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A photograph by Lewis Hine of a ten-year-old newsboy selling near a saloon off Market Square in Providence. No. 3207. This photograph and the others that follow are part of the collections of the Slater Mill Historic Site. The Hine photographs were the gift of Mrs. C. Raymond Munson in memory of Alice Hunt and Edith Woodhead Marshall. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.



Lewis Hine's Photography and Reform in Rhode Island

by Stephen Victor*

Lewis Hine, one of the country's leading photographers of social conditions, left behind an amazing photographic record of working and living conditions in Rhode Island. His photographs are poignant reminders of the hardships some people faced in the early years of the twentieth century. But Hine's photographs are significant for another reason as well. They reflect the goals, methods, and presuppositions of a particular kind of progressivism, a particular approach to reform that emphasized humanitarian concerns above all others. When Hine worked in Rhode Island in 1912, he was associated with the National Child Labor Committee and the Consumers' League of Rhode Island, two groups that advocated humanitarian reform. Hine's photographs, therefore, tell us a great deal not only about the plight of poor people, and especially poor children, who lived in the state in 1912, but also about the ways that reformers sought to bring public attention to that plight, so that the lives of the disadvantaged might be improved.

To understand Hine's photographic record of working and living conditions in Rhode Island, one must first understand the aims of the two organizations that brought him to the state. The National Child Labor Committee, Hine's employer at the time, was an organization dedicated to improving the lot of children. It worked, often in consort with other groups, to better all aspects of life for children, an approach that led beyond child labor to health, education and housing and ultimately to working conditions for their mothers and by extension to women in general. The concern with children was central to the humanitarian progressives. For them, according to Robert Wiebe,

The child was the carrier of tomorrow's hope whose innocence and freedom made him singularly receptive to education in rational, humane behavior. Protect him, nurture him, and in his manhood he would create that bright new world of the progressives' vision.¹

The National Child Labor Committee had close ties with the Consumers' League of Rhode Island to carry out its programs in Rhode Island. This alliance was not unusual. It was common for humanitarian reform groups to work together in the same causes, especially one as popular as child welfare.

The Consumers' League of Rhode Island was affiliated with the Na-

*The author is special exhibits curator at the Slater Mill Historic Site and project director for the exhibit "Things to be Corrected, Things to be Appreciated: Photographs by Lewis Hine." The exhibit, which this essay accompanies, may be seen at the Wilkinson Gallery at Slater Mill from March to May 1982 and at the Museum of Rhode Island History at Aldrich House from June to September 1982. The exhibit and associated programs are partially funded by a grant from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities. The author would like to thank his Slater Mill colleagues Patrick M. Malone and Thomas E. Leary for their assistance with this essay. Jerry Kearns of the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress provided valuable assistance in compiling the checklist.

1. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967), 169.

2. Maud Nathan, *The Story of an Epoch-Making Movement* (New York, 1926), passim.

3. *Ibid.*, 214.

4. *Providence Journal*, Oct. 17, 1968.

5. At its founding in 1901, Judge Charles C. Mumford, who would be more acceptable socially than a woman, was chosen president.

6. John D. Bunker, "Urban Liberalism in Rhode Island, 1909-1919," *Rhode Island History*, XXX (1971), 45-46.

7. Nathan, *Story of an Epoch-Making Movement*, 217.

8. Consumers' League of Rhode Island (hereafter cited as CLRI), Secretary's Annual Report, 1905, John Hay Library, Brown University.

9. *Ibid.*

10. CLRI, Minutes of Annual Meeting, Jan. 15, 1910, John Hay Library, Brown University.

tional League, which in 1899 consolidated several local organizations sharing the same faith in the use of the consumer's tremendous economic power to protect helpless workers from exploitation. At first, the National League's founding chapters had been concerned with reforming the working conditions of clerks in department stores. That concern remained important but was only one of the many areas of reform that League members confronted.²

The Rhode Island group was an offshoot of the Rhode Island Council of Women. Founded in 1901, the Consumers' League of Rhode Island grew to over 300 members in 1912, the year of its incorporation.³ One of its most active members was Alice W. Hunt. After education at Wellesley and some years teaching in Connecticut and at Hope High School in Providence, she became executive secretary of the Rhode Island League in 1908. During a stay in Chicago, Miss Hunt met Mrs. Florence Kelley, an avid reformer and well-known social worker, as well as first General Secretary of the National Consumers' League. Mrs. Kelley inspired Miss Hunt to devote her life to reform. Miss Hunt remained the principal staff member of the Rhode Island League from 1908 until 1951 when, at her recommendation, the League dissolved, its mission accomplished.⁴ In 1930 Miss Hunt was elected president of the group, a position she kept until 1951.⁵

Children's welfare was a particular concern of the Rhode Island League and of Alice Hunt. Annual reports show the continuing efforts of the League to improve conditions, especially working conditions, for children. In these endeavors, the League's goals coincided with those of the state's large ethnic working class, represented by the Democratic party. The Consumers' League and the Democratic party would seem to have had different economic interests and social class origins, but the particular issues of working conditions and child labor served as a common focus. Most of the legislation for which the League campaigned became law through the efforts of the Democrats.⁶

In 1903 the League was instrumental in procuring legislation to prohibit night work in industry for children under sixteen.⁷ Similarly, it endorsed the Factory Inspection Act amendment, passed in 1905, increasing the factory inspector's power over manufacturing and mercantile establishments.⁸ The Rhode Island League seems to have worked with both the National Child Labor Committee and the State Child Labor Committee in seeing that the bill was passed; the National Child Labor Committee sent its general secretary, Owen Lovejoy, to investigate Rhode Island mills as part of the lobbying effort.⁹

In January 1910, in conjunction with the National Child Labor Committee's annual meeting in Boston, the Consumers' League of Rhode Island held a child labor meeting in Providence.¹⁰ The League encouraged amendments to the factory laws of the state that would prohibit children under sixteen from work between 8:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. and would prevent the employment of illiterate children under sixteen. The Consumers' League also helped pass a law in 1912 prohibiting

messengers under twenty-one from working after 10:00 P.M., and in 1915 a law prohibiting children under sixteen from selling after 9:00 P.M.¹¹

The Consumers' League was also concerned with reforming conditions for women: in 1913 it managed to have working hours for women and for children under sixteen reduced to a maximum of ten hours a day and fifty-four hours a week, a restriction applying to all enterprises.¹² In addition to hours of work, the League managed to reform several aspects of working conditions related to health. Thanks to its efforts, employers had to provide seats for women employees, get rid of the common cup and towel (thought to spread disease), and eliminate the "Kiss of Death" shuttle in textile mills. (To thread this shuttle, a weaver had to draw the thread through an eyelet by sucking, thereby inhaling fibers, dust, and possibly disease at the same time.¹³)

The National Child Labor Committee and the Consumers' League of Rhode Island shared not only goals but also methods. Both organizations used education and political action to achieve their ends. Public lectures, conferences, and exhibits were principal means of education. Annual reports of both organizations detail numbers of lectures given by members, reports of conferences, and accounts of exhibitions they sponsored or in which they participated.¹⁴ Information presented both to the general public and in lobbying efforts had to be accurate, so detailed investigations were undertaken to provide the basis for educational and political activities. Along with his photographic work, Lewis Hine not only carried out investigations for the National League but also gave lectures and supervised the exhibit department.

To the humanitarian reformers there was no question that education would be effective. In fact, they had such faith in the human spirit that they assumed "an automatic connection between accurate data and rational action."¹⁵ The differences between right and wrong were so clear, these reformers felt, that they had only to present evidence that an evil existed for corrective action to be taken. The League's annual report for 1916 explained: "It is absolutely necessary that people understand the facts. When they once understand, they will do what is right—namely, demand the necessary legislation to safeguard the boys and girls and women who must work in this state."¹⁶

Political action, as noted earlier, was another part of the humanitarian reformers' program. They worked to establish laws eliminating the most patent ills and to create administrative and regulatory agencies, which would be staffed with workers who could make sure that reforms were carried out. Annual reports of the League, for example, show that its members worked closely with the state factory inspectors. The reports express appreciation to the inspectors, "who have promptly investigated all cases of violation of the factory laws reported by the League. The Secretary [Alice W. Hunt] is especially grateful to the Factory Inspectors for conducting her through mills which generally allow no visitors."¹⁷ In its cooperation with the factory inspectors,

11. Nathan, *Story of an Epoch-Making Movement*, 217; CLRI, *Eleventh Annual Report* (n.p., 1913), 10, 18–19; CLRI, *Fourteenth Annual Report* (n.p., 1916), 25, 27–28.

12. CLRI, *Twelfth Annual Report* (n.p., 1914), 9–10.

13. By the time the "Kiss of Death" shuttle was eliminated, the self-threading shuttle of the Draper-Northrop automatic loom had already made it obsolete.

14. For the National Child Labor Committee see the annual reports of the General Secretary in *Child Labor Bulletin*; for the Consumers' League of Rhode Island see its *Annual Reports*.

15. Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 181.

16. CLRI, *Fifteenth Annual Report* (n.p., 1917), 10.

17. CLRI, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 15.

18. Nathan, *Story of an Epoch-Making Movement*, 67ff.

19. See, for example, Lewis W. Hine, "The High Cost of Child Labor," *Child Labor Bulletin*, III (May 1914), 63-67.

20. Slater Mill Historic Site, Pawtucket, R.I., has a collection of fifty-nine Hine prints. They are the gift of Mrs. C. Raymond Munson in memory of Alice Hunt and Edith Woodhead Marshall. See the checklist following this essay. Two of Slater Mill's photographs are from Hine's April 1909 visit. A card file at the Library of Congress of pictures that were taken for the National Child Labor Committee lists about thirty-five photographs from that trip. Two of them are published in Judith Mara Gutman, *Lewis W. Hine and the American Social Conscience* (New York, 1967), 88, 97.

21. One of the June 1909 photographs is published in Gutman, *Lewis W. Hine and the American Social Conscience*, 75.

22. Lewis Hine, *America & Lewis Hine, Photographs 1904-1940* (Millerton, N.Y., 1977), 18.

23. CLRL, Minutes of Board of Directors' Meeting, Jan. 5, 1912, 36, John Hay Library, Brown University.

the Consumers' League expressed its underlying faith in political and administrative solutions to society's ills.

Another method in the League's reform efforts was consumer sanction. The National Consumers' League, of which the Rhode Island League was part, had established a program that endorsed items manufactured under clean and healthy conditions; approved products were entitled to bear a label of the National Consumers' League.¹⁸ Here again the League was relying on the good will of all people, in this instance consumers, to achieve its reform goals.

The methods of these reform organizations had their roots in middle-class values. They presumed that those values were universally shared and beyond question. They were certain that no right-thinking person could question that child labor, work in the home, gambling, saloons, trash heaps and dirt were bad, and that education, stimulating work, temperance and cleanliness were good. Furthermore, the reformers had a tremendous faith in the country's economic system. The abuse of that system, the reformers said, was responsible for the plight of so many people. A gradual transformation would cure society's ills; no revolution or destruction was required. What was morally sound, they believed, would turn out to be economically sound. According to these reformers, a misunderstanding of economic benefits had encouraged families and manufacturers to put children to work. If child labor were prohibited, they argued, the quality of production would improve, workers would be better trained, and wages for adults would rise to higher levels, appropriate to their greater efficiency.¹⁹

The humanitarian reformers' fundamental faith was in humanity, its potential for progress and its ultimate goodness. Their goal was to improve the world. Remove the impediments to progress, they said, and a wholesome life would grow.

In this light, Lewis Hine's photographs may be properly understood. His choice of subjects and even his treatment of those subjects reflected the concerns of the humanitarian reform organizations with which he worked. Hine's photographs were vital tools in a campaign of reform, a campaign that sought to effect change in society by showing exactly how that society had gone wrong.

Hine's first visit to the state under the auspices of the National Child Labor Committee was in April 1909, at which time he photographed principally in the Pawtuxet Valley (Anthony, Arkwright, Fiskeville, Natick, Phenix, and Riverpoint).²⁰ In June of the same year, Hine photographed again in Rhode Island, this time in Warren.²¹ His emphasis during these trips was on the textile industry since he was preparing a report, submitted in July, on conditions in New England textile mills.²²

When he returned to the state in November 1912 for the national committee, he seems to have worked closely with the Consumers' League. Alice Hunt, the League's secretary, was the state representative of the National Child Labor Committee for that year.²³ It is likely that Miss Hunt made some investigations and arrangements to facilitate

Hine's work on this campaign. She may also have accompanied him as he took pictures in Lonsdale, Pawtucket, and Providence.

By the time of his Rhode Island visit in 1912, Hine had firmly established the utility of photography in reform. Photography was, after all, concise, persuasive, and accurate. Hine's view of photography was at odds with that of many of his contemporaries whose concerns were more aesthetic than reformist. A few years earlier Hine had explained that

the picture continues to tell a story packed into the most condensed and vital form. In fact, it is often more effective than the reality would have been because, in the picture, the non-essential and conflicting interests have been eliminated. The picture is the language of all nationalities and all ages . . . The photograph has an added realism of its own; it has an inherent attraction not found in other forms of illustration. For this reason the average person believes implicitly that the photograph cannot falsify.²⁴

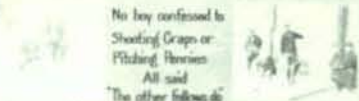
Publications and exhibitions of the National Child Labor Committee used many of his photographs. Although we cannot attribute a specific reform to a certain photographic image, the mass of Hine's powerful photographs could not have failed to make an impact.²⁵

Hine's Rhode Island photographs in November 1912 helped both the Consumers' League and the national committee in their reform efforts. The pictures are described as being taken "For Child Welfare Exhibit, 1912-13."²⁶ A child welfare exhibit was indeed held at Infantry Hall in Providence for a week in January 1913, shortly after Hine's Rhode Island visit.²⁷ Members of the Consumers' League prepared the working child section of the exhibit. As the League explained in its annual report published in 1913: "They showed the Rhode Island Child working under good conditions and under bad conditions in mills, in stores and on the street. . . . 50,000 people saw this exhibit."²⁸

Two of the posters from the Child Welfare Exhibit of January 1913 are reproduced in the League's *Twelfth Annual Report*. Both of those panels were illustrated with several of Hine's photographs. In the "Facts about Newsboys" poster,²⁹ Hine's photographs show young boys shooting craps and pitching pennies, labeled "Some of the ways in which earnings go," with text declaring that "No boy confessed to Shooting Craps or Pitching Pennies." The same poster showed several pictures of ten-year-old newsboys selling "Between Midnight and Morning," including "Nearly midnight. Ten year old newsboy selling in and around this saloon near Market Square" (no. 3207) and "1:00 A.M. Sunday, Nov. 24, 1912, and still selling. Stanley Steiner, the boot-black and newsboy, is ten years old. . . . The other, Jacob Botvin, is 13 years old" (no. 3210). Hine's photographs of several eight-year-old newsboys illustrated another poster, "Newsboy Facts."³⁰ A newspaper report made special mention of the photographs in the exhibit sections on neglected children and the working child.³¹ Hine's photographs seem to have

FACTS ABOUT NEWSBOYS

Mothers and Boys' accounts of earnings disagree



No boy confessed to
Shooting Craps or
Pitching Pennies
All said
"The other fellows do"

Some of the ways in which earnings go.

School records show that selling papers
is bad for most boys.

Many are below grade. 25 out
of 75 studied had very poor marks
Teachers complain of irregular attendance.

Should boys sell late at night?

10 years old Midnight Merchants 10 years old



Between Midnight and Morning

Some boys stay out all night.

NEEDED

To enforce and strengthen existing regulations
to raise the age limit to twelve years
to forbid children under 16 years to engage
in street trades after 8 P. M.

A poster from the Child Welfare Exhibit of January 1913. From *Rhode Island Consumers' League Twelfth Annual Report (1913)*. Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi X3 4225).

24. Lewis Hine, "Social Photography, How the Camera May Help in Social Uplift," National Conference of Charities and Corrections, *Proceedings* (June 1909), as quoted in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, 1980), 111.

25. The Library of Congress has about 5,000 photographs Hine took during the years he worked for the National Child Labor Committee.

26. National Child Labor Committee card file, Library of Congress.

27. *Providence Journal*, Jan. 8, 1913.

28. CLRI, *Twelfth Annual Report*, 10.

29. *Ibid.*, facing 24.

30. *Ibid.*, facing 32.

31. *Providence Journal*, Jan. 8, 1913.

NEWSBOY FACTS

Newsboys are not subject to Rhode Island Child Labor Laws. They are "Independent Merchants."

Providence has a city ordinance stating that Newsboys must be 10 or over. Must have a license Badge and must wear it on their cap.
Newport has no regulation

A Study of $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 75 \text{ Providence street sellers} \\ 20 \text{ Newport street-sellers} \end{array} \right.$ shows that

30 out of 75 had no license or worn another boys.
23 out of 75 were under 10



Providence 8 Yrs. Newport 8 Yrs. Providence 8 Yrs.
67 out of 75 Providence Boys had both parents living. In more than $\frac{1}{2}$ the homes conditions indicated paper-selling unnecessary.

Newsboys add little to family income. 18 Mothers said less than 15 cents a day. Only $\frac{1}{2}$ of Newport boys contribute to family income.

Another poster from the Child Welfare Exhibit of January 1913. From Rhode Island Consumers' League Twelfth Annual Report (1913). Courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi X3 4224).

32. *Ibid.*, Dec. 16, 1912.

33. After 1915 the reports contain no illustrations.

34. Title and number correspond to the National Child Labor Committee card file at the Library of Congress. See the checklist following this essay.

35. CLRI, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 9-10.

36. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

37. *Ibid.*, facing 16.

38. CLRI, *Thirteenth Annual Report* (n.p., 1915), facing 10.

39. *Ibid.*, facing 42.

40. *Ibid.*, facing 26.

made a powerful impact on visitors to the exhibit. Even before the exhibit, Mrs. Carl Barus, a member of both the League and National Committee, seems to have used some of Hine's photographic evidence to show that young children "were setting stones for some of the manufacturing jewelers of Providence, the work being done at their homes."³²

The importance of Hine's images to the work of the League is apparent in many of its publications as well. The League's annual reports for the years 1912 through 1915 are all illustrated with Hine photographs taken in 1912.³³

The *Eleventh Annual Report* (1912), which describes the League's success in getting a law passed prohibiting messenger boys from working at night, has as its frontispiece the photograph of "Speed, one of the young Western Union Messengers" (no. 3169).³⁴ It is proudly labeled "A Messenger Boy, The law does not allow him to work after 10 p.m." The Night Messenger bill was one of three bills presented to the legislature by the League with support from the National Child Labor Committee; it was the only one to pass.³⁵

The same report notes that "the League deplores the amount of home work found to exist in this state. Little children have been seen making chain purses, setting stones in cheap jewelry, stringing tags, making paper boxes and pulling threads in lace. The National Consumers' League is opposed to this home work, this sweat-shop labor."³⁶ A Hine photograph of "Girls, six, nine, and eleven years old, working on chainbags" (no. 3172) illustrates these comments with the caption "Makers of Mesh Bags. Little children work before school, at noon time, after school and at night on these bags."³⁷

More of Hine's work played a role in the League's activities in 1913, and several of his photographs appear in the *Twelfth Annual Report*. The frontispiece of that issue reflects continuing efforts to improve the lot of newsboys with a photograph captioned, "Eight-Year Old Newsboy. At present he is allowed to sell all night. He is Jimmie Rudgeway" (no. 3164).

The League's concern with young people working at night is also evident in its *Thirteenth Annual Report* (1914). Hine's appealing "Group of girls in spooling and warping room, Lonsdale" (no. 3155) is captioned with the rhetorical question, "Should Rhode Island allow these young girls to work all night?"³⁸ Another Hine picture, of three young newsboys, bears the accusatory legend, "Rhode Island allows these boys to sell papers all night."³⁹ Still another Hine photograph portrays "Midnight gambling scene on a Providence street. A flashlight picture of newsboys shooting craps between 1 and 2 a.m."⁴⁰

The *Fourteenth Annual Report* republished two Hine photographs that had been previously published as frontispieces in the *Eleventh* and *Twelfth Annual Reports* with triumphant labels indicating the League's success in reforming their conditions. "Speed" (no. 3169) is labeled "The Night Messenger—1912" and Jimmie Rudgeway (no. 3164) is identified as "The Newsboy—1915"; the dates refer to the years the



No. 3172. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.



No. 3164. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.

League was successful in getting reform legislation enacted under which "Rhode Island now protects these boys by law."⁴¹ "Groups of girls in spooling and warping room, Lonsdale" (no. 3155) reappears in this report as well.⁴²

Hine's Rhode Island work also served the goals of the National Child Labor Committee. The exhibit handbook, *The High Cost of Child Labor*, reproduces an exhibit panel on the moral dangers of street trades.⁴³ A boy operating a power saw with an unguarded blade represents physical dangers, but street trades "expose children to moral dangers more deadly than circular saws." The "Newsboys' midnight crap game" (no. 3208) is among those dangers about which the poster asks, "Does it pay to allow children to have such contact with vice?" We do not have reproductions of all the panels of this exhibit, but there may have been more Rhode Island photos in it and in other exhibits put together by Hine for the national committee.⁴⁴

The utility of these photographs in reform efforts can only be estimated from the size of the national committee's exhibit efforts. In 1914 the General Secretary reported that

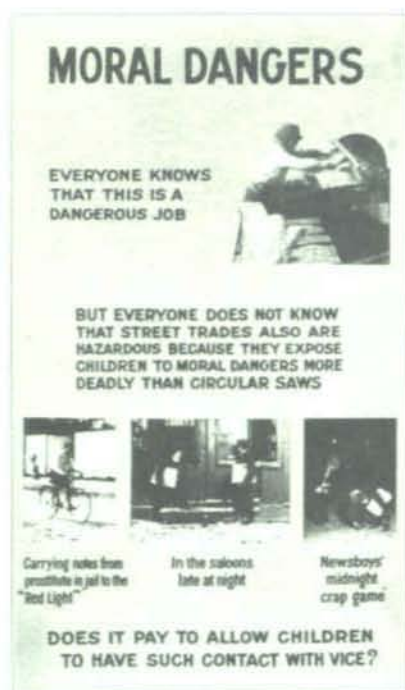
Our Exhibit Department has been considerably developed this year under the direction of Mr. Hine. Our old exhibit material has been

41. CLRI, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, facing 31.

42. *Ibid.*, facing 15.

43. National Child Labor Committee, pamphlet no. 241 (Jan. 1915), 5. See also *Child Labor Bulletin*, III, no. 4 (Feb. 1915), 29.

44. "The High Cost of Child Labor" exhibit contained twenty-five panels when displayed in San Francisco according to *Child Labor Bulletin*, III, no. 4 (Feb. 1915), 1.



Hine's Rhode Island photographs were used to illustrate a poster for an exhibit prepared by the National Child Labor Committee. From National Child Labor Committee, pamphlet no. 241 (1915). Photograph by William Guca.

No. 3153. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.

45. *Ibid.*, III, no. 3 (Nov. 1914), 16-17.

46. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977), 19.

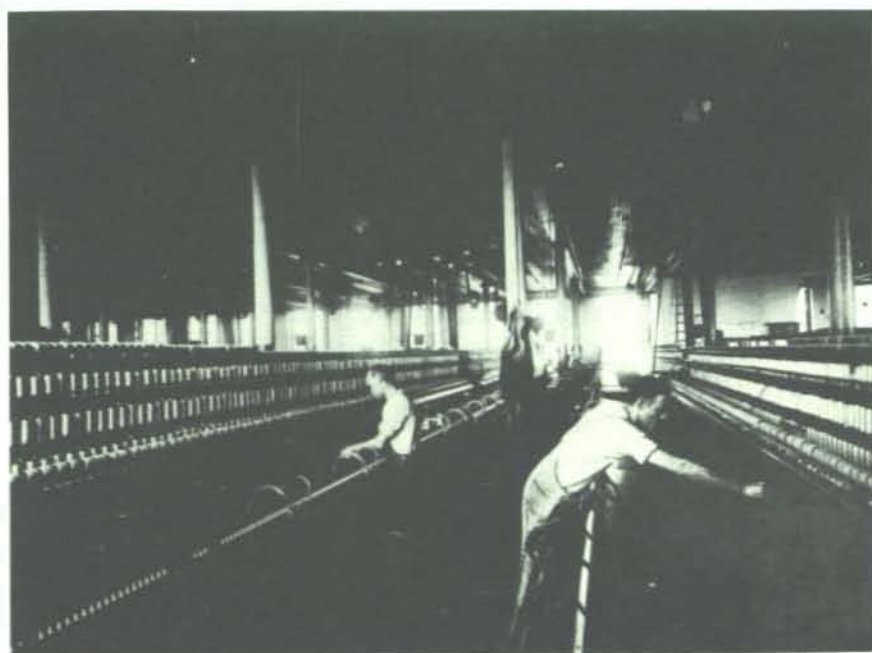
revised and remodeled, and a number of new exhibits added. These have been tried out in various communities and the exhibit has demonstrated its ability to put our cause before people in an impressive way, and the Department is now on a good basis.

Eleven exhibits have been built this year and have been shown in fifty cities in twenty different states, and sixteen places in New York City.⁴⁵

Thus Hine's portrayal of conditions in Rhode Island aided reform movements and taught about the wrongs of child labor to the public across the nation while establishing the importance of photography as an aid in reform.

Hine's work for the National Child Labor Committee came fairly early in his career. In the service of reform, he documented intolerable conditions of work and life, especially for children. When Hine's camera captured small girls at work assembling mesh bags in their tenement apartments or young boys selling newspapers in and around saloons at night, he knew his photographs would educate his viewers, perhaps capture their sympathy and finally lead to the reform of the abuses portrayed.

As Susan Sontag points out, before a photograph can have a moral effect, a relevant political consciousness is needed. "Without politics," she writes, "photographs of the slaughter-bench of history will most likely be experienced as, simply, unreal or as a demoralizing emotional blow."⁴⁶ Efforts to reform working and living conditions were well under way, and Hine could count on a sympathetic audience for whom a reminder and dramatization of abuse were enough of a goad to carry on



the work. The developed moral sense of the progressive era provided a tilled field on which to cast the seed of reform.

However, to treat Hine's work merely as documentation of evident abuse gives us no sense of Hine's special vision and his overall plan. Hine's Rhode Island photographs in the Munson collection of the Slater Mill Historic Site are typical of the range of subjects and treatments of them Hine used during much of his life but particularly during the period he worked for the National Child Labor Committee. Consequently, the major emphasis of the 1912 Rhode Island photographs is child labor, but other topics support that concern. The largest group of photographs treats housing conditions. Newsboys and messenger boys make up the largest part of the photographs of child workers. A large group concerns textile mills and textile workers. One other major subject is Providence's Italian community.

Hine explained the purpose behind his photographs: "There were two things I wanted to do. I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated."⁴⁷ Examples from the 1912 Rhode Island photographs provide excellent examples of the special treatment Hine gave his subjects, of his particular humanitarian vision.

The dignity of work should count first among Hine's "things to be appreciated." As early as 1909, he expressed a need "for the intelligent interpretation of the world's workers, not only for the people of today, but for future ages."⁴⁸ That same conviction is clear in his photographs, especially in those of the 1920s and 1930s when his principal concern was with people at work.⁴⁹ That dignity is also manifest in the Rhode Island pictures, especially in the factory interiors Hine shot in the



No. 3195. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.

47. Quoted in Judith M. Gutman, *Lewis W. Hine, 1874-1940: Two Perspectives* (New York, 1974), 5.

48. Hine, "Social Photography," as quoted in Trachtenberg, ed. *Classic Essays*, 113.

49. Lewis W. Hine, *Men at Work* (New York, 1977 [orig. publ. 1932]).



No. 3177. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.



No. 3203. Courtesy of Slater Mill
Historic Site.

Lonsdale Mills in 1912. In "View in the Mule Room" (no. 3153) Hine shows us two men controlling a pair of spinning mules that are so long they converge in the distance and then disappear into the far glare. One of the men demonstrates his mastery of his machine as he stretches to "piece up" (repair) a strand of yarn. The other patiently continues his dexterous work of piecing somewhere near the middle of a seemingly endless mule. Here are men doing honest, dignified work at machines that eliminate the tedious work of many hands.

The dignity of work is not the only subject to be appreciated in Hine's work. The character and dignity of the individual is the most obvious aspect of Hine's portraits. The disheveled charm of Jimmie Rudgeway smiles out of Hine's photograph (no. 3164). Though his coat is too large for his eight-year-old frame, his knicker leg falling down, his necktie loose around his neck, and his shoes tattered, we still see an attractive, intelligent, young man standing solidly on the sidewalk. Only the caption tells us he is a newsboy; the background of this picture shows only a quiet daytime city streetscape.

Hine was not interested in portraying a character merely because people were appealing or interesting. His portraits are an essential part

of his reform efforts. When Hine shows intolerable conditions, his photography makes it clear that the people retain their intelligence and dignity even as they work in the most degrading situations. The wistful smile of the tired ten-year-old newsboy selling newspapers near Market Square (no. 3207) is definitely out of place at midnight near a saloon. The unsavory man leaning against the saloon makes the newsboy's innocence all the more poignant. The photograph tells us that there is nothing wrong with this child, only with his situation. The conditions are what need to be reformed; the children are merely trapped in them.

Sometimes Hine shows us the effects of unhealthy work. The young man of whom Hine asks "Would this cotton-mill boy stand a test for physical fitness?" (no. 3195) evokes our sympathy for his plight. His narrow shoulders and vacant look are the evidence Hine presents that cotton-mill work is debilitating.

When Hine photographs people working at tedious tasks under terrible conditions, the work environment takes priority over the personalities of the individual workers. When we look into F. Delloiacone's cigar factory (no. 3177) we see adults and children so busy at their work of stripping and rolling cigar leaves that their hands do not stop working even for the camera and their faces do not acknowledge its presence. Our attention then turns from the work to the long room, so narrow and crowded by the workbench and chairs that one could not pass behind the workers. The repeated pattern of the wallpaper echoes the work of cigar rolling that has produced the countless bundles of cigars. That "very dirty and ill-kept" room, the caption tells us, is "the living-sleeping-and-working room and adjoins the store." Bad enough for any-



*No. 3182. Courtesy of Slater Mill
Historic Site.*



No. 3174. Courtesy of Slater Mill
Historic Site.

one, especially children, to spend time working in such conditions, but to live and sleep there as well?

Sometimes it is not the dingy working conditions but an inappropriate job that is the object of reform. Industrial home-work is the subject of a photograph that finds three beribboned young girls hunched over their work benches making chain-bags (no. 3172). A variety of patterns of wallpaper, tablecloths, and a shelf doily portray a cared-for and cozy room, in which the patterns of the girls' dresses seem right at home. The girls belong there; their work does not.

Hine's Rhode Island photographs treat housing conditions two ways: some of his pictures are devoid of human beings and some are packed full of them. Those treatments emphasize different aspects of housing problems. A back alley strewn with trash, festooned with laundry and packed with people (no. 3203) represents one type. The clothesline and fence edge direct our attention from one to another of the several groups of people at different levels. With this crowded picture, Hine is evoking overcrowded housing conditions, too many people, not enough room.

An example of Hine's other mode of portraying unacceptable housing conditions is the photograph of a sink drain running out onto the ground beneath a window (no. 3182). The drain is in the very center of a



No. 3186. Courtesy of Slater Mill
Historic Site.

flat portrait of bleakness, a gray and abstract scene. A scraggly bare tree and an expanse of decaying clapboards stand behind the weeds in the foreground; even they are dead. It is difficult to imagine anyone living in such desolation. Hine's obvious care in composing a picture of housing so clearly neglected tells us to turn our attention there too.

Hine presents the remedies for some of the things that need to be corrected, the results of reform efforts. A photograph in a settlement house shows us well-dressed little girls learning to sew (no. 3174). The arrangement of their chairs highlights the director of the settlement house holding a deserted infant in her arms.

Progress had been made in working conditions as well. A factory in Pawtucket had a room devoted to use as an infirmary and library (no. 3186). Hine's photograph shows us a nurse taking care of the needs of a patient relaxed on clean sheets and covered with a blanket.

A few of Hine's photographs record events that are whimsical or quaint, showing us the human side of ordinary life. When he captures a little girl playing with a goat in a back yard on Spruce Street, Providence (no. 3198), Hine shows the uneasy assimilation of the immigrant to life in an American city, as uneasy as the little girl's stance on a pile of boards. A horse-drawn wagon from which men are unloading



No. 3198. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.

No. 3199. Courtesy of Slater Mill Historic Site.



large round loaves of bread for delivery in the Italian district (no. 3199) is a wholesome portrait of immigrant life. Hine seems to have interrupted a conversation between the bicyclist and his friends the bakers. Everyone knows everyone else in the immigrant community. Immigrants were an important subject for Hine. He had begun his career taking pictures of immigrants at Ellis Island. And near the end of his life he prepared a folio of photographs of immigrants for the Russell Sage Foundation.⁵⁰

In all, Hine's work in Rhode Island during those few days touched on the well-known subjects of his career: child labor, immigration, and the dignity of work. Seen together they show a unified humanistic vision. Human life is central to Hine's approach. It is central in his touching portraits of children at work and in his eloquent photographs of the dignity of work. Concern with the proper conditions for human life is as evident in his photographic record of immigrants living in a new world as in his pictures of housing conditions. Hine's Rhode Island is a place where human beings have the ability and obligation to uphold the dignity of human life. It is a small but representative piece of Lewis Hine's world.

50. Gutman, *Lewis W. Hine and the American Social Conscience*, 46.

Photographs by Lewis W. Hine at Slater Mill Historic Site

All photographs are the gift of Mrs. C. Raymond Munson in memory of Alice Hunt and Edith Woodhead Marshall. All were taken for the National Child Labor Committee and are of the 5" x 7" format. Miss Hunt gave the photographs to Mrs. Munson in the 1930s; Mrs. Munson gave them to Slater Mill in 1981.

The national committee's card file, listing the photographs by number with descriptions by Hine, is now in the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. Slater Mill's prints have the committee's numbers penciled on their backs, and some have brief descriptions as well.

The checklist below is based on descriptions in the committee's card file, except for numbers 675 and 696, for which descriptions are from the committee's labels pasted on the back of the Slater Mill prints. Except for those prints, all the others are identified as being "For Child Welfare Exhibit 1912-13." In cases where Slater Mill's print contains different or additional information, that information is given after the notation "SMHS."

A few of Slater Mill's prints are not in the Library of Congress collection of Hine photographs, as indicated by "not in LC." Some of the photographs given to Slater Mill were duplicates which the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art acquired; initials of these organizations in the checklist indicate that they own a copy of the picture in question.

A beautiful young spinner and doffer in Interlaken Mill, Arkwright, R.I. She has worked there 1 year. Looked 12 yrs. old and had a hectic flush caused by warm, close atmosphere. April 17, 1909. 675.

These are some of the sweepers and mule room boys working in the Valley Queen Mill, River Point, R.I. Several of the *smallest* ones there said they had been working there 3 years and over. Speak no English. Sunday, April 18, 1909. 696

View in Mule-room, Lonsdale Cotton Mills. Lonsdale, R.I. Nov. 22/12. 3153. RIHS.

View of warping room, Lonsdale, R.I. Mills. 3154. RIHS.

SMHS: Group of girls in spooling & warping room Lonsdale, Nov. 22/12. 3155. RIHS. Not in LC.

View in Lonsdale R.I. Mills. RIHS. 3156. [Carding and drafting].

View in Lonsdale R.I. Mills. RIHS. 3157 [Spinning].

- Card-room hands, Lonsdale, R.I. Mills. 3158. Not in LC.
- Doffers in Lonsdale, R.I. Mills. 3159. Not in LC.
- Housing conditions, Woonsocket, R.I. 3160.
- Housing conditions, Lonsdale, R.I. 3161.
- Irene Cohen, ten-year-old Newsgirl, Providence, R.I. 3162.
- Irene Cohen, ten-year-old Newsgirl, Providence, R.I. 3163.
- Jimmie Rudgeway, 8 year-old newsboy, Providence, R.I. 3164. RISD.
- Dominic M. Giouchino, 8 years old, newsie, Providence, R.I. 3165.
SMHS adds: Nov 22/12.
- Loafers—Providence, R.I. 3167
- "Speed"—One of the young Western Union messengers. 3169.
- Entrance to the crowded, dirty house of a Midwife, rear tenement on Spruce Street, Providence, R.I. 3170.
- Girls, six, nine, and eleven years old, working on chain-bags, Mrs. Antonio Caruso, 132 Knight St., Providence, R.I. 3172.
- Setting stones in cheap jewelry, Ernest Lonardo, 11 years old, Thomas, 14 years old, 6 Hewitt Street, Providence. 3173.
- Sewing class in Sprague House Settlement Providence, R.I. The Director is holding a newly arrived deserted baby. 3174.
- Exterior of Sprague House Settlement, Providence, on Saturday morning. The house was so full that these children could not go in. 3175.
- Elvira Christofano, 110 Spruce St., Providence, making chain-bags. 3176.
- Cigar factory of R. Delloiacone, 205 Atwells Av., Providence, R.I. Eight year old boy and ten year old girl are stripping. This room is the living-sleeping-and-working room and adjoins the store. Nov. 23, 1912. Very dirty and ill-kept. 3177.
- Housing conditions, Elm St., Pawtucket, R.I. 3178.
- Housing conditions, Elm Street, Pawtucket, R.I. Nov. 25, 1912. 3179.
- Housing conditions, Elm Street, Pawtucket, R.I. 3180.
- Housing conditions, Elm St., Pawtucket, R.I. 3181.
- Housing conditions, Elm St., Pawtucket, R.I. The drainage from sink runs out onto the ground. 3182.
- Housing conditions, Pawtucket, R.I. View from bridge. 3183. Not in LC.
- The Stone House, Mill Street, Central Falls, R.I. 3184. Not in LC.
- Boy at machine. Atwood Crawford Co., Pawtucket, R.I. Exhaust for shavings. 3185. Not in LC.
- A patient. A sick worker receiving First Aid, in room set apart for hospital use and library, Brym & Marsh, Pawtucket, R.I. Mfrs. of electric light bulbs. Nov. 26 '12. 3186.

- Cotton-mill employee using seat that is on the end of her machine. Pawtucket, R.I. 3192.
- Cotton-mill employee using seat that is on the end of her machine. [Seat vacant in photo]. 3192 A.
- Whitman Street dump, Pawtucket, R.I. 3193.
- Privies and back-yards, Lonsdale, R.I. 3194.
- SMHS: Would this cotton-mill boy stand a test for physical fitness? 3195.
- Would these cotton-mill boys stand a test for physical fitness? Work in Riverside Mill, Olneyville, Providence. 3196.
- Narrow windows in Atlantic Mill, Providence. Interior is very dark. 3197.
- Back-yard, Spruce Street, Providence, R.I. 3198.
- Delivering bread in the Italian District, Spruce St., Providence, R.I. 3199.
- One of the Midwives' homes, Spruce St. 3200.
- Cigarettes, Spruce St., Italian Boys, Providence, R.I. Nov. 23, 1912. 3201.
- Tiny girl with big bag that she is carrying home, Spruce St., Providence, R.I. 3202.
- Housing conditions, Rear of Republican St., Providence, Nov. 23, 1912. 3203.
- Jimmie Rudgeway, 8 year old newsie, Providence. 3205. SMHS adds: Nov 23, '12.
- Nearly midnight. Ten year old newsboy selling in and around this saloon near Market Square, Providence, R.I. Flash-light photo. 3207.
- Midnight, Nov. 23, 1912. Providence, R.I. Newsboys shooting craps near Post Office. Been playing here at craps for an hour. Flash-light photo. 3208.
- 1:00 A.M. Sunday, Nov. 24, 1912, and still selling. Stanley Steiner, the boot-black and newsboy, is ten years old, and sells until 1 A.M. Lives, 92 Ulmsbee Ave., Providence, R.I. The other, Jacob Botvin, is 13 years old, 33 Hilton St. 3210.
- Dumps near Reservoir. SMHS completes: Ave., Providence. 3211.
- View in Pawtucket, R.I. mill—showing accumulation of lint on floor. The air is full of it too, but photo doesn't show it. 3212. SMHS: Dexter Yarn Co. Lint on floor.
- Whitman Street, Dump, Providence, R.I. 3213. SMHS: Session St. Pawtucket.
- Whitman Street, Dump, Providence, R.I. 3214. SMHS: The heart of Pawtucket, Session St.
- The Stone House, Hill Street [SMHS: Mill Street], Central Falls, R.I. 3215.

View of privies, garbage dumps, in back yards near Bed-bug Alley and High Street, Central Falls, R.I. 3216. SMHS: Bedbug Alley, C.F. Playground for fifty or more children. Privies and rubbish, open drainage.

Basement Tenement, High St., Central Falls, R.I. 3217. SMHS: Basement home (?) on High St., Central Falls. Eleven people live here.

Backyard and privies in terribly filthy condition, 76-78 Borden Street, Providence, R.I. Owners wealthy. 3218.

Rear of a six-family house, 230 Richmond Street, Providence. SMHS adds: Dirtiest House in Providence. 3219.

The "Particular Courts" of Local Government: Town Councils in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island

by Bruce C. Daniels*

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Local history is by far the most prevalent form of historical writing in the United States but, paradoxically, we know less about local institutions than any others. Over the past two hundred years, tens of thousands of books have been written about specific parishes, towns, and counties, but we have only a handful of solid historical studies of *the parish, the town, or the county*. Local history writing has traditionally been an antiquarian pastime in which narratives extol the virtues of ancestors and charm descendants with anecdotes and tales of bravery and hardship. Indeed, these local histories are usually charming if one knows the place and the people being described; moreover, they frequently function as a ritual in community-building by renewing and personalizing the relationship people feel with the past. By labeling local history antiquarian or by saying it does not tell us much about local institutions, I do not mean to imply that the genre itself is insignificant. Professional analysis was seldom its goal. But, because of its primary concern with specific incidents and people, we have learned little about the general principles and institutions that have governed our communities. Analyses of local governments have usually been left to political scientists who tend to write about the present and not about the past.

Over the past two decades, however, academic historians have begun to see the local community as a subject worth investigating, and an early trickle of professional studies in the 1960s has become a flood of theses, dissertations, and articles in the 1970s. While vastly expanding our knowledge of early American communities, recent local history nevertheless suffers from two problems. First, almost all of it has been written with a case-study methodology, and although the authors hope to establish general principles, the typicality of each case is usually unproven. Second, the questions asked in the case studies reflect a present societal concern with inequalities and inequities, and have emphasized analyses of power relationships and social structures and have neglected institutions and structures—in short, social history has almost entirely eclipsed constitutional history at the local level. In-depth community studies, of course, penetrate deeply into the lives of a locale and tell us much that is suggestive, and social history has given us

a crucial new perspective on economic and demographic forces that shaped our past; the value of both the methodology and the substance is immense. But, unless we wish to run the risks of "balkanizing" early American history and of pretending that social pressures do not manifest themselves in institutions, we also need to pay some attention to general principles and institutional arrangements operating at the local level.¹ The following analysis of Rhode Island's town councils in the eighteenth century attempts to do this. Using a sample of nearly half of colonial Rhode Island's towns, it describes and analyzes the practices and functions of the towns' key executive bodies.

Rhode Island's distinctive use of the term "town council" requires some explanation. No other colony used the term widely to designate a community's senior officers. In the rest of New England, the towns' executives were called selectmen or townsmen; in the middle colonies of New York and Pennsylvania, a variety of names were used for local executives; and in the southern colonies, vestrymen and county court justices administered local affairs. The term "town council" was not extensively used in England prior to the settlement of British North America, although a group of advisors to the mayors of some municipal corporations were called the council or "mayor's peers" or "mayor's brethren." But such bodies were not direct predecessors of the Rhode Island town councils: the councils in England were larger, subordinate advisors to the mayor, and had different functions.² Thus, while the name has some connection to the English past, and while English common law and practices of borough administration guided much of their actions, the Rhode Island town councils were essentially a New World creation, part of the process of selective borrowing by which every colony derived a system of local government distinct from its fellow colonies but fashioned eclectically from a heterogeneous English institutional background.

In Rhode Island's founding decade, different names were used for executives elected by the towns. The General Court for Newport and Portsmouth specified in 1640 that magistrates in each of the towns were to meet monthly in a "particular court" to administer the affairs of the towns. In the same year the constitution adopted by Providence created a five-member board of "disposers" whose main function was to supervise the allotment of lands but who also acted as an executive board for local matters. Warwick did not constitute a formal government in its first few years and governed itself, it would seem, without an executive body. In May 1647, the four towns meeting together in a General Court set up rules to implement the Charter of 1644 which made them a colony and ordered each town to choose a six-man town council at its town meeting. Each town did so in the following year, and it is from this act that the town councils derived.³

The power and authority of the new town councils were not precisely delineated in the legislation but it was clear that the town meetings were to be supreme in local matters and that the town councils

1. There have been some exceptions to this tendency to overlook institutions and general patterns in local life. The essayists in Bruce C. Daniels, ed., *Town and County: Essays on The Structure of Local Government in the American Colonies* (Middletown, Conn., 1978), have written in this volume and elsewhere on local government. Edward M. Cook, Jr., in *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, 1976), comments perceptively on general patterns of officeholding in New England and analyzes how these patterns intersected with institutional arrangements. Other examples could be cited but in the main they only scratch the surface and dozens of additional specialized studies are needed to provide a secure picture of local government.

2. Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government From the Revolution to the Municipal Corporation Act: The Manor and the Borough, Part I* (London and New York, 1908), 336-377.

3. John Russell Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, 10 vols. (Providence, R.I., 1856-1862), I, (Aug. 1640), 106, (May 1647), 151, hereafter cited as *R.I.C.R.* The Providence constitution can be found in Samuel Greene Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, 2 vols. (New York, 1859-1860), 108.

4. *Digest of 1744* (Newport, R.I., 1744), 177-178.

5. For the acts passed by the General Assembly dealing with town councils see *R.I.C.R.*, II (May 1667), 189; II (July 1667), 212; III (May 1678), 15; III (May 1680), 89; IV (Mar. 1709), 64-65; IV (June 1719), 253-254; IV (Oct. 1719), 263; the acts of Nov. 1742 and Feb. 1743 in *Digest of 1744*, 250-251 and 275-278; and acts of 1663, 1711, 1717, 1724, 1728, and 1737 in *The Digest of 1767* (Newport, R.I., 1767), 214-219.

were to have limited authority to act only on specific matters and were not to make broad policy. The council thus was to function as a "particular court" and handle the details of individual cases under the general guidance of the town meeting. In addition to the six members of the town council elected by the town meeting, any magistrates of the colony living in the town (and each town had at least two) were automatically members of the local council. When the magistracy was increased by the creation of justices of the peace, these colony-appointed officials were also made members of the town councils. Not until 1733 did the colony government, mindful that towns were "defeated of the privilege of having their prudential affairs carried on by persons of their own choosing," exclude magistrates from the town council and make it a body elected entirely by the local town meeting.⁴

Even though the General Assembly passed many laws throughout the colonial period strengthening the powers of the town council to act on delegated matters, the council was never elevated to a policy-making position and was never able to transcend the limits of being a particular court. The belief in participatory government proved too strong to allow inroads to be made on the authority of the town meeting to set all policy.⁵ Moreover, many of the General Assembly statutes set policies within which the town councils were forced to operate which also limited their discretionary powers. Even in its function as a particular court, the town council had limits on its power. In matters which involved punishment of a person by fining, or whipping, or warning out of town, the council had to apply to a justice of the peace for a warrant to put the punishment into effect.

Despite the restricted nature of their authority, however, the town councils were institutions of enormous importance in local governance. If, for example, the town meeting passed a bylaw stipulating that a new highway was to be laid out, it was the town council who decided how much money would be given to compensate land-owners for their losses. If the General Assembly passed laws outlining procedures for probating wills and inventorying estates, it was the town council who decided if the executors of a decedent carried out these procedures with fairness and justice. If a justice of the peace ordered a transient warned out of town or whipped for vagrancy, he usually did so on the recommendation of the town council. The details of administering justice within broad guidelines were immensely important: almost every man in colonial Rhode Island was directly affected at some point by a town council decision.

To handle all of these details, the town councils met frequently. The ideal model seemed to be monthly meetings, although some years they met more than twelve times and some years less, depending upon need. From 1710, the approximate year from which extant council records date, to 1790, the end of the Revolutionary period, the towns averaged just about twelve meetings per year. However, this average of one meeting per month disguises some fluctuations. Out of a sample of ten

towns,⁶ seven of them had years in which the council met only six times and the remaining three towns had lows of seven, eight, and nine meetings respectively in at least one year. At the other extreme, the Providence council met fifty-two times in one year and the East Greenwich council met forty-one times. No clear trend of meeting frequency emerged over the eighteenth century, but in the 1770s and 1780s the councils met much more often primarily to deal with the details of implementing the Revolutionary war effort at the local level: increased poor-relief needs caused by the war, obtaining military supplies, additional probate work, and other war-related matters, all necessitated more meetings than usual. The decade with the highest number of meetings prior to the Revolution was the 1750s, also a decade of war. During the 1760s and the early 1770s, when town meetings were held more frequently to discuss and debate the imperial problem, town councils did not do so because the imperial debate involved matters of policy-making and not of administrative detail. While none of the ten towns in the sample deviated tremendously from the average throughout the colony, Providence, the most populous town in the sample, had the most council meetings. Despite these variations, extremes were unusual and all the quantitative evidence shows that townspeople could usually expect a town council meeting on an average of once a month. Occasionally, town councils met even when there was no evident business to consider, which nonetheless gave people the opportunity to bring matters to their attention. And if no business was forthcoming the councils simply adjourned. About once a year, for instance, the Cranston town council would record that "there appears no business of consequence to be done," and would then adjourn.

An average of twelve meetings a year and an occasionally much higher number must have placed a substantial strain on the energies of the town councilmen. Given this, attendance was surprisingly high at town council meetings and only one town, Providence, had a problem more than once or twice in ninety years in mustering the required

6. A sample of ten may seem small, but at the end of the colonial period Rhode Island had only thirty incorporated towns and ten of them were new towns founded after 1735. Only Cranston of the above ten in the sample was one of these new towns. Several of the towns do not have usable town council records, so the sample includes over three-fourths of the towns in the colony with lengthy town council minutes. Regrettably, the council records of Newport, the most important town in the colony, are not readable.

TABLE I
THE AVERAGE ANNUAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS OF TOWN COUNCILS BY DECADE 1710-1790

	1710s	1720s	1730s	1740s	1750s	1760s	1770s	1780s	least	most
Bristol						12	11	13	9	16
Cranston					10	10	17	14	6	33
East Greenwich	7	9			14	10	18	15	6	41
Portsmouth	9	9	11	13	14	12	11	13	6	17
Providence	13	11	11	13	18	12	26	34	8	52
South Kingstown		12	13	12	16	14	13	14	7	21
Scituate				10	10	9	13	9	6	22
Tiverton				11	9	10	10	9	6	15
Warwick				7	8	8	16	12	6	26
Westerly			10	12	12	12	12	14	6	26
All	9.7	10.3	11.3	11.1	12.3	10.8	14.7	14.7		

TABLE II
ATTENDANCE OF COUNCILMEN AT TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS 1710-1790

<i>Town</i>	<i>Average # attending each meeting</i>
Bristol	5.20
Cranston	5.13
East Greenwich	5.11
Providence	4.79
Portsmouth	5.17
South Kingstown	4.98
Scituate	5.15
Tiverton	5.18
Warwick	5.31
Westerly	5.51

7. Scituate Town Council Minutes, Scituate Town Hall (Nov. 1790); Portsmouth Town Council Minutes, Portsmouth Town Hall, 1750s-1790s.

quorum of four for a council meeting. Even Providence's problems of attendance were slight: only about once every three or four years did less than four councilmen show up and in 1756 the Providence town council members showed their dissatisfaction with their absent fellows by instituting a fine of ten shillings for missing a meeting. Eight of the ten towns whose attendance records were analyzed averaged over five members present per meeting, including Westerly which averaged 5.51. Providence, with an average attendance of 4.79 per meeting (out of a possible 6) was the lowest; undoubtedly this was no accident since Providence, of course, had the highest number of meetings of any town. Still, when one considers that Providence averaged twenty-six and thirty-four meetings per year in the 1770s and 1780s respectively, the attendance of its council members might also be considered high. When one also considers that some members had to travel distances of up to five or six miles and the inevitable sickness that must have befallen some councilmen, the record of attendance shows an extraordinary commitment to duty.

Town councils met in a variety of places and sometimes rotated the location of their meetings in order to be fair to all the members or sometimes met in one fixed location for a number of years. South Kingstown always rotated the meetings among councilmen's houses. The Scituate council met for years at the house of Richard Smith, who was not a councilman, but apparently had convenient and commodious quarters. Smith, although not normally a tavern keeper, had a special license to sell "victuals and drink" on council-meeting days. The Portsmouth council met for over two decades at Christopher Turner's tavern and then switched to a tavern run by David Gifford.⁷ Warwick had no fixed place or rotation schedule but decided at each meeting where the next one would be. Similarly, the time of the council meetings varied within and among the towns but more often than not they began in the early afternoon and adjourned before dark. This arrangement gave councilmen time to arrive with convenience and to reach

TABLE III
BUSINESS OF TOWN COUNCILS 1725-1790

Item	Percentage of Total Activity			
	1725*	1750**	1775***	1790***
Probate	45	26	27	21
Authorizing				
Payments	15	28	34	42
Liquor Licenses	14	13	12	14
Warning Out	8	10	10	10
Guardianships and				
Apprenticeships	8	7	6	3
Highway Matters	4	5	2	5
Granting Certificates	1	9	2	3
Miscellaneous	5	3	3	2

*Six towns in sample.

**Nine towns in sample.

***Ten towns in sample.

home before the late evening. Portsmouth and Providence, however, would occasionally meet as early as 9:00 A.M.; the afternoon meeting was the ideal but if the press of business was heavy, councilmen would have to get up earlier to accommodate the need. Accessibility in terms of location and time was not solely designed for the convenience of the councilmen. The town clerk and town sergeant had to attend all council meetings, and a large number of people applying for licenses, registering probate materials, asking for payment for services, all streamed through many of the meetings. It was not rare for a meeting to deal with ten or fifteen separate items, each one requiring one or several people to appear before it.

This large volume of work would have taxed the energies of any six men, and even if most of the decisions were routine, they still required at least a cursory appraisal. Over the course of the eighteenth century the average annual number of items dealt with by each council increased from twenty-nine items per year in 1725 to seventy-seven in 1790. Not surprisingly, the amount of business varied proportionately with the size of the town. Small towns such as Cranston and Scituate dealt with about twenty-five items of business in 1790, while Providence, the largest town with extant council records, dealt with slightly over 200 items in the same year. Administering the probate processes and authorizing payments of town monies were the two largest items of business, comprising over 60 percent of the councils' activities. The remaining time was spent licensing taverns and public houses, warning people out of town (to avoid assuming the responsibility of poor relief for them), dealing with highway matters, arranging and authorizing guardianships and apprenticeships, granting certificates to people moving out of town (to indicate that the hometown would accept responsibility for their support if they became indigent), and a variety of miscellaneous items. Of course, these categories could be rearranged under other headings which would yield different percentiles.⁸

8. Much of the authorization of payments, warning out of undesirables, binding out of children, and granting of certificates, for example, could be grouped under a single category of poor relief, but this would not serve the purposes of analysis as well.

TABLE IV
AVERAGE NUMBER OF ITEMS DEALT WITH PER TOWN PER YEAR

1725*	1750**	1775***	1790***
29	43	48	77

*Six towns in sample.

**Nine towns in sample.

***Ten towns in sample.

In terms of sheer quantity, the town council's greatest amount of business was spent on authorizing payment of town monies to various individuals. This function as the auditor of all accounts steadily increased relative to other functions as the eighteenth century progressed. It is doubtful, however, if approving payments took the largest part of the council's time; most of the payments were routine and required little in the way of difficult decision-making. Over three-fourths of the payments authorized were to people for taking care of the towns' poor, and most of the rest were for services rendered the town by one of the local officers. Usually, each payment item required a one-line statement in the town council records. Such statements were generally brief: "account of Thomas Shepherd for £3 for the keeping of widow Smith for two months approved." The evidence suggests that accounts were seldom disputed, yet, every person had to be able to justify his expenses to the town council. Petitioners knew that if they appeared suspicious or even unreasonable they could be closely questioned, and this in turn imparted a high degree of accountability to the financial structure of the town. No monies, no matter how small, would be paid out of the town treasury without the council's approbation.

Probate matters, quantitatively the second most numerous item that the councils had to deal with, consumed much more space in council records than all other items taken together. This does not mean, however, that the probating process was controversial; contention seldom surfaced, but the various stages involved in settling an estate each entailed documentation. First, a letter of administration would be issued by the council to someone (usually a close relative of the decedent) who would authorize the supervision of the out-of-council process. Second, if a will was extant it would be presented to the council, usually approved and then entered into the council records. Third, a detailed inventory of all goods and their value would be presented by the executor and two others to the council for entry into the records. Fourth, any debts due or owed by the estate would be collected or paid under the supervision of the council. Finally, the council would approve the distribution of the estate to the heirs under the terms of the will or under the terms of colony law (in cases where no will was extant). In most instances, the process of settling an estate dragged out over several council meetings. Seldom was anything out of the routine involved; the biggest problem councils usually encountered developed if people refused to accept the letter of administration.

Much other business was also routine to the point of being *pro forma*. Licenses for keeping taverns or public houses, once issued, were regularly reissued year after year although the matter of fees for them might provoke some discussion. The issuance of certificates to people moving to another town was nearly automatic. Highway business, although it could involve a decision of great importance to an individual, was seldom contentious at the town council level. Highway planning often prompted heated debates among townspeople, but the town meeting handled this problem, not the town council. The council was called upon merely to adjust little details of highway programs the town meeting had already approved. Similarly, warning people out of town did not usually involve the council in any agonizing over the nature of justice. The town council simply recommended to a justice of the peace that any individuals that the town did not have a clear responsibility to support and who could not support themselves should be ordered out of town and sent back to the town of their last legal settlement, usually their birthplace. If a newcomer to town could not produce a certificate from his hometown guaranteeing the hometown's support in case of financial need, or if a person admitted with a certificate from another town needed relief, the council invariably asked for a warning-out warrant to be issued. Compassion played little role in this process, and if a town could legally avoid the cost of poor relief for a person it did so by warning him out. Only when travel would hazard a person's life did the council deliberate whether or not he should be warned out. Still, even if the decisions on warning out were nearly automatic, they did sometimes involve a hearing to determine which town was responsible for an individual's welfare. Not infrequently towns disputed the assignment of responsibility, and the town councils were required to negotiate an agreement with other town councils or go to court over the matter.

Matters of guardianship and binding out of children as apprentices were also usually routine but could involve some difficult decision-making. Orphaned children fourteen years of age or older were allowed to choose their own guardians and generally the council merely ratified the choice of an uncle, grandparent, or neighbor. At times, however, people refused to accept the guardianship and finding a suitable person to care for an adolescent and manage his property could be a problem. If an orphaned child was under fourteen or if a child under that age could not be adequately cared for by his parents, the child would be "bound out" to some willing town resident. These decisions required careful thought and choice on the part of the town council because it wanted to make certain that the child would be placed in a proper environment. The situation could, of course, invite abuse of the child if he or she was overworked and undercared for.

The most nettlesome problem with guardianships, however, involved the management of the estates of people termed *non compos mentis* by the council. In a society without institutions to provide care

9. South Kingstown Town Council Minutes, South Kingstown Town Hall, Feb. 1752.

10. Portsmouth Town Council Minutes, Mar. 1725, Jan. 1741.

11. Providence Town Council Minutes, Providence City Hall, July 1726.

12. South Kingstown Town Council Minutes, May 1727, June 1727.

for the feeble-minded and elderly, many people with enough to sustain themselves proved unable to manage their property. The council could either initiate action on its own to assign guardians for these people or, as it more frequently did, act on a petition by some concerned person to have a guardian appointed for one of these unfortunates. This occasionally involved some controversy. The delicate nature of determining someone to be irresponsible for himself and the potential for abuse of the individual's finances ensured that the council took these decisions under very serious consideration.

Some unusual decisions were occasionally required of the council and broke the normal humdrum of routine. The most dramatic of these occurred periodically in every town when smallpox epidemics struck and the town councils responded with frenzied activity in an attempt to contain the contagion. In these emergencies, the councils assumed extraordinary power and acted in ways to limit freedom of movement and action that would have been unthinkable in normal times. They ordered people confined to homes or removed to buildings set up as "pest houses" and posted guards around affected areas. The councils often prohibited all unauthorized travel in the vicinity, appointed special persons to treat the infected, closed harbors and roads, directed the process of burials, and in general would try anything that might prevent the disease from being spread throughout the community. The dread of smallpox ran so deeply that no matter how highhanded the councils' orders may have seemed if issued in other matters, they were accepted with alacrity during epidemics. Each town experienced about five or six such emergencies in the eighteenth century.

Small and unusual matters would sometimes come under the town council's purview. Although questions of morality were usually brought to a justice of the peace, they could be brought to the council if they involved conduct in taverns (since the council licensed them), or if they involved people who might be warned out of town. South Kingstown's town council, for example, summoned Jacob Mott to answer charges that he was keeping "a disorderly house, frolicking, [and] entertaining servants." Mott appeared before the council and was not punished because he promised that these practices would end.⁹ John Butts of Portsmouth was not so fortunate: when the town council found him guilty of "suffering card playing," it revoked his license and ordered him "to take down his sign." Portsmouth also ordered Elizabeth Stone, "a woman of ill fame and of lewd conversation [who] is frequently entertained" to be shipped and warned out of town because of her moral character.¹⁰ The Providence council similarly ordered "the girl that lives at Captain David Abbott's . . . to depart" because it thought her conduct somewhat less than wholesome.¹¹ The council was not beyond interfering in internal family matters if it felt decency required official action. The South Kingstown council ordered one of its members to investigate Letiah Cottrell's complaint that she was "much abused by her son Stephen and his wife."¹²

Few matters were too trivial to be brought to the council for action: the Bristol council loaned Joseph Maxfield the money to buy a cord of wood which was to be repaid "when he gets his money from Mr. Bosworth."¹³ When Henry Jones told the Providence town council that he "lay in a very poor condition and especially for want of lodging . . . and that there being a bed in the hands of [the town sergeant] . . . which was part of the estate of John Jones," the council "thought it proper that the sergeant let the bed go to the use of the said Henry Jones for his present relief."¹⁴ In an even more unusual case, Caleb Arnold, a tavernkeeper, asked for and received the Warwick council's help in getting a supply of rum from East Greenwich for his tavern.¹⁵

For all of their diligence in assisting needy townspeople, probating estates, and auditing the town's expenses, the town councilmen usually received something in the way of a financial reward but it was invariably only honorific and not equal to the effort expended. Portsmouth first paid its councilmen in 1682 when the town meeting "taking into consideration the many services the town council has these several years done for which they have had nothing allowed in compensation," ordered that the money the council collected for liquor licenses be divided among them for pay. This amounted to less than one pound per councilman, not a very substantial sum, and two years later the town meeting reduced this to half of the license money.¹⁶ Other towns also usually paid their councilmen a token fee but not all did. As late as 1765 two Newport councilmen complained to the town meeting that they had served for many years without any pay and would no longer stand for reelection unless some "proper allowance" was forthcoming. The town meeting responded, in a way undoubtedly regarded as inadequate by the complainants, by authorizing payments only for times of unusual activity such as smallpox epidemics.¹⁷

Almost invariably, however, councilmen were provided free dinners and liquor on the days of their meetings—the South Kingstown council's last act at each meeting was always to authorize funds for their own "victuals and drink"—but occasionally even these perquisites could fall victim to the towns' penuriousness. When Warwick experienced severe financial problems during the 1760s, one of the casualties was payment for the dinners of the councilmen which had been paid for by the town for the first sixty-five years of the eighteenth century. Not until 1777 were free dinners for councilmen restored to them.¹⁸ Similarly, East Greenwich's town meeting voted "no dinner [for the council] at the town's cost," but it took only seven years of complaining for the town councilmen to get them back.¹⁹ These extreme examples of tightfistedness toward the town councils are unusual but even in the most generous towns the councilmen could expect only meals and a few glasses of rum, or a token payment, for the long hours they served. Prestige, status, and a sense of satisfaction from doing one's duty were the real rewards councilmen enjoyed.

Apparently, the prestige, status, and sense of satisfaction were usu-

13. Bristol Town Council Minutes, Bristol Town Hall, Feb. 1763.

14. Providence Town Council Minutes, Dec. 1734.

15. Warwick Town Council Minutes, Warwick City Hall, June 1777.

16. Portsmouth Town Meeting Minutes, Portsmouth Town Hall, Aug. 1683, June 1685.

17. Newport Town Meeting Minutes, Newport Historical Society, Jan. 1765.

18. Warwick Town Meeting Minutes, Warwick City Hall, June 1765, June 1777.

19. East Greenwich Town Meeting Minutes, East Greenwich Town Hall, Oct. 1724, May 1741.

20. For contention on the colony level see David Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760-1770* (Providence, R.I., 1958), and Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York, 1975). For problems at the town meeting level see Bruce C. Daniels, "Poor Relief, Local Finance, and Town Government in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History*, XL (1981), 75-87.

ally adequate: despite a significant number of men who refused to serve on the council, between 1700 and 1760 town councils averaged a turnover rate of 27.3 percent, which meant that on a yearly average between four and five of the councilmen were reelected. The average town councilman served 5.3 terms, and some, such as Thomas Nickols of East Greenwich and Joseph Crandall of Westerly, served over thirty terms. Of the seven towns whose town council records span all sixty of these years, all had at least one councilman who served twenty terms or more.

It is a moot question whether or not this low turnover rate and the long tenures in office reflect an absence of democracy in the power structures of the towns. Undoubtedly, family connections and wealth as well as leadership ability affected the choice of councilmen. The important fact to note, however, is that the councils exhibited a remarkably high degree of stability—many men were willing to serve and the voters were usually pleased with those who did and reelected them. Nor did this change over the course of the eighteenth century as town council meetings grew lengthier and dealt with more items at each meeting. The pattern of officeholding was just as stable on the eve of the Revolutionary struggles as it was in 1700.

In the final analysis when one combines all the details of Rhode Island's town councils into a coherent whole, a rather clear picture emerges. The council always functioned as a "particular court," as its institutional predecessors in Newport and Portsmouth were called. It never made policy *per se* but instead unified the administrative functions of government on the local level. Any "particular" that required town action came before the town council and it decided the particular to the best of its ability according to colony statutes and town bylaws. Items such as probate, the authorizing of town expenditures, and the warning out of undesirables, were regular and routine items of business; but almost no detail of local life was too trivial for a council to entertain. And, despite the minutiae that characterized the meetings, the lack of a policy-making function, the increasing amount of business, and the lack of adequate compensation, the councilmen were diligent in their duty as shown by their high attendance and their willing-

TABLE V
OFFICEHOLDING AMONG TOWN COUNCILMEN 1700-1785

	Overall*	1701-1720	1721-1740	1741-1760
Turnover Rate	27.3%	27.7%	29.0%	24.3%
Average # of terms per Councilman	5.3	4.8	4.4	4.5

*Twelve towns in sample. The overall average number of terms served is higher than that of any period because periodization artificially lowers the average since most men served terms in more than one period.

ness to serve many terms. The conduct of the town councils in the Revolution adds more support to this interpretation. They did not enter the debates over the Imperial connection, declaring independence, writing a new state constitution, or ratifying the Federal Constitution. Instead, guided by the decisions of the town meetings and the policies of the colony, they expanded their meetings to carry on the particulars of organizing men and munitions and dealing with the many quotidian problems caused by war. If, as all analyses indicate, the General Assembly of colonial Rhode Island was wracked with chronic and vituperative political wrangling and instability, and the town meetings frequently acted with financial irresponsibility,²⁰ the town councils provided a sense of stability, balance, and order in the day-to-day particulars of life that was lacking elsewhere in the colony.

Book Reviews

A Search for Power: The "Weaker Sex" in Seventeenth-Century New England. By LYLE KOEHLER. (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1980. vii + 561 pp. Appendices, bibliography, and index. \$25.00.)

In *A Search for Power: "The "Weaker Sex" in Seventeenth-Century New England*, Lyle Koehler attempts to "describe the cultural stereotype of the proper woman" in New England and then to measure "variation from and adjustment to" that stereotype by "Calvinist women" and by "non-Puritan New Englanders." Among the latter were Rhode Islanders, whose way of life, Koehler believes, offered an important alternative to the Puritan mode.

Given the prominence of "Puritanism" in Koehler's conception of his subject, one might expect him to have defined the term or at least to have shown some awareness of the difficulty in doing so. Instead, he has built a vivid description of "Puritan" personality, leaving the reader to determine how and where to apply it. Koehler's Puritans were "Calvinists" who shared "the Geneva reformer's moral distaste for sensual pleasure." Beset by self-hatred and clinical depression, they kept their children "in a state of repressive bondage" and insisted upon "submissiveness" from their wives. As legislators of a "biblical Commonwealth," they were obsessed with a need to keep "Satan's hot breath in check."

Rhode Islanders were different. In chapter eleven, Koehler argues that the colony "with a singularly un-Puritan cast of mind" offered new "expectations and possibilities for women." Rhode Island women had the right to preach; they were more likely to be named executors of their husbands' estates; they were offered more adequate poor relief than women in the "Calvinist colonies." Rhode Islanders were less likely to stereotype women as virgin, whore, spinster, or witch. They were more tolerant of irregular marriage, and they punished men and women equally for sexual misbehavior.

It should be clear by now that *A Search for Power* is a provocative book. Bolstering his text with lively quotations from primary sources and with a variety of statistical tables, Koehler has demonstrated the abundance of early New England source material and has opened up historical questions which deserve serious inquiry. Comparative study of crime and punishment, for example, or of executorship or poor relief might yield important insights into the position of early American women. *A Search for Power* includes valuable appendixes giving both printed and manuscript sources for such things as divorce petitions,

suicides, witchcraft accusations, and even tavern licenses. That the author has an obvious bias should not obscure the importance of what he has done.

It must be said, however, that Koehler is not entirely trustworthy in his handling of evidence within the book itself. Anyone thoroughly familiar with the sermon literature, for instance, will recognize that Koehler has carefully excised anything which might soften or qualify his portrait of Puritan repression. His quotation of William Secker on page 31 is a particularly blatant example. Koehler quotes only the first half of the sentence; I have supplied the rest in italics:

Our Ribs were not ordained to be our Rulers: They are not made of the head to claim Superiority, *but out of the Side, to be content with Equality.*

Such handling of evidence goes beyond simple carelessness. Koehler simply does not want to be bothered with anything that complicates his argument.

A similar lack of concern for detail warps the material in the Rhode Island chapter. What is the reader to make of a statistical table which includes 73 Rhode Island wills covering a *sixty* year period with 32 Suffolk County wills from an *eight* year period? Equally puzzling is a chart on "Corporal and Capital Punishment" which compares 444 male offenders with 49 female offenders and then attempts to argue that women in Massachusetts were punished more severely than men. Without knowing whether the punishments were for drinking, fighting, swearing, or infanticide, the statistics mean little. Nor is the assertion that Rhode Island authorities responded to rape "more severely than their Calvinist neighbors" particularly convincing since only two men—a Black and an Indian—ever came before the Rhode Island authorities. Under close scrutiny, much of Koehler's evidence simply melts away, though the questions he has raised remain tantalizing.

Search for Power is an unconvincing book, but for Rhode Island historians it makes a compelling invitation to research.

University of New Hampshire

LAURA THATCHER ULRICH

The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700–1807. By JAY COUGHTY. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981. xiii + 361 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$22.95)

Although current historians have rightly minimized the involvement of American ports and merchants in the slave trade, there was one notable exception. Between 1709 and 1807 Rhode Island seamen made almost a thousand voyages to Africa and transported at least

106,000 slaves to the Americas, probably about two-thirds of the American total. This trade followed the classic triangular pattern: New England rum to Africa, slaves to the plantation colonies, and molasses back to Rhode Island. Rum distilling formed a crucial Rhode Island industry, substituting for the export staple that New England agriculture failed to provide. The Rhode Island trade was distinctive in the small size of the vessels used and the reliance on a single trading commodity. Through Rhode Island's involvement in slaving, rum became vital to trade on the West African coast, and approached the status of a monetary standard. "Because of its spectacular success, Rhode Island, the principal carrier of rum to Africa, deserves a much larger place in the annals of the eighteenth-century African slave trade" (p. 110).

In the history of colonial commerce and the slave trade, this clearly written book is the first detailed account of the trade of a "minor" slaving power. Coughtry has painstakingly reconstructed the known details of all traceable Rhode Island slaving voyages, and uses the resulting data to create an extraordinarily judicious, balanced, and lucid account of all aspects of Rhode Island's involvement in the slave trade. The study definitively fills a gap in the history of the slave trade, although it must be remembered that the gap was a small one. Rhode Island's trade made up no more than five percent of the British trade and about two percent of the Atlantic trade in the eighteenth century, accounted for no more than one percent of the mainland colonies' commodity exports, and consumed only about a third of the rum exports of the single colony involved. Coughtry is usually aware of these limitations. Only in his account of the impact of rum shipments in Africa does his estimate of Rhode Island's importance seem disproportionate to the scale of her enterprise. In the broader realm of commercial history, the book adds significantly to knowledge of American economic history. Not only does it explore Rhode Island's slave trade, but it also analyzes the distilling industry, the growth of maritime insurance, the recruitment and payment of ships' crews, and other related topics. Along the way it exploits underused sources such as customs ledgers and merchants' accounts to yield several of the kind of new data series that economic historians need if they are to escape the repeated reworking of familiar sources.

While the contributions of *The Notorious Triangle* to slaving and general economic history are substantial, the book represents a landmark in the writing of Rhode Island history. In the economic history of the state it ranks with the works of James B. Hedges and Peter J. Coleman, and in related social and political areas it provides important perspectives. For the first time the economic basis of Bristol's flowering as a seaport is properly documented, and light is shed on the precarious revival of Newport after the Revolution and on the divergence of interests between Providence and its island rival. Students of Rhode Island politics will find invaluable Coughtry's integration of his identification of slaving interests with the history of the political and judicial

struggle for the suppression of the slave trade. For the first time surmises about the causes and circumstances of Bristol's campaign for an independent customs district in 1801 become clear, as do the motives of Bristol and Newport merchants in shifting to the Republican party after 1800. Finally Rhode Island scholars are in the author's debt for presenting his census of Rhode Island's slavers and slaving voyages with clarity and in detail. Not only will it be possible for his successors to supplement and correct his enumerations but also to use his data to study linkages between slaving and the many yet unexplored aspects of the history of the state.

University of Chicago

EDWARD M. COOK, JR.

So Few the Brave: Rhode Island Continentals 1775-1783. By ANTHONY WALKER. (Newport, R.I.: Seaford Press for the Rhode Island Society, Sons of the American Revolution, 1981. x + 204 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$15.00.)

It is difficult to appreciate the service rendered by Colonel Anthony Walker in compiling a book about Rhode Island's Revolutionary War regiments until one attempts to compare it with previous works on the same subject. They simply do not exist. One is forced to go back to Benjamin Cowell's 1850 book, *Spirit of '76 in Rhode Island*, or to hunt for scattered paragraphs in a dozen or more other books. The exercise becomes all the more frustrating, if not maddening, because it shortly becomes obvious that these regiments were exceptional, if not extraordinary.

Walker's focus is on the two regiments that served as part of Washington's Continental Army. There were other Rhode Island regiments, of course, state troops who were raised to guard the coast against British raids and who were called upon as in the case of the attacks on Bristol and Warren to keep the British from leaving Aquidneck Island and ravaging the mainland. There were independent companies, too, of militia with names like the Kingston Reds and the Smithfield and Cumberland Rangers, but the focus of the book is primarily military actions outside of Rhode Island.

The two Continental regiments, the 1st and 2nd Rhode Island (there was briefly a third, but it merged with the other two early in the war) bore the official designation of the 9th and 11th Continental Regiments respectively. They served from June 1775 to November 1783. By this date the numbers of troops were so depleted so as to muster only a single unit known as the Rhode Island Battalion.

The story of the Rhode Island regiments is a remarkable one. Not only did they endure the struggle from its earliest days at the Siege of Boston to its final resolution at Yorktown, but they did so with great

courage and determination making them one of a handful of truly dependable units. They were in the vanguard of Washington's successful counterattack at Harlem Heights. They appeared at a crucial moment in the Battle of Princeton, filling a gap in the American line and turning a defeat into at least a standoff by smartly attacking bewildered British troops who had become used to seeing the backs of American troops. Many of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment went with Benedict Arnold through the wilderness of Maine to attack Quebec in the middle of winter. Taken prisoner and held in captivity, they eventually returned from Canada and rejoined the army below Philadelphia where they defended a small network of forts. They threw off the British timetable to move its fleet up the Delaware by several weeks. Finally surrounded by shore batteries and warships, they defended Fort Mifflin through a murderous bombardment until their island fort was pounded into the mud and they had nothing left with which to cover themselves, in the words of Thomas Paine, "save their glory."

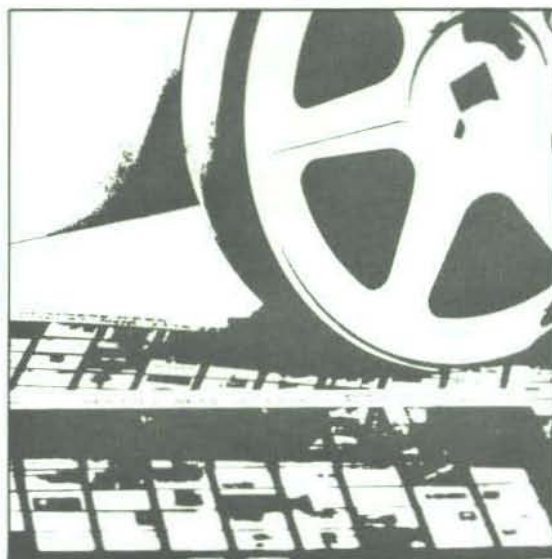
The case of the 2nd Rhode Island was much the same. Finding themselves defending a bridgehead on the Raliway River at the Battle of Springfield, some 160 men of this regiment held up a column of several thousand British and Hessians for nearly an hour, losing forty men, while Nathanael Greene summoned reinforcements from the countryside. Perhaps the Rhode Island contribution was best exemplified by the charge led by Stephen Olney at night at Yorktown, using bayonets to avoid an accidental discharge of muskets. Clambering up the parapet of Redoubt Number 10, a key British defensive strong point, Olney assembled his victorious raiding party while personally sustaining half a dozen bayonet and sword wounds. Even in a day which looks askance and skeptically at would-be heroes, these troops have to be accorded recognition and appreciation approaching hero-worship.

Colonel Walker is remarkably restrained in his accolades for these efforts. His book is more a genealogy of command changes and a brief outline of the achievements of these units. Whole chapters, even books, could be written about some of the events he covers in less than a page. Yet, he succeeds in providing a clear and certain path for others to follow. He is to be commended for pulling together an impressive storyline. The Rhode Island Society of the Sons of the American Revolution are to be commended, too, for making this most useful research tool available to students and scholars of the War for Independence.

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