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Review of *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution*

Chrishon Campbell
Washington College

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The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution.

By Alfred F. Young. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000. ISBN-13: 978-0807054055

Alfred F. Young's *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* is a work that operates on various levels. It examines the American Revolution as it relates to the memory of one of its participants, George Robert Twelves Hewes, reminiscing at the twilight of his life many years after the revolution. Hewes is kept alive in the public memory of succeeding generations and is often put to their own political ends. It also examines the changing significance of a particular pre-Revolutionary event, The Boston Tea Party, as Young surmises how it came by that nomenclature (it was known as "the destruction of the tea" in its own time), all of which is wrapped up in the 1830s biographies of Hewes that serve as Young's initial source material. In the following review of Alfred Young's work, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, it is important to provide a synopsis of the book's contents and survey his written vernacular, contextual evidence, and implicit/explicit notions towards historic society.

The assembly of the first section in Young's book delves into specific information correlating with George Robert Twelves Hewes and his personal experiences. His two main sources for the information regarding Hewes are biographies written in 1834 and 1835. In a quest for the audience to view history through the lens of an everyday man, Young uses Hewes as a vessel to implicitly declare his notions towards historic memory. The author described Hewes as "a nobody who briefly became a somebody in the Revolution and, for a moment near the end of his life, a hero" (24). Young begins discourse about Hewes's life by starting to talk about his apprenticeship. He was an everyday average shoemaker who evolved into something much more. Young touched each stage of Hewes's life and his participation in famous events like The Boston

Tea Party and the Boston Massacre and ends with Hewes being a survivor and a hero. Hewes's private memory perpetuates further knowledge regarding the specific events he participated in.

The key concepts in the book are public and private memory. In part two of Young's novel, he dives into the importance of recognizing the social constructions of memory and how it is formed. He questions the origin of the Boston Tea Party. When he understands that the original name for this event was "the destruction of the tea" (104), Young inquires: at what time does the majority of society claim that event as the Boston Tea Party? He examines public memory and defines it with societies collective memory, especially after most private memories have faded and disappeared.

Young continues discourse relating to public memory and about examples in which memory was controlled. He brings up the Whig party and their perceptual constructions of what they wanted society to remember, which Young refers to as "Taming the Revolution" (108). In another event, The Destruction of the Tea is described by the author as a quasi-military act and the largest mass action of the decade (116). This action of Indian disguised men played an immense part for the American Revolution. According to Young, the Whigs were successful at taming memory (mainly because of their size and prestige) for their personal needs and propaganda, but the Sons of Liberty were unable to accomplish the same. Public rituals like Independence Day were said to help in the eradication of popular radical ideologies of the Boston Revolution.

Young concludes with ideologies that relate to "master mechanics" and their place in history, and more specifically, public memory. When he discusses Hewes's position, he claims that Hewes has recovered memories from iconic moments in American History (e.g., Boston Tea

Party, Boston Massacre, and the tarring and feathering of John Malcom) and has helped authenticate public memory through his own internalized private memory.

Young did an incredible job at sectioning this book. This made it easy for the reader to clearly understand the importance of both public and private memory. In addition, Young engages his audience through use of descriptive vernacular. For example, his description of “the destruction of the tea” forms a visual picture in the audience’s mind. When Young describes the famous event, he recites the actions of the Bostonians as “quasi-military”. These descriptive phrases provide the reader with a comprehensive imagery of historic occurrence. These dynamics concurrently assemble more clarity towards Young’s question about the original name of the Boston Tea Party.

However, Young’s use of non-textual imagery (e.g., pictures within the book) lacked in organization and can cause the audience confusion. For example, page 59 shows a militia power horn carved by a man with symbols of the Liberty Tree. This was a useful image, but Young did not explain the image until page 107. Due to this slight misfire in organization, the audience might be less engaged and confused with referencing an image that is 50 pages away from the related text. Simultaneously, Young fails to address several cultural and societal references that the reader may not understand. An explicit example exists on page 111 when the author refers to “The Cincinnati”. Prior to this text, the everyday reader might not be aware of the social implications that promotes positive ideologies relating to the American Revolution. Moreover, a further display of definitions towards historic societal references would ensure a complete comprehensive assessment from the quotidian bibliophile.

Alfred Young’s ideologies within the text provided both positive and negative interpretations. Young’s notions towards the Bostonians’ Indian disguises are explicit and

comprehensive. On page 103, the author states that there were two main reasons for the Indian disguise: for un-recognition (to avoid arrest), and the use of imagery intended as a symbol of terror and savagery. These notions help the audience visualize the Sons of Liberty and to understand the relation between Americans and Natives. While Young did bring about important ideologies about the public (and private) memory of the people, he did not correct a source of his own merit. On page 159, the author recites a song that is written about the destruction of the tea. It claims that the event happened in 1775, when in fact the “Boston Tea Party” occurred in 1773. The reader would benefit from more elaboration in regard to this for a more comprehensive understanding. If this was Young’s example of how memory is formed and its relationship to what we know now, then (for the audience’s understanding) he should fill the audience in on these implications.

Young’s display and specificity towards the mechanics of that time encourages the audience to view history through a different lens: the lens of an ordinary man. Using Hewes as his back bone, the author perpetuates the importance of this character and uses his perception of events to try and diagnose constructions of memory. This ability is favorable in the reader’s eye because of its authenticity towards historic memory and formations of that memory. In addition, Young’s writing style and neutral stances encourage the reader to create his/her own opinion regarding historic events. He will state the facts without explicitly verbalizing his own biases. With Young’s merit and contextual clues, the audience can form their own understanding of the book.

Altogether, Alfred F. Young provides both pros and cons in his research through his written vernacular, contextual evidence, and implicit/explicit notions towards historic society. This book has provided immense knowledge on both public and private memory as it relates to

the American Revolution. From the introductory descriptions of Hewes and his personal life, to the broader examinations of private and public memory, Young provides an abundance of facts for the reader to interpret in relationship to the construction of memory through the eyes of the working class. Young's book places a huge emphasis on the mechanics by using Hewes as a lens for iconic events in American history. Further research on historic events should adhere to Young's ideologies and psychohistorical fundamentals of public and private memory, particularly for the ordinary citizen. Overall, this research on the major events leading to the American Revolution should inspire readers to consider divergent perceptions of the authentic and recessive participations in history. In conclusion, Alfred F. Young's book, despite its shortcomings, assembled resourceful information for any person interested in the construction of historical memory.

Chrishon Campbell

Harold Washington College (Chicago, IL)

About the author

Chrishon Campbell is currently a Neuroscience major and a double minor in African American Studies and History. His historical interests derive from societal constructions of memory from the working class versus those of dominant authority.