Teaching James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* in a Course on the Literature of the U.S. Revolution

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**Abstract:** We discuss how to engage students' curiosity about the American Revolution by designing a course on the literature the Revolution inspired. A natural choice for inclusion in the course is James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy*. Cooper's novel reimagined the Revolution in order to intervene on behalf of the common man in cultural debates regarding class. We discuss how to illustrate these cultural debates to students by utilizing two lesser-known works, William Dunlap's *André* and H.L. Barnum's *Enoch Crosby, or the Spy Unmasked*. We conclude with a discussion of student research projects that illustrate the learning goals addressed by teaching these materials.

Contemporary American culture is saturated with engagement with the American Revolution. As can be seen on any morning commute, Tea Party supporters proudly display "Don't Tread on Me" bumper stickers. Television miniseries such as *John Adams* and *TURN: Washington's Spies* have achieved both popular and critical acclaim. Lin-Manuel Miranda's multiracial revisioning of the Founding Fathers, *Hamilton*, is one of the most momentous recent Broadway musicals. The prevalence of such references to the Revolution illustrates that the question of what it means to remember this war remains culturally pertinent. This relevance offers instructors the opportunity to captivate students' curiosity about the cultural, historical, and political roots of the Revolutionary images they regularly see. Teachers of college literature may achieve this goal by designing a course on the literature the Revolution inspired. Such a course may be designed for either upper-division undergraduates or graduate students.

**The Literature of the U.S. Revolution, American Romanticism, and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy***

Remembrance of the Revolution inspired much romantic literary production beginning in the 1820s. This surge in interest reflected the earliest sustained effort by writers to understand the Revolution as myth after it was no longer lived memory for most
Americans. Therefore, a unit on romantic reimaginings of the Revolution would be an indispensable element in a course that is intended to explore the question of what it means to engage the U.S. Revolution as cultural memory.

The work that spurred this literary phenomenon is James Fenimore Cooper's historical romance *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821). In not only popularizing literary discussion of the war but also the genre of historical romance that would dominate American fiction for decades, *The Spy* set the terms for much future literary discourse regarding the Revolution. The work is also arguably more aesthetically and historically rich than its peers. It is therefore a natural work to include in the course.

Cooper's novel is consistent with more recent Revolutionary reimaginings because it illustrates how remembering the Revolution is a political act. Through its usage of Revolutionary iconography, the Tea Party seeks credibility by associating its small-government ideology with a venerable foundational past, arguing that its policy goals are consistent with the Founders' intentions. By casting African Americans and Latinos to play the Founding Fathers and featuring a hip-hop- and R&B-tinged score, Miranda's *Hamilton* advocates a multiracial understanding of America by making Revolutionary history available to people of color who may struggle to relate to the story of a group of dead, white, frequently slaveholding men. Shortly after the 2016 presidential election, *Hamilton*'s political import exploded in the national consciousness after a highly publicized incident in which Vice President-elect Mike Pence attended a showing. The cast addressed Pence after the show and beseeched his administration to protect the rights of all Americans. Their actions inspired criticism from President-elect Donald Trump as well as much debate about the propriety of the cast's actions, which many liberals viewed as a gracious way to make a crucial political point and many conservatives viewed as sententious and condescending (Mele and Healy). Clearly, Revolutionary memory remains a contentious site. Instructors may illustrate the roots of the political resonances of reimagining the Revolution by explaining *The Spy*'s political dimensions.

What resonances would instructors want to draw students' attention to in the course? Cooper reimagined the Revolution in order to engage a broad Jacksonian-era debate
regarding whether the common man could act on principle rather than self-interest. This debate exploded in the public eye in 1817 when Revolutionary veteran John Paulding petitioned Congress for an extended pension. Paulding was one of the three militiamen who captured a disguised British major John André. Their apprehension of André revealed Benedict Arnold's treachery and averted the potentially devastating loss of West Point. Some praised the three yeoman soldiers—the other two of whom were Isaac Van Wart and David Williams—for their fortuitous discovery as well as for refusing André's attempts at bribery. The three men initially received substantial material rewards for the efforts.

However, on the basis of André's claims that he could have successfully bribed the militiamen if he had possessed readier funds, doubts persisted from the beginning regarding the men's claim to have acted out of a love of liberty. When the aging Paulding petitioned Congress to alleviate burdens brought on by infirmity and the needs of his large family, his request was denied in the wake of arguments made by another Revolutionary veteran, Connecticut Representative Benjamin Tallmadge. Relying on André's account, Tallmadge argued that Paulding and his fellow captors were not patriots at all but rather freebooters motivated solely by greed. The militiamen, Tallmadge explained, would have accepted André's bribe if they had not doubted his ability to produce the promised sums and had they not thought an even greater reward was forthcoming from the Continental Army. Tallmadge's accusations spurred a contentious debate in the ensuing years. Supporters of André's captors warmly defended the militiamen's characters as devoted adherents to liberty's cause, while others agreed with Tallmadge (Cray 371-73).

Underlying this pension policy discussion were a series of questions related to class and Revolutionary memory. Had the Revolution been won, as many believed, by virtuous republican "citizen soldiers," yeomen who laid down the plow to take up arms out of love of freedom? Or had it been won, as elites believed, by virtue of the leadership of genteel professional soldiers, with the yeomanry acting in a merely supporting role? Was the lower class capable of acting upon principle, or did its lack of good breeding entail the inability to act on anything but crass material desires, placing it in need of the gentry's direction if it were to play a positive role in the conflict? Were the words of Major André, widely admired
by genteel Americans for his talents and polished persona despite his involvement in the Arnold plot, worth more than those of the militiamen solely because of André's distinguished pedigree (Cray 373)?

Over the course of the early Jacksonian era, national consensus would decide for Paulding, Van Wart, and Williams (Cray 374-75). Instructors may stress to students literature's role in this development by explaining the part Cooper's *The Spy* played in the national imagination. The popular novel vindicated the common man's principled contribution to the Revolution via Cooper's depiction of the peddler spy, Harvey Birch. Birch asserts that he has "been a peddler from his youth" (33). Although given that his skills in espionage suggest that this assertion may be a cover, "his skill in the occupation [of peddler] went far to prove the truth of [his] declaration" (33). Although due to the "superior intelligence which belonged to his father, it was thought they had known better fortune in the land of their nativity," Birch exhibits "the common manners of the country, and was in no way distinguished from men of his class, but by his acuteness, and the mystery which enveloped his movements" (33). Cooper emphasizes that Birch is not well-educated, as exhibited, for instance, in Birch's non-standard spelling of "recommend" as "riccommind" (220). He is, in other words, not merely low-born but also not genteel. As such, "[t]o a superficial observer, avarice would seem his ruling passion" (35-36), and most of the novel's characters assume that Birch has sold himself to the crown in his work as a British spy. Their prejudice against Birch is consistent with cultural attitudes regarding peddlers and spies, both of whom were thought to be even more avaricious and unprincipled than usual for the non-genteel (Fink 149, 152; Rose 96-98).

Yet as instructors will want to stress, the careful reader will observe frequent cause to doubt whether greed is truly Birch's governing motivator. His eagerness to give a freebooting band of Skinners his life's savings so that they will give him a few moments with his dying father shows that he values his filial bond more than money (131). This devotion to his parent is also on display during the father's funeral procession, when Birch sees his persecutor Captain Lawton, contemplates taking flight, but instead chooses to risk capture to do his duty to his father's memory (171). Other characters' avarice contrasts greatly with
these and other of Birch’s principled actions. The crass housekeeper Katy Haynes repeatedly bemoans that Birch is “wasteful of his money” (274). Moreover, Captain Lawton, a character whose opinion the reader learns to respect, comes to admire Birch after witnessing the peddler perform many noble acts. Lawton phrases his admiration for Birch in the language of principle and honor some withheld from the common man. After Birch warns Lawton of an ambush, Lawton states that although Birch is a spy, “he has a heart above enmity, and a soul that would honor a soldier” (233). Later, when Lawton has an opportunity to capture Birch after Birch rescues Sarah Wharton from the burning Wharton mansion, Lawton allows Birch to flee, stating that his duty “cannot require her children to forget gratitude and honor” (267). By contrast, Cooper uses Lawton to denounce the novel’s most morally dubious characters. For instance, after delivering Birch to Captain Lawton, the leader of the Skinners tells Lawton that he feels Paulding’s party should have accepted André’s bribe (210). Lawton proceeds vehemently to denounce the Skinners’ greed.

In the novel’s conclusion, Lawton’s intuition is proven correct when Cooper reveals Birch to be a double-agent working for George Washington. What is more, rather than laboring for money, Birch endangers his life solely out of his commitment to liberty. When Washington offers Birch payment, Birch contemptuously asks, “Does your excellency think that I have exposed my life, and blasted my character, for money?” When Washington voices the genteel view that yeoman spies act from no other motive by obtusely asking, “If not for money, what then?,” Birch eloquently retorts that he—and implicitly, his class—fights for the same reason Washington does: “What has brought your excellency into the field? For what do you daily and hourly expose your precious life to battle and the halter? What is there about me to mourn, when such men as you risk their all for our country? No, no, no—not a dollar of your gold will I touch; poor America has need of it all!” (398). This stirring exchange helped popularize the idea of the yeomanry’s principled contributions to the Revolution.¹

¹ As Ewart (see esp. 61-62, 74-75) explains, while Birch—not to mention Leatherstocking—was instrumental in popularizing the common man’s contributions to the United States’s founding, Cooper’s fictional creations illustrate his investment in what Beard calls the “Revolutionary mythos” (85) that is often not apparent in Cooper’s more formulaically conservative non-fiction prose. Cooper increasingly
Contextualizing *The Spy* Using William Dunlap's *André* and H.L. Barnum's *Enoch Crosby*

To enable students better to understand the cultural debates Cooper engaged, instructors may draw students' attention to a variety of relevant, lesser-known texts. In doing so, instructors may achieve not only course-specific goals related to better understanding Revolutionary cultural memory but also the broader objective of providing students with practice in using non-canonical writings to place works of literature in illuminating cultural contexts. Two useful works for this purpose are William Dunlap's tragedy *André* (1798) and H.L. Barnum's biography of Birch's possible prototype, *The Spy Unmasked; or, Memoirs of Enoch Crosby* (1828). Both works can be easily shared with students: They are readily available on the worldwide web, and Dunlap's drama is packaged in the Penguin edition *Early American Drama*, which contains other plays that instructors might consider including in a course on literature and the U.S. Revolution.

Instructors may link *André* to Cooper to examine the seeming irony of Patriot admiration of the British major and how that esteem illustrates dynamics of Revolutionary memory and class. The play presents André as a tragic hero, an admirable man who yet deserves his fate due to the momentary lapse in judgment he displayed by participating in Arnold's treachery. Dunlap enhances the tragedy of André's demise by portraying the British major eloquently admitting to his guilt. André bemoans that in taking on the role of a spy he acted "[a]gainst my reason, my declared opinion" by briefly forgetting his contempt for "[a]ll bribery base, all treacherous tricks in war" (77). *André* presents sufficient aesthetic richness to reward close reading and is of such cultural interest that instructors may consider assigning it in its entirety and discussing it over multiple class sessions. In addition to comparing the work to Cooper to achieve the aforementioned goals of a unit on romantic reimaginings of the Revolution, instructors could pair it with Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* in a unit on the early national stage.

grew suspicious of the politics and culture of the masses during his career. He instead insisted that political authority ought to be invested in gentlemen, who had sufficient leisure to study the matters requisite to appropriate policy-making. Such gentlemen, Cooper contended, could be trusted with the maintenance of a stable polity.
However, if instructors feel too strapped for time to devote that much attention to Dunlap, they may more briefly introduce the author and his work and draw students' attention to specific passages that provide context for *The Spy*. Dunlap (1766-1839) was somewhat like Cooper in important respects. Cooper was a nationalist who sought to cultivate his readers' esteem for the Revolution's achievements. He also, though, married into the loyalist DeLancey family and developed an empathy for their position that informed his sympathetic depiction of Henry Wharton in *The Spy* and his broader characterization of the conflict as a civil war that pitted friends and kinsmen against each other rather than a war against foreign invaders. Similarly, although Dunlap presented the Revolution in a positive light in *André*, his father was a loyalist. Their family spent Dunlap's formative adolescent years in New York City near the occupying British army (Richards 58), an experience that colored Dunlap's view of British figures such as André.

The play's reception further illustrates how it engages crucial conflicts regarding Revolutionary memory that Cooper also addresses. These complexities are precisely what make the play interesting. *André*'s opening performance on March 30, 1798 in New York City achieved moderate financial and critical success. However, one scene drew a negative response. The Patriot soldier Bland, to whom André had shown mercy earlier in the war, pleads to Washington for leniency against the captive. When Washington insists on the necessity of acting consistently with the laws of war, Bland responds—in one of the chief scenes to which instructors will wish to draw students' attention—with the following passionate words:

> The country that forgets to reverence virtue;
> That makes no difference 'twixt the sordid wretch,
> Who, for reward, risks treason's penalty,
> And him unfortunate, whose duteous service
> Is, by mere accident, so chang'd in form,
> As to assume guilt's semblance, I serve not:
> Scorn to serve. I have a soldier's honor,


But 'tis in union with a freeman's judgment,
And when I act, both prompt. Thus from my helm
I tear, what once I proudly thought, the badge
Of virtuous fellowship. (86-87)

The scene, which originally concluded with Bland indignantly tearing off his cockade, drew hisses and boos from patriotic theater-goers. Dunlap added lines to the scene for future performances to mitigate its unpatriotic tone (Richards 59). Explaining the incident in a preface to the published play, Dunlap admitted that he had injudiciously "gone near to offend the veterans of the American army who were present on the first night, and who not knowing the sequel of the action, felt much disposed to condemn him" (64). However, he admonishes his detractors to "remember the diversity of opinion which agitated the minds of men at that time, on the question of the propriety of putting André to death" (65). Indeed, like Bland, many Americans viewed Washington's decision to hang André as one of his few mistakes, a fact to which the play clearly alludes in its depiction of Washington as a man who may err on the side of the letter of rather than the spirit of the law (Richards 60-61). Response to the cockade scene illustrates the difficulty Dunlap found in reconciling American admiration of André's demonstrated gentlemanly breeding with nationalist sentiment.

While the play's discussion of the touchy subject of André's death thus reopened divisive Revolutionary wounds, readers will at the same time observe the glaring absence of Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart, who do not appear by name. In another passage to which instructors will want to direct students, the militiamen are briefly referred to in the opening action when Melville informs Bland of André's capture:

The brave young man, who this day dies, was seiz'd
Within our bounds, in rustic garb disguis'd.
He offer'd bribes to tempt the band that seiz'd him;
But the rough farmer, for his country arm'd,
That soil defending which his ploughshare turn’d,
Those laws, his father chose, and he approv’d,
Cannot, as mercenary soldiers may,
Be brib’d to sell the public-weal for gold. (71)

The play thus approves of the good character the three militiamen showed in refusing André’s bribes. However, it relegates their role in the André affair to a side note, instead focusing on the tragedy of the momentary lapse of judgment that leads to André’s demise and the impact that demise has on American admirers such as Bland. All of the major characters, from Washington (referred to as "the General"), André’s patriot friend Bland, to André himself, are well bred. At a time when many genteel Americans aligned with Tallmadge in remembering the Revolution as the achievement of erudite political theorists and gentleman soldiers, it was possible for Dunlap to represent yeoman militiamen as mere adjuncts in liberty’s cause and to portray the André episode with only the most oblique of references to the questions of class that occupied the public consciousness during the debates spurred by Paulding’s pension application (Cray 383-84). This selective memory would become less likely after Cooper more openly addressed questions of class in the 1820s.

Instructors will probably not elect to assign Barnum’s *Enoch Crosby* in its entirety. An attempt to profiteer off the popularity of Cooper’s novel, the work could hardly be considered aesthetically sophisticated. Moreover, it is likely for the most part fraudulent. To be sure, there was a historical Enoch Crosby, and it is possible that he was one of Birch’s prototypes. As Cooper explains in *The Spy’s* preface, Birch was inspired by an old war story shared by Cooper’s family friend John Jay, who was part of the Continental Army’s espionage arm. Jay was fond of sharing a moving story of a spy who lost his reputation while posing as a loyalist in his efforts to gain intelligence for the American cause. When Jay offered the spy payment, the individual refused, stating the nation and its independence effort had greater need of the funds (Cooper 3-7). Jay’s spy may have been Crosby. In 1832 Crosby submitted a deposition supporting his request for an extended pension, and
while he did not report the crucial element of refusing payment, the similarities between his stated career and that of Jay's anecdotal agent remain similar enough for the connection to be plausible (McDowell 116). (Crosby's deposition is readily available to teachers and researchers via James H. Pickering's 1966 reproduction in *New York History*.)

The plausibility of Barnum's account ends there, though. As Tremaine McDowell explains in a study of Birch's historical prototypes, comparison of *The Spy Unmasked* to Crosby's deposition and intelligence committee minutes kept by Jay reveal that Barnum's book includes numerous feats of Crosby's not related elsewhere. Given that Crosby would have naturally mentioned such incidents in a deposition in which it was in his interest to emphasize how often he endangered his life for the cause, it is likely that the unique incidents in Barnum are fraudulent (McDowell 116-19). Moreover, many of them, such as Crosby's persecution at the hands of a zealous American captain and his escape with a woman's aid, feature prominently in *The Spy*. Cooper's novel is likely the source for much of Barnum's biography (McDowell 119).

However, introducing *Enoch Crosby* in the classroom enables instructors to achieve important goals. One is that the work illustrates the market for peripheral, frequently questionable biographies, exposés, and other supposedly illuminating material that could crop up around popular novels such as *The Spy*. Students' ability to engage the material will be bolstered when they realize that just as avid fans of today's cultural phenomena consume or at least observe the appearance of unauthorized peripheral material dedicated to their favorite works, authors, and actors, so too did Cooper's readers. Not all novelists achieved enough notoriety to support a market for works like Barnum's biography. *Enoch Crosby* proves the impact of Cooper's novel and brings its cultural context to life for students.

Having used *Enoch Crosby* to illustrate Cooper's impact, instructors will find it valuable to draw attention to what *Enoch Crosby* reveals about what Barnum felt to be the most meaningful aspects of *The Spy*, the aspects that it would be most important to play up to appeal to Cooper's readers. Crucial amongst the passages instructors should highlight to
achieve this goal are those in which Barnum seeks to capitalize on Cooper's novel by emphasizing similarities between Crosby's origins and those of Birch.

Like Birch, Crosby is a child not of wealth but of parents who are moderately stable financially but who suffer misfortune in Crosby's adolescence. Just as "from something of superior intelligence which belonged to his father, it was thought [the Birches] had known better fortune in the land of their nativity" (33), Crosby, prior to his father's losses, "passed the happy period of childhood" on a moderately successful farm, "blest with parents whose tenderness and affection were only equalled by the rectitude of their lives; and indulged with every reasonable gratification that moderate affluence could procure" (18).

Although like Birch relatively uneducated (e.g., Cooper 220), Crosby enjoys some education, "assisted by such precarious literary instruction as could be conveniently obtained in a thinly populated district, at a period when the state of education was not very promising in any part of the country" (19). However, just as his father's circumstances force Birch into the position of "pursu[ing] with avidity his humble barter" (33) after the family purchases a small Westchester County holding, so too does the Crosby family's sudden reduction "to poverty and distress" make "it necessary for the son, at the age of sixteen, to leave, for the first time, the shelter of his paternal roof, and seek his own fortune in an untried world" (27). However, whereas Birch becomes a peddler, his purported prototype "became an apprentice to a worthy man who resided in the eastern part of Phillipstown, since called Kent, in the county of Putnam. Here he was taught the 'art and mystery of a cordwainer,' and faithfully fulfilled his term of service, which terminated on the fourth day of January, 1771, that day completing his twenty-first year" (28).

As should be clear, Barnum's exposition of Crosby's origins is meant to set the stage for the same argument Cooper made in The Spy: America's yeoman partisans did not act merely on material self-interest but rather are to be commended for their principled contributions to the Revolution. The fact that Barnum emphasizes this argument in a work that was clearly meant merely to make money by satisfying the public taste suggests the extent to which Cooper's views had by 1828 won in the court of public opinion despite having been a matter of acrimonious debate a decade earlier.
Barnum's nod to these views is also evident in his depiction of André, which contrasts strongly with that of Dunlap. Dunlap appealed to genteel views of André as a man who exhibited a lapse of judgment but whose elite breeding and life of principle ultimately placed his character above suspicion. While Dunlap himself did not excoriate André’s captors, many of André's admirers did not extend the militiamen a similar benefit of the doubt. Despite the militiamen's service to the cause, they were often construed as brigands due to their yeoman origins. By contrast, whereas Barnum follows Cooper in praising Crosby's dedication to liberty's cause despite Crosby's humble origins and choice to serve in the dubious role of a spy, Barnum—here going farther than Cooper, whose empathy for loyalism engendered respect for British heroes—makes a concerted effort to challenge sentimental views of André in an extended appendix on the matter.

Whereas Dunlap had only mentioned the three captors in passing, Barnum praises them by name, writing that "Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart...were poor, but reputable men, and exhibited a striking instance of disinterestedness and fidelity. Andre offered them large bribes, but they were not to be corrupted" (199-200). Based on this exchange, Barnum concludes that "it is at last in the integrity of the well-informed yeomanry of a country that the strength and security of every free government is to be found. Wo to that government which ever suffers this class of men to remain in ignorance, or to be exposed to corruption!" (201). Barnum proceeds to question several ways in which André had been depicted as a tragic figure. He claims that André's letter to Benedict Arnold stating that John Anderson (André's alias) had been captured, construed as a generous attempt to warn Arnold, has been given "a character which it by no means merits." The letter "was obviously an ingenious artifice to save himself" by procuring Arnold's command that the captors release André (201-02).

Barnum continues by examining André's letter to Washington, commonly praised for André's admission of his identity and his noble claim that he wrote not to secure leniency for himself but rather to defend his honor. Barnum questions both claim and praise, arguing that the letter's chief purpose "was to save his own life by inciting fear for that of others" (emphasis original). Citing André's reference to "some gentlemen at Charleston, who being
either on parole or under protection, were engaged in a conspiracy against us; though their situation is not similar, they are objects who may be sent in exchange for me, or persons whom the treatment I receive might effect" (emphasis original), Barnum marvels "that the ungenerous character of this paragraph has never been properly animadverted upon" when other passages had been so routinely lauded (203).

Barnum concludes his discussion by addressing the question of whether André deserved an ignominious death on the gallows. Washington's choice not to permit the more honorable execution by gunshot that André requested had been frequently criticized as one of the few blots on the commander's judgment. Dunlap's play, for instance, alludes to this view. Barnum vindicates Washington's decision on the grounds that André's actions and his judges' demonstrated wisdom prove that he fully deserved his fate.

Barnum points out that "Washington did not order his execution summarily, as by the laws of war he would have been justified to do, but commanded a board of general officers to be convened, and submitted the case to their consideration." After describing the credentials of this board, Barnum concludes that "if dignity, worth, and service can give weight to the decision of a court, never was one constituted more worthy to be respected. There were in it six Major Generals and eight Brigadiers. They were unanimously of opinion, that Andre must suffer as a spy" (205-06). Barnum's censure of André further illustrates his acknowledgement of the change in public views regarding the respective roles of the gentry and commoners in the Revolution. By drawing students' attention to contrasts between Barnum and the earlier attitudes regarding André, his captors, class, and Revolutionary memory represented by Tallmadge and Dunlap, instructors may emphasize the shift in cultural consensus Cooper's The Spy spurred during the 1820s.

The Spy and Undergraduate Research

Given its aesthetic richness and the historical impact illustrated by Enoch Crosby, The Spy provides students with an excellent opportunity not only to achieve the learning goals outlined thus far but also to develop their research skills in both literature and history. Auburn University at Montgomery English-History double major Kelhi DePace wrote two
papers on *The Spy*. Her experiences working on these projects illustrate *The Spy*'s utility for budding historically minded literary critics.

The first was a contextually informed close reading of the novel and the second a more heavily researched analysis. In Spring 2013 DePace wrote the first paper, a seven-page analysis of the novel for John Havard's class on the literature of the American Revolution. Through an analysis of the novel's characters in light of its historical context, specifically André's arrest and the associated class issues, DePace illuminated how Cooper wrote *The Spy* with a purpose in mind, namely to reshape the common man as an American hero. Harvey Birch is this new heroic prototype, and through the gradual disclosure of Birch's character in the novel, his honor is shown to the audience.

This novel provides students an excellent opportunity to analyze character as presented in long and complicated stories. Birch is elusive; Cooper does not provide the complete picture of his life, motives, and goal when he is first mentioned. Other characters do not know how to judge him, and their misgivings color the audience's perceptions. However, by his own actions and through the novel's culmination, Cooper makes Birch's character and the novel's overall message clear. Only at the novel's end can readers look back and see how Birch's character was revealed throughout the story. Readers can then look back and see that this common man was the hero all along. In addition to providing students the opportunity to draw out the details of a character while wrestling with the novel's message, the work also requires them to understand the historical context of the story and the author.

Birch's character and the significance of honor in common men for the young republic is not the only area of inquiry that *The Spy* offers to students. For a Spring 2014 history class on the American Revolution, DePace returned to *The Spy*, this time compiling research for a 20-page paper. DePace followed several avenues of research before reaching her conclusions in this project. First of all, following one of the course's thematic questions—how revolutionary was the Revolution?—DePace considered Cooper's ambivalently radical and conservative interpretations of the conflict. To achieve this goal, she researched Cooper's background, including his and his wife's familial relationship to the
Revolution, his upbringing, and his political affiliation. A number of sources proved fruitful in this endeavor, including James Grossman's *James Fenimore Cooper*, Wayne Franklin's *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years*; A Historical Guide to James Fenimore Cooper, edited by Leland S. Person; and Robert E. Long's *James Fenimore Cooper*. Through works such as these, she also looked into Cooper's possible personal sources for his story given his contacts and his own proximity to the "Neutral Ground" of Westchester, New York.

Second of all, this extended research and discussion led to exploring other historical realities presented in the novel, realities that students are often unfamiliar with; here, we find another reason why *The Spy* is a valuable novel for modern students. DePace conducted research concerning loyalists in New York, especially in Westchester. Other historical realities included the story of and response to John André's capture and death; the activities of Skinners and Cowboys in the Westchester area; and even minor figures, such as camp followers.

Finally, DePace looked at the history of spies during the Revolution and how spies were viewed during that period and in Cooper's own time. For these discussions, a number of books and articles proved useful, chief among them being Richard M. Ketchum's *Divided Loyalties: How the American Revolution Came to New York*, Janice Potter's *The Liberty We Seek: Loyalist Ideology in Colonial New York and Massachusetts*, and Alexander Rose's *Washington's Spies: The Story of America's First Spy Ring*. More specific to the history of Westchester County, New York, DePace used digitized versions of Henry B. Dawson's *Westchester County, New York, During the American Revolution* (1886) and "Minutes of the Committee and of the First Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York, December 11, 1776—September 23, 1778, with Collateral Documents" from the New York Historical Society. While all of these topics, and Cooper's use of them in *The Spy*, are worthy of distinct research and writing, the wide array of sources necessary to look into so many diverse topics provides students practice in filtering through research possibilities while keeping topic and thesis in focus.

Lastly, in the historical discussion of spies, DePace tackled a literary question, namely that of genre: How did Cooper style his novel after Scott but also create an
American romance using American topics while including a disrespectful character type? Besides many of the aforementioned historical works, Brett F. Woods’s *Neutral Ground: A Political History of Espionage Fiction* and James D. Wallace’s *Early Cooper and His Audience* provided valuable information and insight into DePace’s literary research. From this perspective, *The Spy* enables students to conduct historical and literary research and analysis side-by-side, an integration many students do not attempt at the undergraduate level.

Through these diverse threads, DePace argued in the paper’s culmination that while Cooper held to a conservative interpretation of the Revolution (namely, that he wanted the Revolution to spur the enduring patriotism of his contemporary Americans in the new republic), he also hinted at the reality of social strife, especially classism, during the Revolution. His presentation of Harvey Birch, spy, common man, and hero, enabled him to expand upon Scott’s fictional prototypes he was working with and to make a significant development not just in literature but also in the popular conception of what it means to be an American. In both of the classes in which DePace explored the novel, *The Spy* served as a context in which to investigate the political and social issues at play in the Revolution, how it was interpreted by the generations directly following, and, more broadly, how literature is a part of history. Cooper’s *The Spy* provides instructors and students a plethora of valuable topics for research and discussion, allowing students to sharpen their academic skills while tackling the ever-relevant question of the common man in the developing story of America.

**Concluding Remarks**

This essay has provided suggestions regarding how to use *The Spy, André,* and *Enoch Crosby* to illustrate to students the political resonances involved in creative acts of reimagining the American Revolution. DePace’s research projects show the instructional utility in using *The Spy* to these ends. As recent discourse regarding "Don't Tread on Me" flags and *Hamilton* demonstrate, how one remembers the United States's Revolutionary founding says much about one's ideological leanings and understanding of what it means to be American. Students can learn about the cultural roots of such contemporary phenomena...
via study of *The Spy*, which will enhance their appreciation of the stakes involved in literary culture as well as their ability to engage in a purposive, self-aware manner with that culture.
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