Stamp Act from being enforced, and in early 1766 Parliament began hearings about its repeal. Witness Benjamin Franklin downplayed the constitutional dispute and observed that the colonists would support taxes fairly imposed. The act was repealed within a few weeks.



Mason Chamberlain (died 1787), *Portrait of Benjamin Franklin*, 1762. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Nathaniel Appleton (1693–1784), *A Thanksgiving Sermon on the Total Repeal of the Stamp-Act* (Boston: Printed by Edes and Gill, 1766).

Relief and exultation about the repeal of the Stamp Act were widespread in the colonies. This sermon celebrates not only the return of domestic peace but the assertion of the colonists' rights.

*“The invaluable rights of taxing ourselves, and trial by our peers,
are ... confirmed by the great charter of English liberty.”*

— The Stamp Act Congress, 1765



Paul Revere (1735–1818), *A View of the Obelisk Erected under Liberty-Tree in Boston on the Rejoicings for the Repeal of the Stamp Act*, 1766.

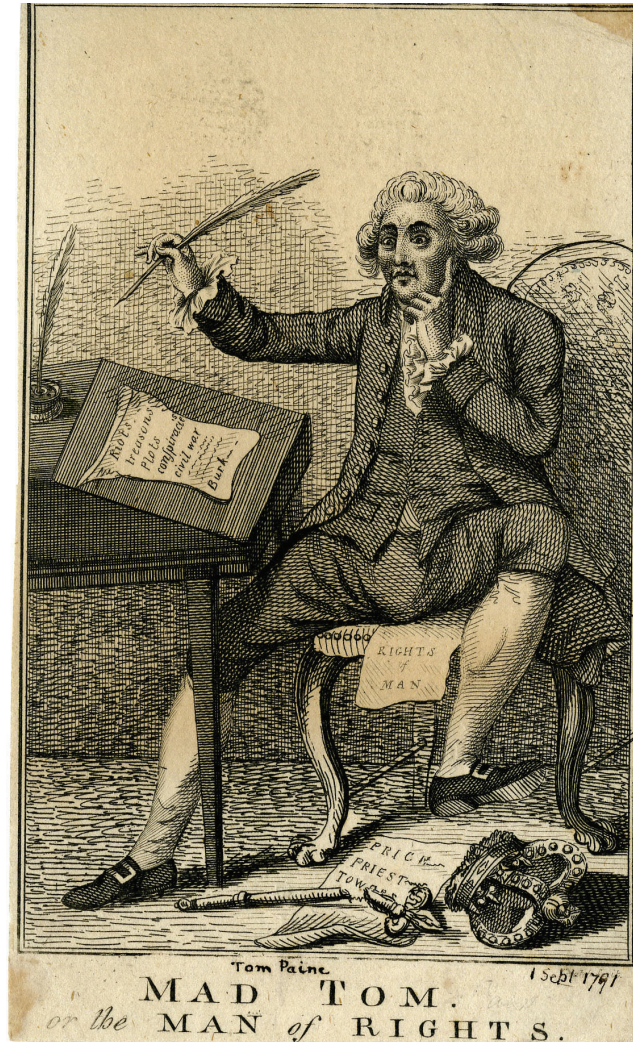
News of the repeal was met in Boston with a grand fête featuring bonfires, bell-ringing, and firing of cannons. On Boston Common, the Sons of Liberty erected a monument, depicted in this engraving by Paul Revere.

THE RIGHTS OF MAN

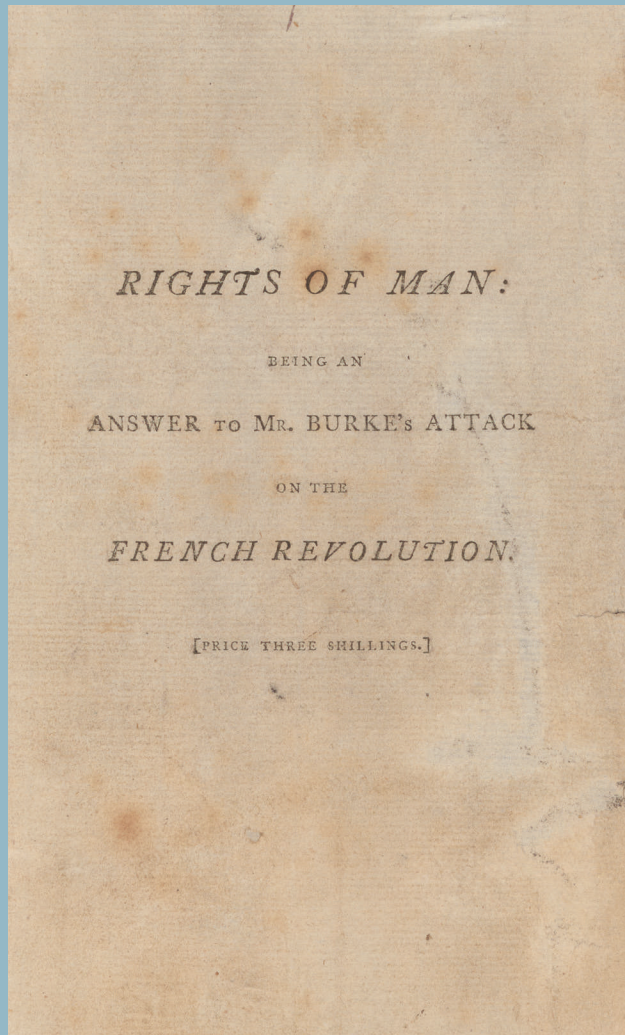
Thomas Paine made his name during the American Revolution with pro-independence sentiment. However, his political philosophy finds its most complete expression in *Rights of Man*, a treatise composed in Paris during the French Revolution.

In response to conservative arguments, Paine argues that the rights of the individual originate in human nature and that governments exist to protect those rights.

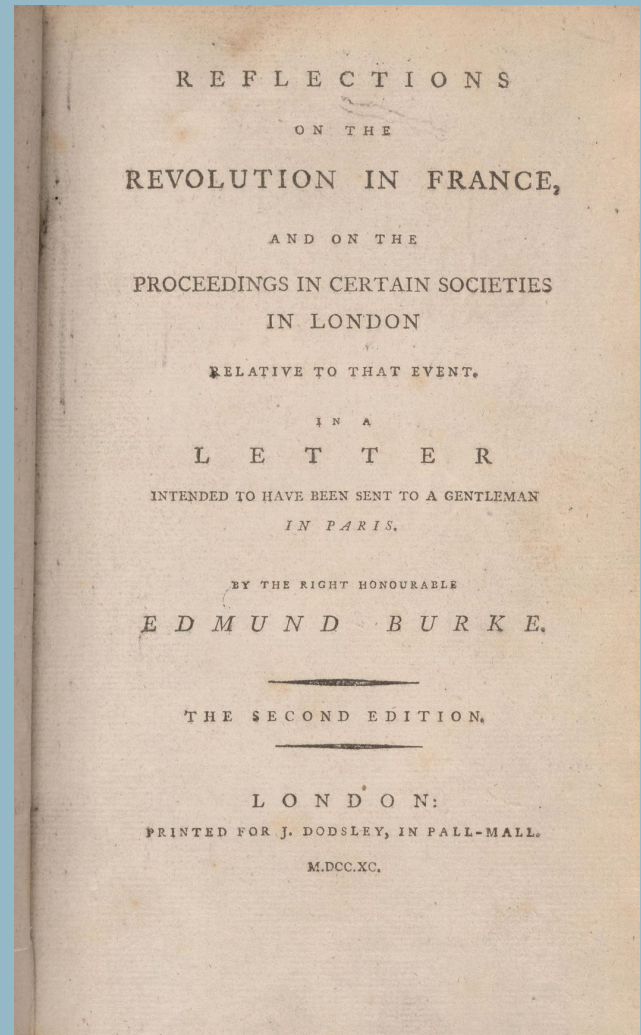
He rejects the authority of traditional structures of society such as aristocracy as unjustifiable privilege. In his second volume, Paine coined the phrase “The Age of Reason”, holding that the establishment of societies based on philosophical principles of the Enlightenment would usher in a new age free from oppression.



W. Locke, *Mad Tom, or The Man of Rights*, 1791.
The British Museum.



Thomas Paine (1737–1809), *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (London: Printed for J.S. Jordan, 1791).



Edmund Burke (1729–1797), *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event* (London: Printed for J. Dodley, 1790).

Paine wrote in response to Edmund Burke, who was concerned that revolutionaries were disregarding structures such as monarchy, the nobility, and the church, which—in the best cases—served to preserve order and thus protect individual rights, however limited under an aristocracy.

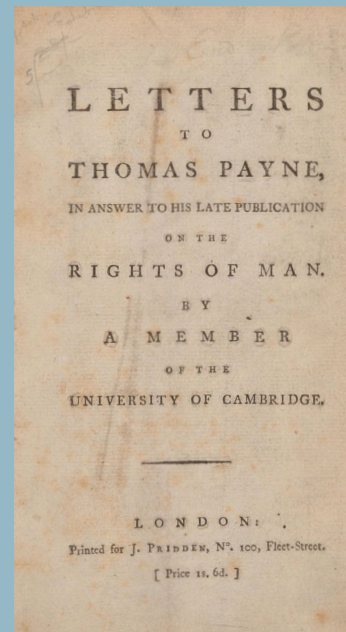


Isaac Cruikshank (circa 1756–circa 1811), *Why Wants Me?*, 1792.

Paine was often ridiculed by conservatives. In this cartoon, he is shown as bringing to any prospective employers a host of ills including rebellion, treason, anarchy, and “national & private ruin.” All the while, he is trampling upon loyalty, obedience to the laws, industry, inheritance, religion, and protection of property.

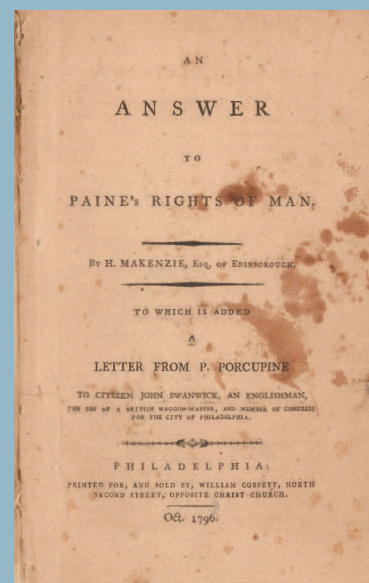
Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831), *An Answer to Paine’s Rights of Man* (Philadelphia: Printed for William Cobbett, 1796).

By 1796, the French Revolution had gone through the Reign of Terror. In response, Mackenzie observes that radical democracy is unpredictable while the British system better preserves stability while being open to reform.



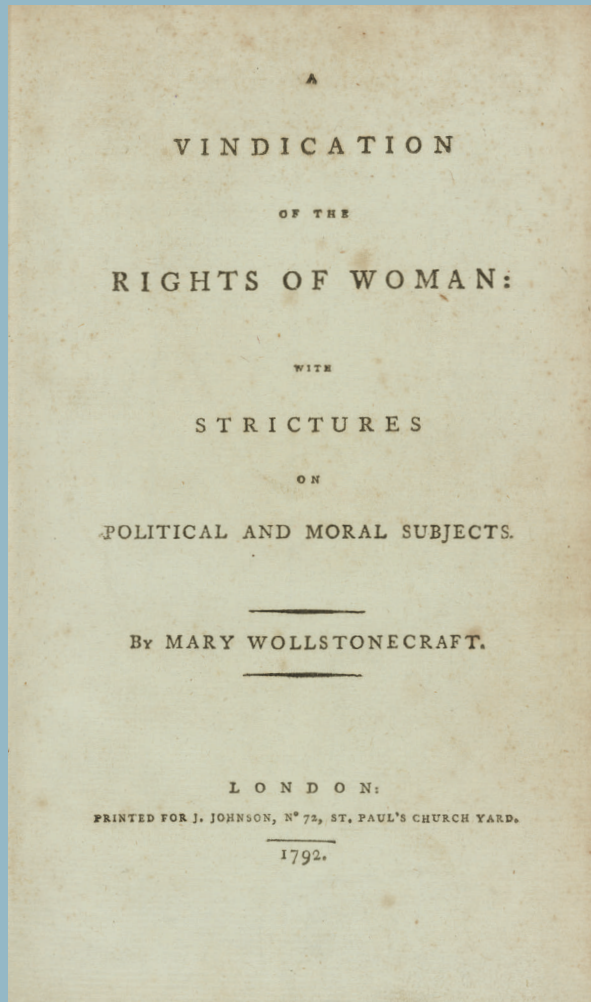
Graham Jepson (1734–1811), *Letters to Thomas Payne, in Answer to His Late Publication on the Rights of Man*, (London: Printed for J. Pridden, circa 1792).

The Burke-Paine exchange roused interest even among average Britons. Clergyman Jepson found in the British system as much individual freedom as may be found in other countries, and a preservation of the rights to property missing from the radical changes wrought by the French Revolution.



*“There must be more equality established in society,
or morality will never gain ground.”*

— Mary Wollstonecraft, 1792



Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1792).

A glaring oversight in most writings was the failure to discuss the subjection of women in all political systems. Wollstonecraft envisions a reform of society in which the exercise of women's rights leads to moral reform.



James Heath (1757–1834), after John Opie, *Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, ca. 1786–1814. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

*“If the present generation, or any other, are disposed to be slaves,
it does not lessen the right of the succeeding generation to be free.”*

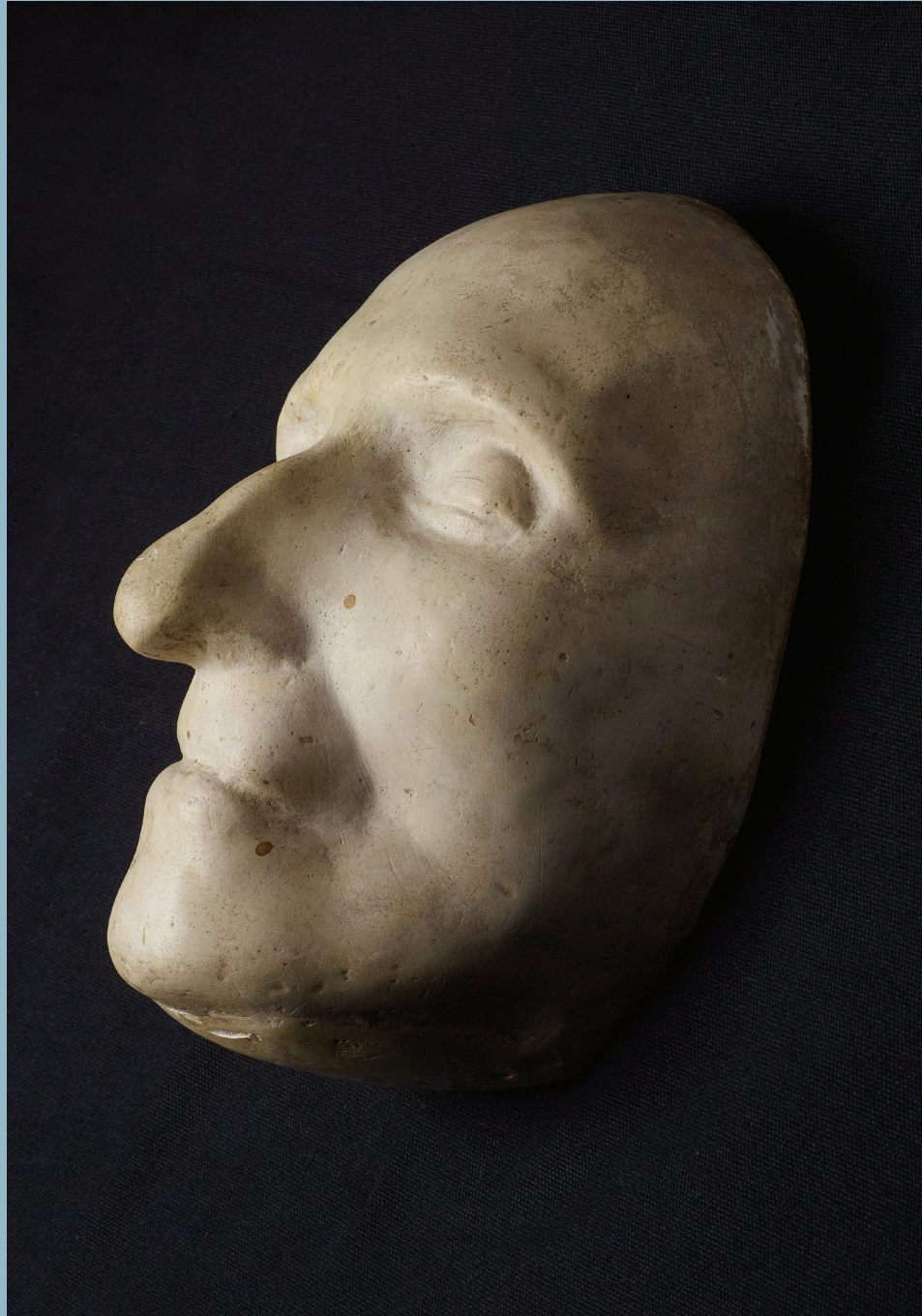
—Thomas Paine, 1791



Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827), *Thomas Paine*, 1791.

“My own mind is my own church.”

—Thomas Paine, 1794

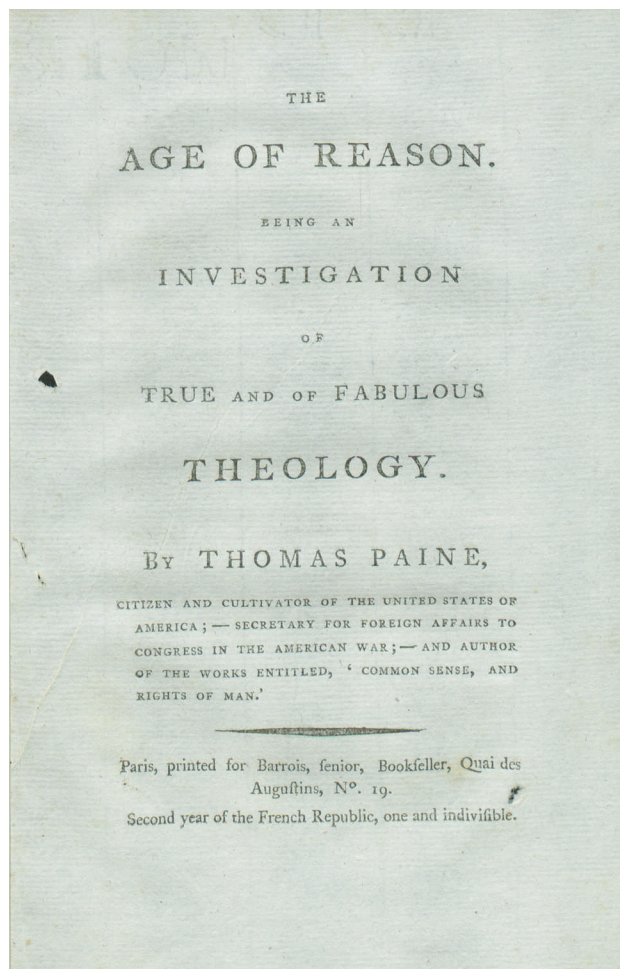


John Wesley Jarvis (1780–1839), *Death mask of Thomas Paine*, 1809.

THE AGE OF REASON

In his 1794 book *The Age of Reason*, Paine addresses religion. He attacks orthodox Christian claims about God, the Bible, and the church. Instead of urging atheism, Paine proclaimed deism, in which a one-personed God is known through reason rather than through revelation and dogma. Paine's conversational style made deistic arguments accessible to many readers. In the United States, it both contributed to a brief flourishing of deism and provoked reactions that helped usher in a great revival of trinitarian Christianity in the 19th century.

Thomas Paine (1737–1809), *The Age of Reason, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (Paris: Printed for Barrois, senior, Bookseller, 1794).

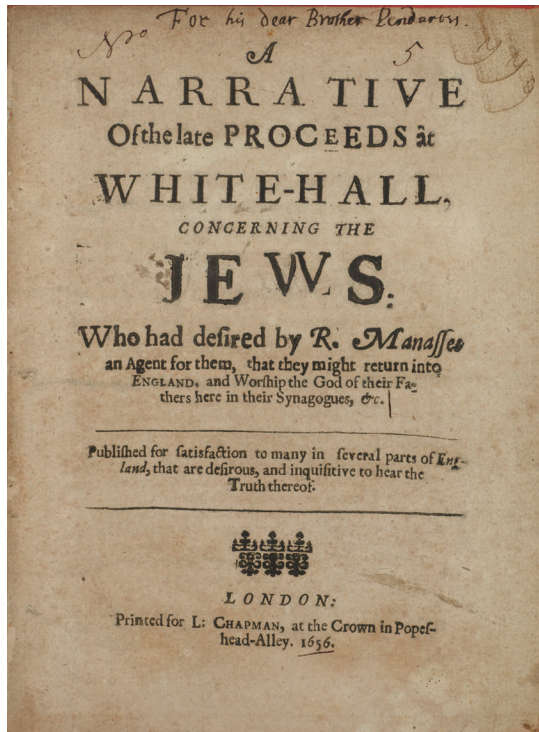




James Gillray (1756–1815), *New Morality - Or - The Promis'd Installment of the High-Priest of the Theophilanthropes, with the Homage of Leviathan and His Suite, 1798.*

In this satirical print, Paine is lampooned as a crocodile in women's undergarments, part of a procession of republicans whose political reforms lead to the overthrow of traditional religion.

JEWISH OPPRESSION AND LIBERATION IN ENGLAND AND THE UNITED STATES



Henry Jessey (1603–1663), *A Narrative of the Late Proceeds at White-hall, Concerning the Jews* (London: Printed for L. Chapman, 1656).

In the 1650s, the Dutch rabbi Menasseh ben Israel petitioned Oliver Cromwell to re-admit Jews to England. After a debate reproduced in this pamphlet, Cromwell declined to enforce the edict of expulsion.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), *Menasseh ben Israel*, 1636. The British Museum.

Jews were expelled from England by King Edward I in 1290. During the 1650s, the rabbi Menasseh ben Israel encouraged the republican parliament to re-admit Jews.

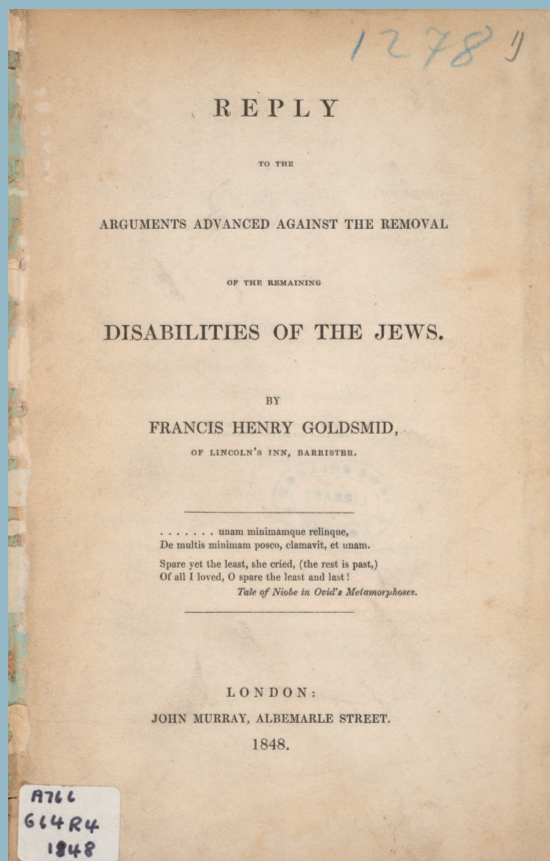
The laws gradually changed until in 1858 the first Jewish member of parliament was allowed to be seated.

Anti-Jewish prejudice, along with concern for religious uniformity, competed with Enlightenment ideals of the natural rights of individuals to participate in their own government and to worship according to their consciences. Many works on this topic from the Lapidus collection were donated to the Center for Jewish History in New York.



“No principle can be clearer than this,—that those who share the burthens of a state, ought in justice... to share its honours also.”

— Francis Henry Goldsmid, 1848



Francis Henry Goldsmid (1808–1878), *Reply to the Arguments Advanced against the Removal of the Remaining Disabilities of the Jews* (London: John Murray, 1848). Center for Jewish History, Gift of Sid Lapidus.

Lionel de Rothschild became the first Jewish member of Parliament in 1858. Francis Goldschmid, a Jewish community leader, rebuts justifications for Jewish exclusion with an appeal to the natural rights of Jews to share in their government.



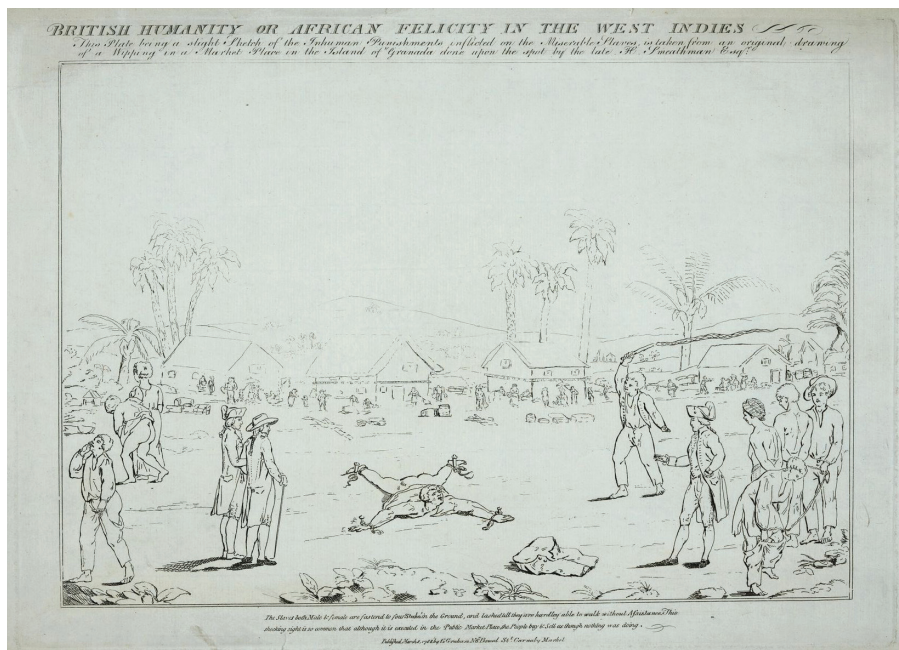
William Richardson (flourished in the 1850s), *Baron Lionel de Rothschild, M.P.*, after 1858. National Portrait Gallery, London.

SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION

Millions of people of African descent were enslaved. For Enlightenment thinkers concerned with the rights of the individual and personal liberty, slavery was an obvious target of criticism.

Many of the arguments against slavery that culminated in emancipation had their first airings during the Age of Reason.

Most of the works collected by Lapidus on this topic were donated to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, part of the New York Public Library.

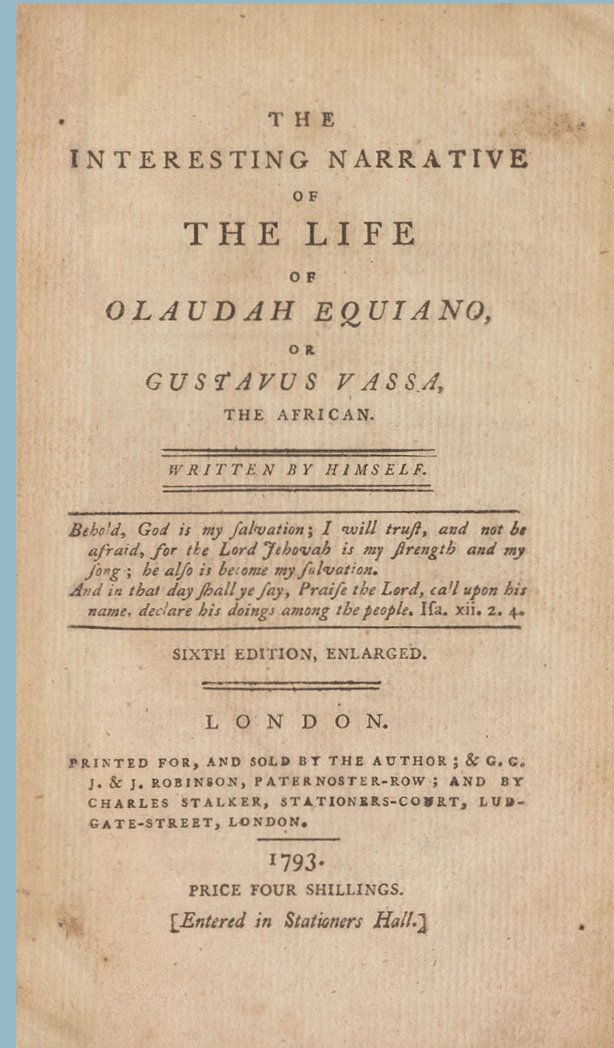


Henry Smeathman (1742–1786), *British Humanity or African Felicity in the West Indies*, 1788.

Smeathman traveled to the West Indies for research, and witnessed the brutalities of the slave trade and the treatment of enslaved workers. Among his notes was this etching of a public whipping in Grenada.



Portrait of Olaudah Equiano, frontispiece of his *Interesting Narrative*.



Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797), *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano: or, Gustavus Vassa, the African* (London: Printed for, and sold by, the author, 1793).

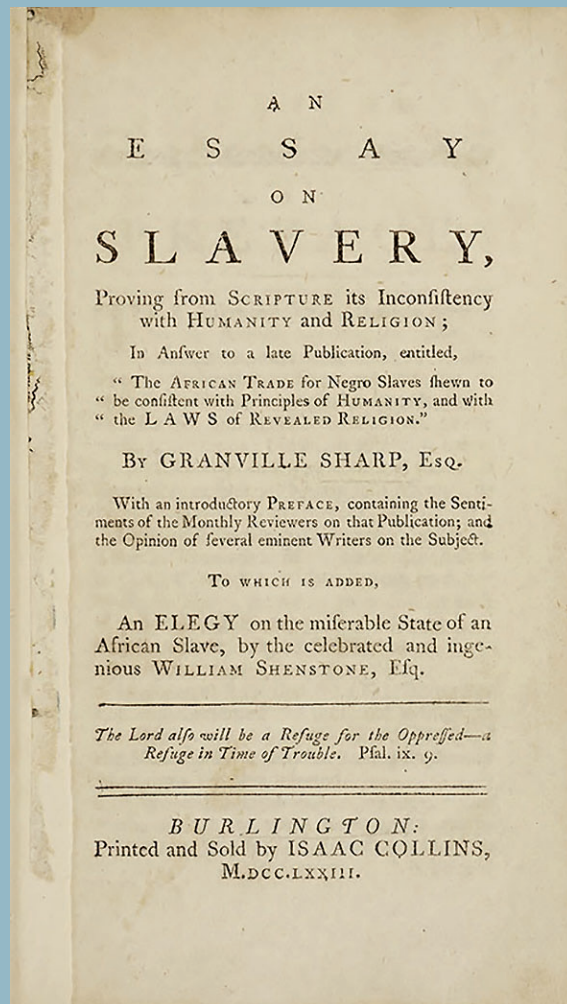
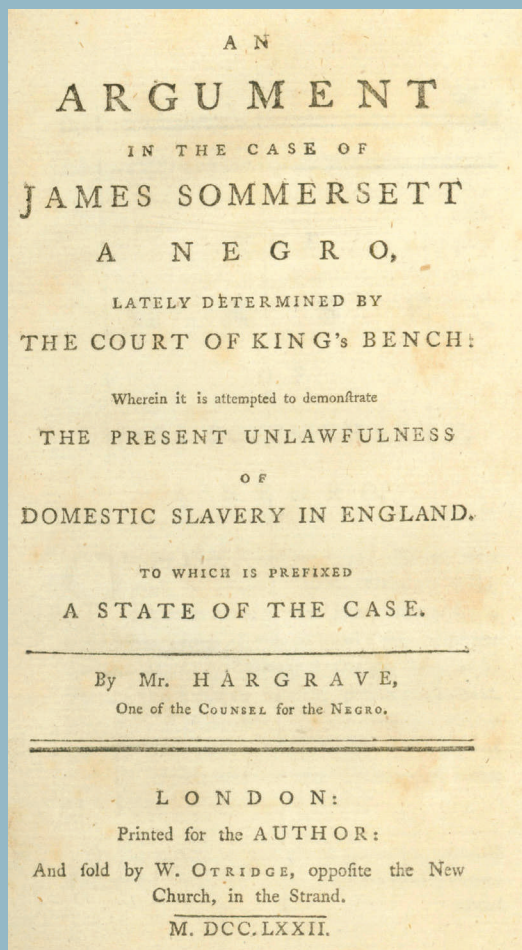
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Equiano was kidnapped from Nigeria as a child and enslaved. After he bought his freedom in 1766, he contributed to the abolitionist movement by writing his autobiography, one of the first slave narratives published in England.

Francis Hargrave (about 1741–1821), *An Argument in the Case of James Sommersett A Negro... Wherein It Is Attempted to Demonstrate the Present Unlawfulness of Domestic Slavery in England* (London: Printed for the author, 1772).

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

James Somerset was kept in bondage in Virginia until 1768. When his enslaver took him to England, Somerset sued for his freedom on the grounds that English law had no provision allowing chattel slavery. The courts found for Somerset, highlighting the tension between the English constitution's respect for individual rights and the slavery practiced in England's colonies.



Granville Sharp (1735–1813), *An Essay on Slavery, Proving from Scripture Its Inconsistency with Humanity and Religion* (Burlington, N.J.: Printed and sold by Isaac Collins, 1773).

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Granville Sharp wrote the first major abolitionist book in England. Sharp's arguments against slavery rely upon natural rights, and also find in Christian scripture condemnation for the enslavement of people.

“We certainly deserve to be considered in no better light than as an overgrown society of robbers... at enmity with all the rest of the world.”

— Granville Sharp, 1773



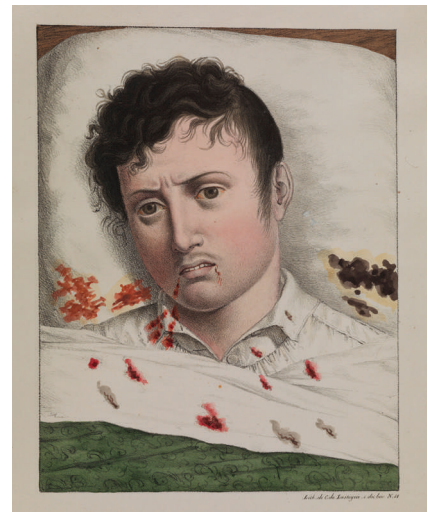
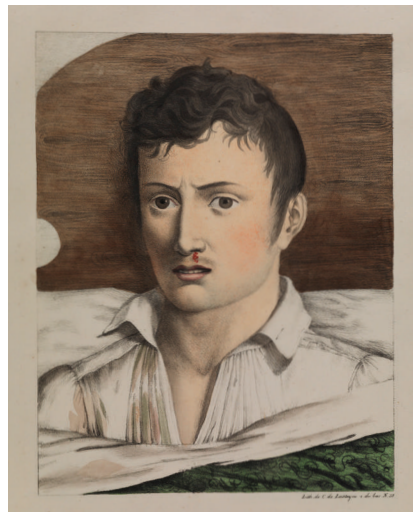
Francis Eginton (1737–1805), illustrator, and Isaac Taylor (1730–1807), engraver, Title page of *The Dying Negro, A Poem*, third edition, 1775.

Authors Thomas Day (1748–1789) and John Bicknell (1746–1787) composed the epic poem *The Dying Negro* about a man who committed suicide before allowing himself to be subjected to enslavement. The title page reproduced here illustrates the climactic moment in the poem and the protagonist’s dying words.

MEDICINE

Medicine in the Age of Enlightenment was a mixture of supposition, superstition, and observation. Many doctors embraced the scientific method, but others persisted in medieval beliefs, such as the “miasma theory” that disease is caused by “bad air.”

The Lapidus collection includes works on disease and medicine, with a particular focus on the epidemic of yellow fever that struck the United States in 1793. Many of them are at the New York University Health Sciences Library.

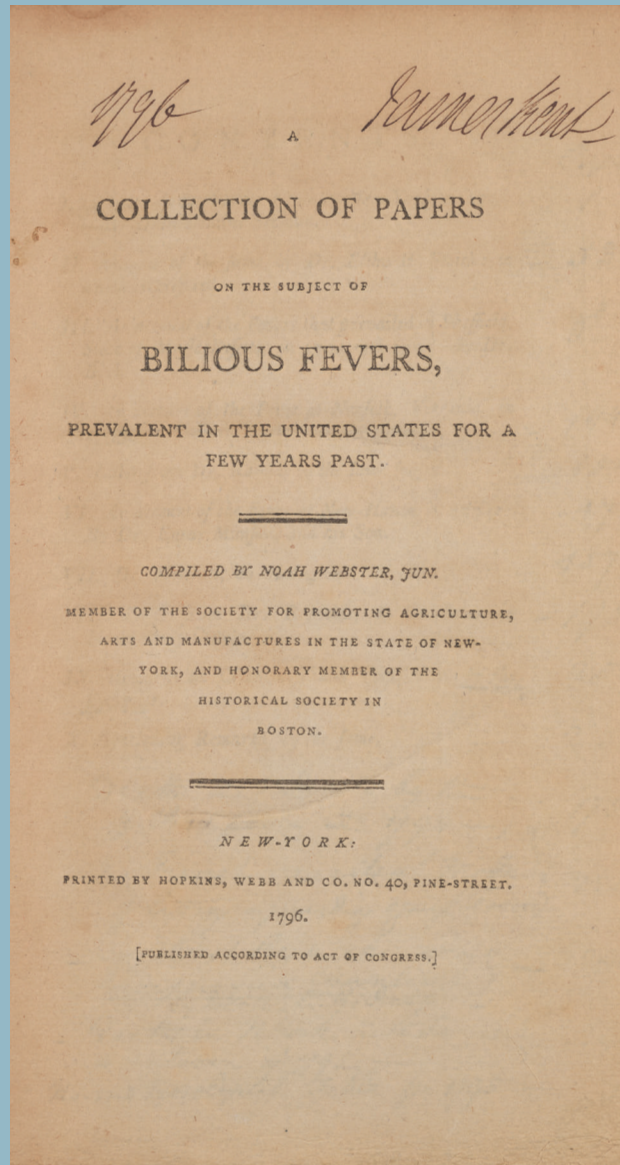


Charles Philibert de Lasteyrie (1759–1849), Color plates from *Observations sur la fièvre jaune, faites à Cadix, en 1819* (*Observations on Yellow Fever, Made in Cadiz, in 1819*), 1820. Wellcome Collection, London.

Yellow fever is a mosquito-borne fatal infectious disease which occurred in epidemics in the 18th and 19th centuries. The illustrations reproduced here demonstrate the progression of the disease, which starts with flu-like symptoms and progresses to abdominal pain and bleeding from the mouth, nose, eyes, and gastrointestinal tract.

“Reason was given to man chiefly to promote his physical happiness.”

—Benjamin Rush, 1799

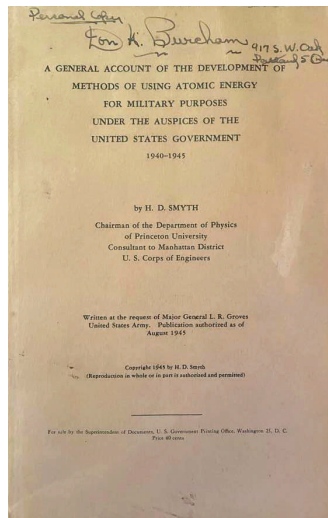


Noah Webster (1758–1843), *A Collection of Papers on the Subject of Bilious Fevers, Prevalent in the United States for a Few Years Past* (New York: Printed by Hopkins, Webb and Co., 1796). NYU Health Sciences Library.

Noah Webster began the study of epidemiology in the United States. He deduced the fact that stagnant water is associated with the spread of disease—but also asserts that foul air is a factor in contagion.

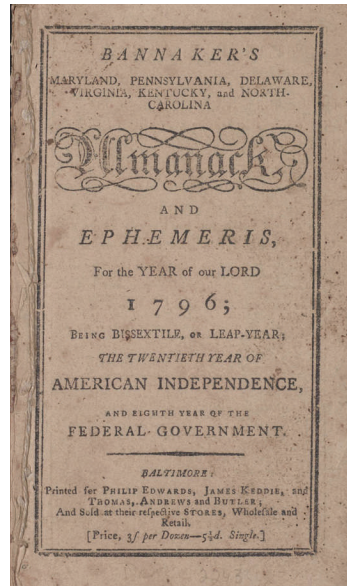
ASTRONOMY AND ATOMIC SCIENCE

The Enlightenment era's emphasis on observation as the key to knowledge is the foundation of modern science. From earlier scrutiny of astronomical phenomena to the detection of subatomic particles, the Lapidus collection—in works concentrated in the New York Historical and the American Antiquarian Society—offers glimpses of the progression from the astrolabe to the nuclear bomb.



Henry De Wolf Smyth (1898–1986), *A General Account of the Development of Methods of Using Atomic Energy for Military Purposes under the Auspices of the United States Government, 1940-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945). The New York Historical.

Henry De Wolf Smyth consulted on the development of atomic bombs. His report shared information about the origins and development of the bomb. Its focus on physics (slighting other fields) shaped postwar perceptions of the project.



Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806), *Bannaker's Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, Kentucky, and North-Carolina Almanack and Ephemeris for the Year of Our Lord 1796* (Baltimore: Printed for Philip Edwards, James Keddie, and Thomas, Andrews and Butler, 1795).

Almanacs were vital for farmers planning their agricultural work for the year. Such information was scrupulously calculated using a tool called the astrolabe to observe and predict the position and movement of the sun and stars.



A modern reproduction of an astrolabe, between 1986–1996.



Joseph Wright Pinxit

THE PHILOSOPHER READING A LECTURE ON THE ORRERY, 1768.

Wm Pether delin. et fecit.

William Pether (circa 1738–1821), from a painting by Joseph Wright of Derby (1734–1797), *The Philosopher Reading a Lecture on the Orrery*, 1768.

A tool of astronomers in the 18th century was the orrery, a mechanical model of our solar system that shows the relative position and motion of the planets, moon, and sun as they orbit.

EXHIBITION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition features works from Princeton University Library's special collections, with items drawn from:
Graphic Arts Collection
Manuscripts Collection
Numismatics Collection
Rare Books

A special thank you to the following organizations for their generous loans to this exhibition:

American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA
Center for Jewish History, New York, NY
Sid and Ruth Lapidus Health Sciences Library,
New York University, New York, NY
The New York Historical, New York, NY
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
New York Public Library, New York, NY
Wolf Law Library, William and Mary Law School,
Williamsburg, VA

EXHIBITION CURATOR

Steven A. Knowlton
Librarian for History and African American Studies

EXHIBITION CONTRIBUTORS

Daedalus Arnold, *Special Collections Intern*
Ashley Baker, *Conservation Technician II*
Lauren Bell, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Wayne Bivens-Tatum, *Librarian for Philosophy, Religion,
and Anthropology*
Eli Boyne, *Preventive Conservator*
Jennifer Cabral-Pierce, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Melody Chen, *Paper Conservator*
Wind Cowles, *Associate Dean, Data, Research and Teaching &
Acting Head of Exhibitions*
Stephen Ferguson, *Associate University Librarian for
External Engagement*
Emily Forney, *Student Assistant*

Fabi Garcia, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Brian George, *Preparator*
Joe Gradl, *Enterprise Infrastructure Services Specialist*
Martyna Gryko, *Conservation Technician I*
Beth Haas, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Tracy Hall, *Library Systems Coordinator*
Will Harris, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Anne Jarvis, *Dean of Libraries*
Brandon Johnson, *Communications Strategist*
Kimberly Leaman, *IT Project Manager*
Mick LeTourneaux, *Book Conservator*
Dan Linke, *Acting Associate University Librarian for
Special Collections*
Mary Marrero, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Jennifer Meyer, *Curatorial Services Coordinator*
Roel Muñoz, *Library Digital Imaging Manager*
William Noel*, *John T. Maltzberger III '55, Associate
University Librarian for Special and Distinctive Collections*
Stephanie Oster, *Publicity Manager*
AnnaLee Pauls, *Reference Services Coordinator, Special
Collections Firestone*
Maren Rozumalski, *Book Conservator*
David Sutton, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Monica Taylor, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Barbara Valenza*, *Director of Library Communications*
Squirrel Walsh, *Digital Imaging Technician*
Stephanie Wiener, *Exhibitions Registrar & Gallery
Operations Manager*

EXHIBITION DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Hudson Archival (Mountainville, NY)
Orangebox Pictures (Hamilton, NJ)
Pure+Applied (New York, NY)
Object Mounts, LLC (Brooklyn, NY)
Princeton University Print and Mail Services
(Princeton, NJ)
Vinyl Bomb (Hamilton Township, NJ)

*IN MEMORIAM

ABOUT THE ELLEN & LEONARD MILBERG GALLERY

At Princeton University Library (PUL), we enrich teaching, learning, and research by providing world-class library services and collections. Our collections showcase the ideas and discoveries of five millennia and represent the highest forms of human achievement. The gallery highlights PUL's world-renowned collections while also drawing upon complementary collections from campus partners and peer institutions.

Stewardship of our rare and often invaluable items requires a commitment to conservation work, climate-controlled storage environments, and retrieval and

special handling processes. While protecting items for future generations is vital, we are also committed to ensuring that today's scholars have both physical and virtual access to our collections to support their research.

The Ellen and Leonard Milberg Gallery provides a state-of-the-art facility where we are able to share these seldom-seen treasures with a wider audience.

For information about our exhibitions:
library.princeton.edu

IMAGE (FRONT COVER): Isaac Cruikshank (circa 1756–circa 1811), *Who Wants Me?*, 1792.

IMAGE (BACK COVER): Thomas Spence (1750–1814), artist; C. James (flourished 1790s), engraver. Conder token, between 1787–1807.

For information about the exhibition, public tours, and related programming:





Princeton University
LIBRARY