“MORE DANGEROUS ENEMIES”: THE ROLE OF NATIONALISM IN
THE EXECUTION OF ADMIRAL JOHN BYNG, 1756-1757

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
In
History

by
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Spring 2010
“MORE DANGEROUS ENEMIES”: THE ROLE OF NATIONALISM
IN THE EXECUTION OF ADMIRAL JOHN BYNG, 1756-1757

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Joseph J. Krulder

Spring 2010

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DEDICATION

Thank you to the extraordinarily strong women in my life whose eternal guidance blesses me still. From them I gained insight, fortitude, steadfastness, and a love of the humanities.

Thanks also to Empire Coffee, and to my high school English teacher, “Happy” Jim Vinyl.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must give thanks to several historians who provided advice and inspiration. At the top of the list is my supervisor Dr. Jason Nice, whose patience is a virtue and needs extolling, whose insights provided invaluable leads, and upon whose faith in my research permitted me to lecture. On my sense of Historiography I am especially obliged to Dr. Lawrence Bryant. I also wish to convey thanks to Dr. William Campbell and Dr. Robert Tinkler, both of whom proved the value of this project in exploring the senses of liberty post the Seven Years’ War, especially in the colonies.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize my undergraduate professors whose influence continues to inspire: thank you Dr. Elizabeth Colwill, Dr. William Cheek, and Dr. Sarah Elkind.

I thank also the good people behind the scenes at the British Museum for providing high resolution files of eighteenth-century prints so necessary for this erudition.

The support of family assisted me immeasurably. And though no amount of thanks can ever repay their patience, editing, and laughter, I must clear space on the page for them. To Jori, my wife, you allowed me time away from home, filled me with copious amounts of coffee, and eased my anxieties: I love you, and some day Italy and England will be in view! To my beautiful daughters Elizabeth and Sarah, I promise some day to make amends for all the time I missed being your dad. I could not have finished this if not for your all too forgiving nature.
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ABSTRACT

"MORE DANGEROUS ENEMIES": THE ROLE OF NATIONLISM IN THE
EXECTION OF ADMIRAL JOHN BYNG, 1756-1757

by

© Joseph J. Krulder
Master of Arts in History
California State University, Chico
Spring 2010

On March 14, 1757, Admiral John Byng’s life ended: death by firing squad. Most historiography on the Byng affair focuses on the military and/or political aspects of the case, often concluding, therefore, that the admiral’s execution came as a result of just those two factors. This thesis, however, takes a different approach. While acknowledging that politics absolutely played a role, the author claims that forces outside of the political gates of Parliament and the Court also factored into the admiral’s ultimate demise. Other forces that played a significant role leading to the execution of Admiral John Byng include the various forms and imaginations inherent within British society: its economics, its free press and other modes of media, how its social hierarchies and strong religious
values played into the affair, and how the rise of a unique form of nationalism may have contributed to the admiral’s untimely death.

During the pamphlet wars prior to Byng’s execution, famed Tory writer Samuel Johnson wrote that the admiral faced “more dangerous enemies,” than when he faced off against the French in the sea-going Battle of Minorca (May 20, 1756). In other words, John Byng not only had to face down his political enemies in order to escape execution, but as a matter of course, had to overcome the manner in which Briton’s imagined their society, their economic institutions, their moral and religious mores, their expectations over empire, and their nationalist aspirations. Further, that all these forms of imaginations exploded to the fore through the British free press and other media, excoriating either Admiral John Byng or the government (ministry and Court). Issues of national identity arose creating a volatile atmosphere under which the Byng affair played out. This thesis, thus, explores to what degree nationalism played a role in John Byng’s ultimate end.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the pamphlet wars which accompanied the Byng affair 1756-1757, famed Tory writer Samuel Johnson wrote, “The Admiral has now more dangerous Enemies to combat with, than he had then,” an implied reference that though Byng faced down French cannons off of the island of Minorca, a plurality of enemies targeted the admiral at home. On May 20, 1756, Admiral Byng witnessed a French fleet fleeing from his broadsides. By July, from prison, the admiral took stock of a ministerial campaign that released a broadside of rhetoric, satire, and images attacking his honor, accusing him of cowardice, disaffection and the inability of “not doing his utmost,” as required by the penal codes of the 1749 Articles of War. Britain exploded with intense domestic turmoil over the loss of Minorca to the French, a loss the ministry attempted to make Byng the scapegoat. Throughout England, Wales, Ireland, and even the colonies, anti-Byng demonstrations rocked Britain. “I have been but one night in town,” wrote Horace Walpole to George Montagu on July 12, 1756, “and my head sung ballads about Admiral


2 Markus Eder, Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy of the Seven Years’ War, 1755-1763 (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 4. Eder points out there was a general trend in the early-eighteenth century to add stiff capital punishments throughout both domestic and military penal codes; the 1749 Articles of War made the offence of “not doing one’s utmost” punishable by death.
Byng, all night, as one is apt to dream of the masquerade minuet: the streets swarm so
with lampoons…” By October, the Newcastle ministry resigned. By about noon, on
March 14, 1757, British Admiral John Byng’s life ended: death by firing squad. In the
interim: from Byng’s recall, to his arrest, trial and execution, the British nation, if not the
western world, watched transfixed.

The severity of the sentence certainly confounded Voltaire whose work
*Candide*, published two years after the death of Byng, suggested that this was just the
way the British operated. “Mais dans ce pays-ci il est bon de tuer de temps en temps un
amiral pour encourager les autres.” For Thomas Turner, a simple mercer from East
Hoathly, Sussex, Byng’s execution represented a failure of the British sense of justice:

…but in my own private opinion I think him not that guilty person as many
represent him, neither do I think it a prudent thing for him to be executed; but
I suppose there was no calming a clamorous and enraged populace without
taking away the life of this man, though he is an innocent person, I think
innocence should more than balance popular clamour.

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3 W. S. Lewis, and Ralph S. Brown, eds., *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with George

4 For the international impact that the trial and execution of Admiral John Byng possessed,
see W. S. Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith, and George L. Lam, eds., *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with
between Sir Horace Mann, a British diplomat in Florence, and British MP Horace Walpole over the Byng
affair was extensive and spoke often of perceptions of Britain by other nations in regards to the Byng affair.
For example, Mann to Walpole writing on the loss of Minorca dated June 19, 1756, declared that “I can’t
describe to you the disappointment of our friends, or the surprise in general that all this has occasioned, as
it falls so short of what everybody expected…” Lewis, Smith and Lam, eds., 20:567. As for the domestic
calamities the trial caused, there exist numerous articles and books, especially helpful were John M.
Cardwell, *Arts and Arms: Literature, Politics and Patriotism During the Seven Years War* (Manchester:
Manchester University Press, 2004); Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain*
(New York, London: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics,

5 “But in this country it is good from time to time to kill an admiral to encourage the others.”

6 David Vaisey, ed., *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765* (Oxford: Oxford University
Perhaps the comparison is unfair. One is French, the other British, one an elite, the other from the middling ranks, one a philosopher, the other a merchant. Any number of endless unjust relationships can be called upon to void the comparison. Yet they both wrote on the same topic: John Byng’s ultimate demise.

For Voltaire, the admiral’s trial and execution created a decisive disconnect. For decades leading up to the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), French philosphenes compared France to England, with the latter more often winning their praise. From relative obscurity, the rise of England as a predominate global power left continental thinkers searching for answers. The philosphenes often concluded that England’s constitution, which placed requisite limitations on the king’s rule and promoted a House of Commons which pillared a parliamentary system (a “beautiful system” according to Montesquieu), merged the institutions of “the people” to the theatre of “the state.” A sense of fellowship thereby ensued, that whether a “nobleman” or “plebe,” all shared in the benefits of the English nation.

Yet, the “plebes” during the Byng affair joined forces with the merchant middle class to rail against the nation’s political status quo. In doing so they nearly toppled a state, destroyed a ministry (Newcastle’s), and loudly demanded alterations of a government it saw as corrupt. As Byng’s trial proceeded, Voltaire worked in France to accrue proof of Byng’s innocence, sending to friends in London a letter written by the Duc de Richelieu, the French General who laid siege to Minorca.\(^7\) That letter professed Byng’s actions during the battle in a positive light. Richelieu’s letter, and one of

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Voltaire’s, made it to the pages of the February 1-3 edition of the *London Chronicle*, but with little to no effect on British popular opinion according to Horace Walpole who followed the arrest and trial with ardent interest.\(^8\) In *Candide*, a book that ridiculed the absurdities of the western world, the execution of the Admiral John Byng ranked among them. That the execution occurred “pour encourager les autres,” reflects not irony, but the traditional intellectual outlook held by the *philosophes* of a concert between the people of England and its government. Mob influence failed mentioning because in the bureaucratic decision to end Byng’s life, the government’s thumbs down reflected the will of the people as a whole. According to the *philosophes*, that was just the British way of doing things.\(^9\)

Turner, however, was closer to the action. A voracious reader, Turner also wrote furiously, maintaining a diary during the entire breadth of the Seven Years’ War. His entries mostly dealt with the everyday throes of life. Occasionally, however, the political world entered his thoughts. Perhaps, geography played a minor role in this as East Hoathly sits but twenty miles from England’s south shore. Not only did the empire bring material wonders from across the globe, important for a mercer such as Turner, but sometimes the empire clashed with France who, at the beginning of the Seven Years’ War, threatened invasion. East Hoathly celebrated or fasted depending on the news of this struggle. The arrest, trial, and execution of Admiral John Byng made it to the pages of Turner’s diary. A pious man who served as a deacon in his parish, Turner commented

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\(^8\) Lewis, Smith and Lam, *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann*, 21:51.

many times on both the “enraged populace” and the aristocracy who seemed filled with “dissoluteness of manners, a spirit of effeminacy and self-interest, together with an intolerable share of pride….”

Byng’s execution troubled Turner for it ran against his sense of fairness and justice. This placed Turner in the minority opinion. Despite numerous publications which alleged a ministerial conspiracy to make Byng the scapegoat for Minorca’s loss, the outcry against Byng remained strong until the day of his execution. When William Pitt asked the king to pardon the admiral, demonstrations against the admiral resurfaced. Mob rule demanded mob justice. Though a surfeit of pamphlets and newspapers printed ample evidence of an innocent admiral targeted and made scapegoat by ministers, in the end it did not matter. Unfortunately for the admiral, Byng belonged to the aristocracy, those degenerate ones that would sell Minorca to France rather than fight like a true Briton.

‘Britannicus’ warned,

Justice ought always to take a fast and impartial Hold of every Offender, and not, like a Cobweb, catch only small Flies, and be broken by great Ones. To take away the Life of the Poor, who break the Laws for Want of Bread, and to suffer great Traitors to truck away a Nation’s Territories, and plunder the Publick of Millions with Impunity, is great and manifest Injustice…

10 Vaisey, The Diary of Thomas Turner, introduction and 125.


13 Rogers, 63-64.
For the majority of the middle and lower orders, overwhelmed for decades by a sense of social injustice and a simmering disdain for the apparent corruption inherent in their government, the Byng affair provided an opportunity to demonstrate the many years of their frustrations.

So which was it: Voltaire’s assertion that Byng died at the hands of a government trying to encourage its naval officers to do better, or Turner’s assertion that justice wilted before the clamor of an “enraged populace”? That Byng’s life hung upon the workings of a mandated Courts-Martial system, where Parliament reviewed its recommendations, and king George II lobbied to pardon a man acquitted of cowardice, Voltaire’s quote speaks true to the ‘rule of law’ – the pride of English plebes and noblemen. Yet, the rule of law, as Voltaire saw it, turned the stomach of Thomas Turner who saw unfairness not only in the stiffness of the sentence, but the contrived schemes that worked in the shadows to doom the admiral. In Voltaire’s quote “the mob” does not exist. In Turner’s thinking, however, the mob acted as the ultimate arbiter.

Perhaps within the conjunction of Voltaire’s and Turner’s observation reside the convergence of forces that allied against John Byng, like a single unitary which involved British society, politics, economics, religion and the budding germinations of British nationalism. To remain alive, John Byng needed to stare down this many-headed leviathan.

This paper juxtaposes Byng’s demise against the manner in which the British people perceived and imagined their society, state and empire. This paper asks whether the structure of the British free press existed to such an extent whereby a ministry’s purposeful propaganda could be sent to and received by the general populace and thereby
create a perception among the populace that Admiral John Byng existed as a traitorous villain. The paper focuses on the politics of the day, and how different segments of British society imagined the Byng affair within those political structures. The paper takes a look at the manner in which British society was segmented, and how the hierarchy of social structure played a role in the demise of Admiral Byng. The loss of Minorca also forced Britain to reanalyze its empire, for the economic impact over the loss of the Mediterranean island was steep. Also, what role, if any, did Britain’s religious structure play upon the imaginations of Britons in the context of the Byng affair? And finally, did nationalism exist in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, and if so, to what extent? And did nationalistic imaginations play a role during the Byng affair?

The historiography on Byng is mixed. John Charnock was one of the first historians to comment on the arrest and execution of John Byng. In 1796, he published the final volume of *Biographia Navalis*, where:

> Reviewing the whole transaction, future ages can scarcely avoid considering Mr. Byng as a true victim to the mistakes of others... In whatever respect he might be deficient as a commander, the blame certainly attaches, in a much stronger degree, to those who sent him in such a service.\(^{14}\)

Charnock’s comments on Byng’s demise, that his execution was owed mainly to the machinations of a ministry bent on deflecting blame of the loss of the Mediterranean island of Minorca, influenced historians throughout the nineteenth century and indeed the twentieth. Robert Beatson’s 1804 *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain from 1727 to 1783*, though more political than Charnock’s, also insisted that the ministry’s reaction to the loss of Minorca was “to throw off the blame from themselves, to fix it

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solely on the unfortunate Admiral….” By the twentieth century with the British military focus turned toward the era of dreadnaughts, Sir Julian Corbett’s epitaphs on naval warfare commended Byng’s action as progressive, whose modifications during the Battle of Minorca earned him “considerable merit.” Further, that not only did his replacement, Admiral Hawke, adopt Byng’s tactics but wrote of them in “Additional Instructions” for the rest of the fleet to follow. “With these facts in mind,” wrote Corbett, “Byng’s actions may be approached with some possibility of right judgment.” Philip Guedalla followed in 1913 with the same reasoning; Byng conducted himself militarily wise but “politically foolish.” However, not until Brian Tunstall’s 1928 book Admiral Byng and the Loss of Minorca, are there any direct or indirect references to the mountain of propaganda leveled by the ministry at Admiral Byng. This theme is picked up by Dudley Pope’s 1962, At Twelve Mr. Byng was Shot, where Pope all but accuses the ministers of murder. Yet, despite the historical attention attributed to Byng’s execution, few historians have approached the matter by considering the societal forces of politics, economics and religion, let alone nationalism, conjoined and directed against the admiral. Evidence of such forces arrives in numerous forms such as satirical political prints. For example; the

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18 At the completion of this thesis, this author became aware of another work, published in 2009, dedicated to a biography on John Byng. Though this author regrets not reviewing the book, the inclusion of it to the historiography is certainly justified. See Chris Ware, Admiral Byng: His Rise and Execution, (London: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009).
print entitled, “The English Lion Dismember’d” (figure 1) displays the political,

![Figure 1 – “The English Lion Dismember’d,” 1756, British Museum. Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3547. Reprinted with permission.](image)

economic, and societal issues prominently debated at the dawning of the Seven Years’ War. Civic activism is alive and well in this print where both City leaders and country peasants are dedicated to the political issues of the moment. Even Byng, at left, appears civically engaged, acting within the bounds of British law while attempting to convince a Courts-Martial of sorts that his actions against the French in no way violated the want of his countrymen. Politics, economics, and empire vie for attention in the depiction of courtiers and London officials verbally sparring to the right. London’s mayor points to
the dismembered English lion and states, “I am deputed to enquire how this Limb came to be cut off.” Indeed, the lion’s right forelimb is gushing blood and its paw labeled “Minorca” lies nearby. The City aldermen chime in, “Our Constituents loudly insist to know where the blame lies.” Another alderman adds, “Minorca is lost & our American Colonies in danger.” The courtiers explain, “The Amputation cou'd not be avoided, the Patients ease being mistook at a Consultation of Political Physicians.” Another courtier replies to the alderman, “It was owing to an error in the Prescription. On the faith of a Courtier, we have a Catholicon will set all right again & if your throats were cut, it will restore you.” 19 The sub-caption of the 1756 print stresses it was “the voice of the public” that demanded “an inquiry into the loss of Minorca,” a real-time reference to the City’s October 1756 instructions sent to the monarch demanding an inquiry to Minorca’s loss. In the center of the print, however, foreign mercenaries, in this case Hanoverian soldiers, converse with countryside peasants. 20 The hiring of mercenaries to defend England’s shores became a Patriot Whig issue, not only over the obvious patriotic concerns of hiring foreigners over the arming of the English militia, but on taxation issues as well since the costs involved in keeping mercenaries far exceeded the training of a home-grown militia. In the print, the Hanoverians are somewhat condescending, “Fear not! if your blood was let out of your Veins, we'll tranfuse ours in its room, Then you'll be sprightly.” Another Hanoverian extols, “We have left our Country and are come hundreds of Miles to keep you from fainting,” because, of course, the English are weak and

19 A “catholicon” is a type of cure all, note the reference to bloodletting and who would be doing the throat cutting.

20 The choice of depicting Hanoverians is a telling one since George II was born in Hanover.
feminine. But the British peasants stand firm, “We want none of your blood, Was it not for Hares & Partridges we could defend ourselves.”21 Another peasant cries, “Our enemies have Guns, Our Arms are only Rakes and Flails. The Gentry are more concern’d to preserve the Game than their Country.”22 Yet another peasant sounds off that “W—s and Cards, Hunting & Horse-racing are more their concern then Commerce or Glory.”23 The print thus depicts peasants knowledgeable in the arts of “commerce and glory,” indelible marks of the British spirit. In front of the soldiers and peasants struts a French cock tearing at the British flag. Admiral Byng, at left, points to the ships of the line in a recreation of the battle. Below the hung battle map is a poem “Byng’s Plea” which famously toured the country in prose and song at the outset of the anti-Byng hysteria:

With thirteen Ships to twelve says B—g
It were a shame to meet ’em
And then with twelve to twelve a thing
Impossible to beat em
When more to many less a few
And even still not right
Arithmetic will plainly shew
Twere wrong in B—g to fight

As a satirical poster, “The English Lion Dismember’d” bleeds politics, economics, civic duty, defense of British liberties, and the rule of law.24

In coming full circle, the Voltaire and Turner quotes which began this introduction, speak in volumes of the state, of Great Britain, of the sense of justice, law, politics, economics, religion and culture. In Voltaire, the death of Byng reasoned upon

21 Newcastle’s French cook, Cloe, was famed for his dishes of partridges and rabbits.

22 A spirited reference to the enclosure movement.

23 W—s refers to “whores”.

24 Stephens, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, no. 3547.
the notion that it will encourage other admirals, and therefore, on the face of it, remains focused upon the actions – or in Byng’s case – the inactions of the elite class. Turner’s dismay over the admiral’s execution found fault with Britain’s “clamorous and enraged populace,” a focus that therefore places the crisis at the hands of the mob. Both men’s comments over the Byng affair, however, missed entirely the burgeoning middle class, the increasingly wealthy, yet politically disenfranchised bourgeoisie. Politically stonewalled for decades by entrenched Whigs, uncomfortable in collusion with Tory country gentlemen, and aghast at the losses incurred, first in America and then in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the Seven Years’ War, the merchant class found its political voice in the Patriots, a small band of radical Whigs that reflected deeply their entrenched middle class values: religion, wealth, and empire. Without the political power they saw fit to deserve, the middle order of British society resorted to ardent retorts of national sentiment, feelings of “anger aroused by the violation” of their core principles.25 As the events of the Byng affair unfolded, propaganda wars ensued between various political factions. Byng became stigmatized, caught in the crosshairs of anti-aristocratic rhetoric on the one hand, and cowardly inaction on the other. But the question still remains, among the ardent politics, the worry over failing economics, the social dislocations and questionings brought about by war, the vocal demands for adherence to moral and civic-based religiosity, did nationalism play a role in the execution of Admiral John Byng?

CHAPTER II

THE BYNG AFFAIR, 1756-1757

The context of the Byng Affair is essential to examining the role of nationalism in the admiral’s execution. The on again, off again warring feud between France and Britain throughout the eighteenth century began heating up once more in 1755. Fishing rights in the Northwest Atlantic, land disputes in the Ohio Valley, and mercantile rights in the Caribbean and the subcontinent of India contributed to conflict. Impressment gangs, stocked with press warrants from the Admiralty, scoured port towns and cities in anticipation of war.26 On June 8, 1755, British Admiral Edward Boscawen’s fleet captured the Alcide and Lys, two French men-of-war off of Newfoundland.27 In July, General Edward Braddock failed in taking Fort Duquesne. Despite these and other pervasive provocations by British forces, “Whatever be the reason,” exclaimed Horace Walpole in a letter to Sir Horace Mann, “they don’t declare war.”28

Contrasting the British build up to the war against the vulnerability of Minorca lends credence to the argument that blame for the island’s loss lay at the feet of

26 Rogers, 62; see also: Charles Harding Firth, ed., Naval Songs and Ballads (London, Navy Records Society, 1908), lxvii.

27 Firth, lxvii.

28 Lewis, Smith and Lam, Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann, 20:490.
the ministry. As of January 1, 1756, only a “small British squadron consisting of one 60-gun ship, one 50-gun ship and four frigates” defended the country’s Mediterranean interest. Despite volumes of information received by the ministry on French preparations in their southern ports, fear of a cross-channel invasion caused the administration to keep the bulk of the British fleet close to shore. British intelligence received in October of 1755, however, named not only the French admiral, the Marquis de la Galissonnière, but the name of the ships that were to be employed in the invasion of Minorca, and also the name of the French General, the Duc de Richelieu, who would lead the troops, how many troops, the equipment to be transported and the number of tartans requested. Yet the garrison at Minorca remained not only unprotected, but a bulk of its officer corps enjoyed leave back in England as these tensions rose. Additionally, the main of the British fleet remained just off the coast of Britain in anticipation of a French invasion.

In fact, form and imagination intrude at this point, as newspapers and coffee houses spurred public murmuring by printing reported French buildups:

This invasion that I announced to you, is very equivocal; there is some suspicion, that it was only called in as an ally to the subsidiary treaties: many

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29 The importance of Minorca is discussed in detail in Chapter IV, “Form and Imagination: The Economy.” See also the block quote on page 30. However, Minorca’s importance largely lay in economics due to its strategic location. Such centrality facilitated the gathering of goods traded within the Mediterranean making the island a weigh station. Thus, trade between Britain and the Mediterranean became decidedly more efficient.


32 Pope indicates 2,860 manned the garrison at Port Mahon, but that “no less that forty-one officers were absent in England,” many of whom traveled with Byng’s fleet to make their return. Pope, 61.
that come from France say that on their coasts they are dreading an invasion from us.\footnote{33}

The ministry pushed threats of a French invasion into the public press. Even after anti-ministerial press accounts reprinted dozens of intelligence reports showing the French never intended to invade but had eyes on the Mediterranean only, pamphlets in defense of the ministry continued not only to claim such but argued the point in such a way as to continue the stirring of fear through a series of what-if questions:

> How many Towns, and Villages would it have filled with Widows, and with Orphans? How many Thousands would have lost their lives in struggling for their Liberty, their Religion, their Country, and every other dear and valuable Blessing which we enjoy, under a good and gracious King?\footnote{34}

But by pushing the fear factor, the Newcastle administration and its Admiralty office, headed by Lord George Anson, boxed itself into a corner. The more they played upon fears of a French invasion, whether for political reasons or not, the more difficult it became to dispatch ships to protect other portions of the empire. Thus, the Mediterranean theatre lay unattended and vulnerable. Mounting evidence and urgent requests from Minorca and Gibraltar finally forced the Admiralty’s hand.\footnote{35} On March 9,

\footnote{33 A week later, Walpole wrote to Mann, “I am glad, my dear Sir, that you have not wasted many alarms on the invasion; it does not seem to have been ever intended by the French. Our ministers, who are not apt to have any intelligence, have now only bad; they spread the idea…” The campaign by the ministry to use the press to create fear of a French invasion is reinforced by a later letter sent on February 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1756, Walpole to Mann, “The reigning fashion is expectation of an invasion; I can’t say I am fashionable…” Lewis, Smith and Lam, \textit{Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann}, 20:512-13, 516, and 531.}

\footnote{34 \textit{An Appeal to Reason and Common Sense or a Free and Candid Disquisition of the Conduct of A--- B---} (London: 1756), 30.}

\footnote{35 Alerted by numerous British diplomats from all across Europe and the Mediterranean: John Birtles in Genoa; Arthur Villettes, British Minister at Bern, James Banks at Carthagena; John Dick from Leghorne; Lewis Cabins from Nice; James Miller at Barcelona; the Earl of Bristol in Turin; and Sir Benjamin Keene, the Ambassador in Madrid, plus agents from Marseilles and elsewhere all reported that the French were massing troops near Roussillon, and building thousands of tartans with their destination Port Mahon, Minorca. This was the French Belle-Isle plan. See Pope, 58-59.}
1756, Newcastle called an Inner Committee meeting in regard to Minorca. Two days later, Admiral John Byng received orders to prepare ten ships of the line. However shortages of men constrained the British navy. Impressment gangs continued to round up as many sailors as could be found, still, Admiral Byng’s ten ships were short by well over 700 men. Yet, George Anson, Lord of the Admiralty, refused Byng the habit of borrowing men from ships moored but at the ready. Instead of seasoned maritime sailors, Anson assigned a regiment of Fusiliers, mere musket men with no sailing experience to outfit the rest of Byng’s fleet. With no tenders, fireships, or hospital ships, as was the custom, Byng set sail on April 1st with ten ships, most in disrepair, to save Minorca from falling into French hands.

He arrived too late. On April 17, 1756, an army of 15,000 French landed on the west side of the island near Ciudadela with no resistance. As this massive force moved toward the British garrison holed up at Fort St. Philip on the opposite side of the island, nearly the whole of the British Mediterranean fleet quietly slipped away from Port Mahon and headed toward Gibraltar in hope of meeting with reinforcements. Byng’s ten ships arrived at Gibraltar on May 2, 1756. In route, storms and dead winds slowed his progress and at one point the Intrepid had to be towed.

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36 For a list of the ships, and the men thereof, that were highlighted by the Admiralty Office as off limits to Byng as the admiral prepared to set sail for Minorca, see: Johnson, *Some Further Particulars in Relation to the Case of Admiral Byng*, 4-7.

37 Pope, 74-87.

38 The ships which departed the port were the Deptford, Princess Louisa, Portland, Chesterfield, Proserpine and Dolphin.

39 Cardwell, 46-7; Pope, 85-88.
At Gibraltar, Byng received a bevy of bad news. He learned first that the French landed so many at Minorca; second, that an expected regiment of marines from Gibraltar was to be denied him by its commander, General Fowke; and finally, the condition of the port facilities: the mast-house, boathouse, pitch house, smith shop, and cable-shed were “all decayed and broken down.”¹⁰ Not until May 8th, was Byng able to leave Gibraltar for Minorca.

In the meantime, news of French landing at Minorca hit the British presses on May 6th. Whig Patriot William Pitt, scathingly attacked the Newcastle administration on the floor of the House of Commons the next day.¹¹ For more than a year, Britain nipped at the patience of the French. When the French finally responded, it attacked the one place left virtually undefended: Minorca.

Just as Pitt lambasted the ministry, Byng sent his first dispatch from Gibraltar. The tone of the letter clearly attempted to shift blame of the loss of Minorca onto the ministry. If I had arrived “at Mahon before the French had landed,” wrote Byng, “they would not have gained a toehold.”¹² His dismay of the port conditions at Gibraltar also

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¹⁰ Pope, 110-13. Fowke convened a War Council upon Byng’s arrival and without Byng in attendance. According to Fowke, orders from the Admiralty office by way of Byng contradicted previous orders. He convinced his officers that these new directives must not supersede the others on the basis that the French would make a move to attack Gibraltar. See also, Richmond, xxxviii-xxxix. When Byng docked at Gibraltar, with his fleet still unfitted from Portsmouth and battered by Atlantic storms, it was in need of serious repair. Without any tenders, Byng sent Milburn Marsh and Henry Blankney, officers from his ship to investigate the docking facilities of Gibraltar. The conditions report stunned the admiral.

¹¹ Cardwell, 47-48. Pitt stated that the administration ignored evidence of a French buildup in the Mediterranean, ignored the Americas, and had mismanaged the entire international situation.

¹² Pope, 111-12.

On May 17th, the day King George II declared a state of war between Britain and France, Henry Fox sat down with George “Bubb” Dodington, Treasurer of the Navy, to complain that “he was very uneasy about the posture of public affairs” concerning the loss of Minorca, and particularly about having to regurgitate Lord Anson’s lines that the “Duke had never obstructed the sending sooner [Byng’s fleet] to the Mediterranean.” According to Dodington’s diary as the meeting continued, Fox complained bitterly that Newcastle was being “obnoxious” toward him despite his spirited defense of his Grace in the House of Commons. At this point Dodington informs Fox that perhaps Newcastle could not be so temperamental “unless they had anyone to make a scapegoat.” Fox:

seemed alarmed, and asked me, if I thought him likely to be a scape-goat, and dwelt upon the expression. I told him, as the truth was, that I had not him, in any degree, so much as in my contemplation, and I had no such apprehensions.

It is not clear who ‘him’ is, but in the 1823 edition of the diary, ‘him’ is clearly italicized. While it may never be proven that ‘him’ is Byng, it can be proven that

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43 Ibid.


46 Wyndham, *The Diary of the Late George Bubb Dodington*, 341-42. I was not able to locate any of the previous three editions and, therefore, am unable to assess if the italicized “him” reflects Dodington’s writing, or an editorial comment made by the editor.
even before Admiral Byng engaged the enemy on the 20th of May, the ministry was already looking for someone to scapegoat for the loss of Minorca. This did not escape the pro-Byng faction. In many pamphlets such as, *A Letter to a Member of Parliament in the Country From a Friend in London*, the attacks against Admiral Byng occurred so early as to throw suspicion of calumny back on the ministry.

The Disingenuity of Mr. Byng’s Adversaries is particularly remarkable… for, as it was thought convenient to implant in the Minds of the People, a Suspicion of his Cowardice, before it could possibly be known, *whether he would fight*; so it was deemed equally expedient, to supercede him, before it could be fairly known, *whether he had fought*…

Thus, it is possible that Byng erred politically by sending his tersely worded dispatch from Gibraltar on his way to Minorca. Whether Admiral Byng’s first dispatch had anything to do with Dodington’s ‘scapegoat’ comments three days prior to the actual battle, may forever live as an intriguing historical musing.

Byng’s fleet arrived off of Port Mahon late on the 19th of May. Despite the siege and within cannon shot of entrenched French batteries, Byng ordered Captain Hervey’s frigate, the *Phoenix*, to make an attempt to advance a letter to General Blakeney, whose small force lay under siege at the garrison. Before Blakeney’s reply, however, Galissonnière’s fleet appeared on the horizon. Byng now had a problem. If he unloaded the fusiliers to help the siege, he would render his fleet unfit to engage the enemy. In fact, as matters stood, Byng ordered men from the five frigates of his fleet to be transferred to the battle ships in order to engage with Galissonnière.

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48 A pamphlet defending Byng charged General Fowke’s refusal to supply a regiment of marines from Gibraltar for the relief of Minorca as a chief quandary for the admiral, “as to the relief of
Naval warfare in the mid-eighteenth century utilized lines of ships so that each ship of the line faced off against one of the enemy’s almost simultaneously. Byng’s line became confused when the *Intrepid*, rigging and sails heavily damaged, became dead in the water. The next ship in the line, the *Revenge*, refused to pass the *Intrepid*. The next two ships of the line, the *Princess Louisa* and the *Trident* also pulled their sails: the rear of the van began to come to a halt. Byng’s flagship, the *Ramillies*, received tentative fire and nervous cannoneers returned a volley without orders. Obscured by smoke, the *Ramillies* nearly fired into and collided with the *Trident* off the starboard bow. To prevent the *Culloden* and *Kingston*, the two ships at the rear from repeating the same mistake, Byng ordered the rearward ships to hold fast while ordering the *Revenge* and *Princess Louisa* to sail around the *Intrepid*. All the while, the first five ships came under heavy fire. Just as Byng’s line reformed and reengaged in battle, darkness descended and the French fleet disappeared. Byng did not give chase, and the French did not return in the morning as anticipated. With no hospital ships to tend to the wounded and dying, and no tenders to make repairs, Byng waited. He ordered his fleet to begin making repairs in anticipation of Galissonnière’s return rotating repair crews for three days. Then, on the 24th of May, and at the insistence of his Rear Admiral, Temple West, Admiral John Byng

*Minorca*, he had neither the Battallion [sic] on Board; which was to have been sent on that Service; nor could he have the Fuziliers [sic], if they had been a Number sufficient for it [relief of the garrison], which it is notorious they were not, without exposing the Squadron to Perdition.” Johnson, *Some Further Particulars in Relation to the Case of Admiral Byng*, 38. Also, in a letter to William Pitt, Byng outlined the same scenario in the form of a question: “Or, when the Enemy’s Fleet appeared steering towards ours, and was known to be superior to it, would not any weakening of our Force have been a very injudicious, not to say culpable, Measure; especially as the Fleet was badly manned, and sickly?” This question, and Byng’s answer to it, left but little chance for a positive outcome. *An Exact Copy of a Remarkable Letter from Admiral Byng to the Rt. Hon. W--- P---, Esq.* (London: 1757), 13.

49 Pope, 134-5.
convened a War Council of his own.\textsuperscript{50} On May 25\textsuperscript{th}, Byng handed his second dispatch to one of his frigates and then ordered the rest of his fleet to make sail for Gibraltar. His fleet struggled to make way arriving into that harbor on June 20\textsuperscript{th}. Byng ordered immediate repairs and began to make plans to reengage Galissonnière’s fleet.

Unbeknownst to Byng, however, the ministry sent Admiral Hawke and Saunders to replace him and a few of the other officers, and announced as much in the \textit{London Gazette} on June 6, 1756. The catalyst for such a decision came to the ministers three days earlier. Copies of Galissonnière’s account of the Battle of Minorca landed in London via a Spanish diplomat from Paris. But a considerable gap existed between the interception of Galissonnière's dispatch and the arrival of Byng’s nearly three weeks later on June 23\textsuperscript{nd}. This allowed the ministry to formulate a response for Byng’s inability to reinforce the garrison at Port Mahon. On June 4, at the duke of Cumberland’s (the future George III) apartment, Newcastle convened another Inner Committee meeting. There, Philip Yorke (1\textsuperscript{st} earl of Hardwicke), the Prime Minister himself, George Anson, Henry Fox, John Cateret (2\textsuperscript{nd} earl of Granville), Robert Darcy (4\textsuperscript{th} earl of Holderness), and Sir Thomas Robinson (MP) as well as George II, decided to sack General Thomas Fowke, General James Stuart, Major James Mace, Rear Admiral Temple West, and Admiral John Byng.\textsuperscript{51} Two days later, the \textit{London Gazette} printed that Byng and company were to be recalled with replacements on their way. Pamphlets which later defended Byng quickly pointed out that this inner circle decision occurred without the benefit of Byng’s input.

\textsuperscript{50} Pope, 140-62.

\textsuperscript{51} Pope, 74-77.
It is not usual to take the Enemy’s Word for their own Feats and Performances; because notorious that the Bias of the Story will ever be in their own favour. And it is certain there is not a Precedent in History to be found of any Process of any Kind, founded upon such Evidence.\textsuperscript{52}

Precedence or not, the press machines on Grub Street ran overtime in excoriating Admiral Byng just as the admiral began refitting his fleet at Gibraltar in order to take another swipe at Galissonnière somewhere in the Mediterranean.

\textsuperscript{52} Johnson, \textit{Some Further Particulars in Relation the Case of Admiral Byng}, 50.
CHAPTER III

FORM AND IMAGINATION: THE PRESS

There is nothing new, but what the pamphlet shops produce: however it is pleasant, to have a new print or ballad every day – I never had an aversion to living in a Fronde.  

Horace Walpole to George Montagu
August 28, 1756

Admiral Byng’s arrest, trial, and execution greatly benefited the British free press, a booming industry since 1695. Already printing 7.5 million newspapers per year in 1750, the threat of war in 1755 only increased demands for the printed page, and then came the loss of Minorca. General literacy figures provided by John Brewer shows that English literacy rose from 10% in 1500, to over 45% by 1714, and 60% by 1750. Work by M. J. Cardwell shows that the laboring classes, especially “skilled artisans and craftsmen who lived in an urban environment,” were nearly as literate as their middle class brethren. Thomas Turner’s diary underscores this research as Turner formed a

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57 Cardwell, 11.
reading club with a “social inferior,” a shoemaker by the name of Thomas Davy, “a very sober man and one who has read a great deal, by which I oftentimes learn something.”

If mass media signifies the possibility of nationalism, then the extent of the free press in Britain evinced the potential to unify its populace under a “pattern of values” as proclaimed upon the printed page. According to Colley, Aberdeen published about 50,000 almanacs per year by the 1680s. In 1702, London acquired its first daily newspaper a feat not repeated in Paris until the 1770s. In 1760, London readers could choose from four daily newspapers, four weekly newspapers, and as many as six tri-weekly accounts from the presses at Grub Street. There existed thirty-five other dailies throughout the provinces, and some of the newspapers operated as joint-stock companies showing not only a clear economic and industry-wide sophistication, but increasing independence from Tory and Whig political partisanship.

In the port cities, as well as the industrial towns, press accounts connected the nation to the periphery of empire, yet in doing so began to articulate how such an empire reflected upon the character of the nation. As the century developed, infractions of integrity and probity increasingly breached the political and social worlds to land on the pages of pamphlets and


59 Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 24-25. Smith defines national identity as the continuous reinterpretation of a “pattern of values.”


62 Cardwell, 3-10.
newspapers. In this context, Byng’s arrest spread rapidly throughout the news circuit, and any remaining propriety of the press quickly waned.63

Assuredly, the journalistic accounts and the numerous prints of 1756, did not exist within a vacuum. These printed words and images about people, places and empire already existed within a recognized and collective national readership: the several million printed papers per year could not sell otherwise. Additionally, work by Robert Mitchell describes the press not only reporting on the state of British finances in the 1720s, but working to influence the financial world as well. Grub Street writers attributed the rise and fall of stocks to backdoor scheming, astrology, and the supernatural. Reporting on financial scandals such as the South Sea Bubble was never meant to be neutral, but to influence the readership, to create a force for change.64

This is abundantly evident in the Byng affair as mid-eighteenth-century newspapers throughout the isle expressed opinions, published political poetry, and printed images to influence its readers.65 For example, two weeks before Byng’s return to England, the July 13, 1756 edition of the Evening Advertiser announced – like other papers – the ministry’s decision to arrest the admiral. Using Latin and the ancient story of Virgil’s Dido and her curse upon Aeneas after he abandoned the Carthaginian Queen, the paper declared “Sed cadet ante diem, mediaque inhumatus arena,” or “may he fall before

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64 Mitchell, 130.

65 Cardwell, 10.
his time, and unburied in the middle of the sand." The paper then referenced Byng, the ministry’s charge of cowardice, and the anticipated Courts-Martial trial with the warning that he “Who fears to meet his country’s foe, Must tremble at her laws.” From the moment the ministry targeted Byng, newspapers worked upon the British public’s imagination, connecting the extent of the empire to a very literate British society hungry for news and ready to devour words, images, and stories of an admiral the ministry painted as too scared to fight. Details of Byng’s Courts-Martial proceedings were not word for word trial accounts, but rather interpretive narratives of them. They filled a news-starved public with skewed or biased details of a far away Mediterranean battle that did not go their country’s way.

But is this nationalism? Hobsbawm, who argues that nationalism is a post ‘era of revolutions’ phenomena, states that nations exist only “in the context of a particular stage of technological and economic development” that “standard national languages, spoken or written, cannot emerge as such before printing, mass literacy, and hence, mass schooling.” The structure of mid-eighteenth-century Britain meets nearly all the criteria set forth by Hobsbawm, but one: “mass schooling.” However, a quick comparative history of European states shows Britain drastically lagged behind other Western nations

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66 Bungiana, Or an Assemblage of What-d’ye-call-em’s, In Prose and Verse: That have occasionally appeared Relative to the Conduct of a Certain Naval Commander, Now first Collected; In Order to perpetuate the MEMORY of his Wonderful Atchievments (London: 1756), 25.

67 Ibid.

68 Alryyes states Courts-Martial proceedings excited readers’ imaginations and helped to connect the turns of the “crimes, failures, and accidents at the peripheries into England’s probities, victories, and national goals.” Alryyes, 531.

in enforcing mass schooling upon its populace.\(^7^0\) Ironically, because of early-eighteenth-century British supremacy in the sciences, applied mechanics, and the concomitant large-scale enterprises of industry, compulsory schooling fell lethargically behind the more pressing need for workers. Until the late nineteenth century, working class children did not receive much schooling. Britain’s national compulsory requirements did not surface until 1870, failing enforcement until 1876, and still considered a “sham” well into the 1880s.\(^7^1\) Yet, I dare say there exist any historian who would deny that Britain was a nation by the end of the nineteenth century.

Instead, the dissemination of news and events, and especially the quantity and variety of media presented before the people, is the clearer test by which historians must judge nationalism. Britain, by 1750, clearly possessed an extensive news distribution system that operated freely for more than half a century. By mid-century, Whigs and Tories learned that newspapers, pamphlets and prints influenced readers who then responded, sometimes in unexpected ways. But sermons also found their way into papers, as did colonial currency reports, or astrological forecast, or the latest report on scientific advances. At the dawning of the Seven Years’ War, the British news dissemination infrastructure possessed the ability to reach vast numbers of people. Given the narrative nature of early-eighteenth-century journalism coupled with the relatively high literacy rates of Britons, the ability to inculcate British imaginations is a greater indicator of nationalism than Hobsbawm’s “mass schooling” scenario. Especially when put to the test

\(^7^0\) Robert J. Hind, “Elementary Schools in Nineteenth-Century England: Their Social and Historiographical Contexts,” *Historical Reflections* 11, no. 2 (1984), 191. Prussia, for example spent £600,000 to England’s £20,000 on compulsory education of the masses in 1833.

\(^7^1\) For the impact of sciences (Newton, Bacon, etc.) on early eighteenth-century industrialization see: Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *The Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), chapter 2; see also: Hind, 190-205.
of the Byng affair, it is crystal clear that the loss of Minorca dominated papers and prints. The ministry’s anti-hero, John Byng, fell victim to satire and became a tool by which nearly all political factions attempted to rule over the dynamics of the British imagination. Every day, newspapers printed accounts of the Byng affair, and as Benedict Anderson points out, every reader or “each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others…”

Other forms of mass media pervaded the Byng era, as well. For those who could not read, prints, handbills, playing cards, in short, anything that could carry an image and convey a story, depicted the unfolding events in the saga of Admiral Byng. A playing card entitled “Byng’s Turn to Ride” (figure 2), reflected an ardent desire by Byng

![Figure 2 - "Byng's Turn to Ride," circa 1756, British Museum](image)

Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3370. Reprinted with permission.

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72 Mitchell, 124.

supporters to influence those who could not read. The playing card, a five of hearts, shows Admiral Byng riding atop a sea lion, recognizable to those in 1756 as Admiral and First Lord, George Anson, head of the Admiralty. A leaf-shaped ribbon from Byng’s mouth reads, “I’ll flog ye Lyon, for Contracting my letter,” referencing Byng’s dispatch which the ministry edited to paint Byng a coward and then released to *London Gazette*. This distribution of Byng-related satire followed an extensive network, long-existing, between large urban centers and the outlying provinces. Thus London and much of the Atlantic Archipelago read, viewed and responded in concert to the unfolding of the Byng affair.⁷⁴ This fusing of the individual to the collective and national imagination – as far as prints and press are concerned – tallies England under the heading of “Nation” in 1756.

⁷⁴ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 45-46. Old Corps Whig MPs utilized their franking privileges sending newspapers, prints, and other assorted anti-Byng propaganda to reach their constituents back in their districts.
CHAPTER IV

FORM AND IMAGINATION: POLITICS

In the political realm, Old Corps Whigs dominated politics at mid-century, but several cracks undercut that dominance. The Whigs themselves, with the accession of George I in 1714, championed the formation of a European Protestant league. But by the accession of George II, the banner of global mercantile realities and the rise of empire far outweighed the global spreading of the Protestant faith. The Tory Party, long accustomed to neglect by the King’s court, placed the veneer of acting as the people’s party while sitting in opposition to Whig politics. Robert Walpole’s attempt to pass an Excise Tax in 1733, for example, fell victim to Tory unity and their alleged claim of a union with the British people. Tories argued for transparency in government and finances, a more free and open press, and despised “moneyed men” and the Bank of England. Another crack in Whig dominance occurred after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) that put an end to the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714). British merchants, in defiance of the terms of the treaty, continued to illegally trade within the lucrative Spanish colonies, mostly in the Caribbean. In retaliation Spanish warships

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75 McJimsey, 23.


77 McJimsey, 21.
boarded many British merchant vessels, impressing sailors and confiscating cargo. The Tory press pilloried Walpole’s slow response to the crisis fomenting public unrest to the point where a small faction of Whigs aligned themselves with London merchants, calling themselves Patriots. Patriots also took a position deeply suspicious of the financial revolution. They feared the bonding of war debt to governments and institutions outside of Britain, and promoted the possibility of alien extortion over British politics because of it. The Patriots, almost evangelical-like call for civic virtue, personal integrity and patriotism attracted adherents from the middle to lower ranks of British society who increasingly saw in the Old Corps Whigs just the opposite.

No matter which party ascended to or descended from power, peerage in the House of Lords, and by extension, placemen in the House of Commons, befitted a political system wholly beneficial to Britain’s aristocracy, monarchy, and the Anglican Church. Early-eighteenth-century attempts to limit peerage failed on the grounds that without it the House of Lords would become more independent of the Commons, take away money from the king by limiting peerage sales, drastically reduce a commoner’s selection to peerage, and would go against the grain of the ancient constitution. However, by mid-century, charges of peerage mismanagement or even outright corruption against the traditional constitution shrilled loudly through pamphleteering and

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78 Bowen, 22-23. Liberal uses of the British free press allowed the Patriot Opposition to capture some support among the masses.

79 Cardwell claims that such “emphasis upon civic virtue and personal integrity, patriotism became as much a moral and cultural, as a political movement, and profoundly influenced the world of letters.” Cardwell, 25.

80 Brian Hill, The Early Parties and Politics in Britain, 1688-1832 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 66-67. A bill introduced by Charles Stanhope in 1711 would have limited the number of new peers to six in any given election.
other media outlets. Theatre became a means to express dissatisfaction with the peerage and patronage systems which corrupted the government. In the Phanuel Bacon 1757 satirical play, *The Taxes*, the protagonist, Lord Worthy, alone in his study “with a scroll in his hand” exclaimed, “My attempt at court has found success that e’en exceeded hope! ….Another meeting [with the Princess] secures the wish’d for point! – At ten this morning I’m promis’d farther hearing!” And to emphasize the downside of patronage, Bacon adds to the characters scene-parting words, “What our poor country suffers – this bulg’d vessel That cries for help in signals of distress.”

The Georges themselves represented another crack in the political continuity of Great Britain. Their Hanoverian pedigree and insistence on Continental engagements met with, on occasion, resistance from Parliament. Even at the outset of the conclusion of the Glorious Revolution, both the trading class and Parliamentary nobility resisted the call of King William’s Grand Alliance scheme. Saying no to European compacts equated to an extension of liberties, trade and empire at home and abroad. The inability of the first two Hanoverians to sway Parliament to adopt a more Continental orientation to British foreign policy shows the depth and commitment unto which the marriage between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Despite the rumblings and demands of the first two Georges, the British state held fast to a “blue water policy” that favored trade and empire.

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81 Lewis B. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London: MacMillan, 1929), 45-90. According to Namier, peerage became so extensive at the time of the Seven Years’ War that the government maintained a secret fund taken from the treasury for the purpose of providing bribes, pensions, and election expenses. Also, that of the fifty merchants that held seats in the House of Commons in 1761, thirty-seven of them were government contractors.


83 Bacon, 8.

84 McJimsey, 21.
and refused entanglement on the continent which would do nothing more than divert attention away from empire, commerce, and trade abroad.⁸⁵

Another major crack to Whig political dominance in 1756 included the prominence of London, especially as a sort of speaker or representative of the commercial, financial and trading classes. The lack of enfranchisement gnawed at the bourgeoisie, though several of the most wealthy of its members managed to be elected as MPs by mid-century.

And finally, a growing fissure to Whig political dominance in the mid-eighteenth century appeared in the form of the lower orders. Though, seemingly without representation and lacking of any substantial political influence, the lower ranks nonetheless held significant political sway during the Byng affair. No sector of British politics (Old Corps Whigs, Tories, Patriot Whigs, the Court, the City, county, borough, or any other element of political persuasion) could or would ignore their presence. As soon as the loss of Minorca travelled the news circuit, protests in London, port cities, and industrial centers erupted. In the political fallout of the French taking of Minorca, the lower tiers entered the political fray in the form of mobs: a regular feature of protests in 1756. According to at least one Tory pamphlet, the rousing of the public was not only easy, but already a tool employed by the ministers. “With what facility Mobs may be put

⁸⁵ According to Daniel Baugh, nearly all of Britain’s leading politicians claimed support of the Georgian kings, yet “these politicians were usually unable to gain sufficient support in Parliament for a strongly Continental policy.” Baugh, 34; Langford argues that “the many courtiers, placemen and M.P.s” vetoed George II’s proposed Waldegrave-Fox Ministry in June of 1757, supporting Pitt instead. Pitt’s near celebrity status, despite his politically risky appeal to the king for Byng’s life, remained high, and Parliament denied the king his ministry on the basis of political continuance. Paul Langford, “William Pitt and Public Opinion, 1757,” English Historical Review 88, no. 346, (January 1973): 54; and McJimsey, 28, provides an international example highlighting the rift between the commercial class and the Crown over tensions between the UK and Sweden. George I called for a boycott of that country’s iron and timber in 1718 – both commodities vital in the building of empire. When merchant backlashes became unbearable, parliament persuaded the king to lift the ban in 1722.
in Motion, with what ease they may rendered the Tools of private Resentment, or the
instruments of undeserved abuse…”86 Thus, fear of mobs drove political factions to court
them, to track their grievances, and employ them, as if a tool, to achieve political ends.

In connecting the politics of 1756 to nationalism, Hobsbawm reminds us that
nationalists use political parties to pitch their appeals and propaganda to a populace
increasingly literate and democratic. Hobsbawm’s attempt at a one-size fits all definition
of nationalism, and especially the insistence of relegating nationalism to a truncated
nineteenth and twentieth-century timeframe, utilizes an argument whereby political
parties “mobilize constituencies on the basis of national, non-national, or alternative
national appeals.”87 In other words, because “the theoretical criteria of nationhood
became passionate, because any particular answer was now believed to imply a particular
form of political strategy, struggle, and programme,”88 political parties began to articulate
issues of national identity; they became the central means by which governments
remained stable in the face of the rising political demands of mass society. For
Hobsbawm, this centrality of party allegiance and organizing discipline based on national
identity issues does not take place in Europe – including England – until the latter part of
the nineteenth century.

However, when looking at the protests of 1756-7, the role of various political
parties therein certainly suggests articulations of issues of national identity. In the

86 Some Reasons for Believing Sundry Letters and Papers, Ascribed, in Three late
Publications, to Admiral Byng, not only spurious, but an insidious attempt to Prejudice the Admiral’s
Character, (London: 1756), 1.

87 Hobsbawm, 44.

88 Ibid.
Tory/Whig dichotomy of the early-eighteenth century, the ability of both parties to maintain discipline remained acutely strong. During Queen Anne’s reign, excluding the Scottish contingent which came in halfway through, only one-eighth of all Tories ever deviated from the party line. Between 1715 and 1754, eleven of the fifteen divisions of Parliament show that not one single Tory voted with the government, and on the other four divisions only a handful of Tories cross-voted.89

Another factor to keep in mind when discussing nationalism in Great Britain in 1756, is the argument on horizontality put forth by Adrian Hastings. Borrowing heavily from Benedict Anderson, Hastings claims that:

What we have to look for in nation-spotting is a historio-cultural community with a territory it regards as its own and over which it claims some sort of sovereignty so that the cultural community sees itself with a measure of self-awareness as also a territorial and political community, held together horizontally by its shared character rather than vertically by reason of the authority of the state.90

Merged with Benedict’s “deep horizontal comradeship” theory, then the view of 1756 Britain is one of dissension, not comrades ready to fight “the Other” in anticipation of the biggest global war to date.91

Yet, I would add that individualism, the championing of liberty, the English Bill of Rights, the ancient Constitution, the practice of dissenting religions, and the refusal to accept any political or social conformity, are the horizontal hallmarks of British nationalism in the eighteenth century. The commonality or the horizontality of “shared character” resides, as Paul Langford put it, in the fact that conformity “seemed so alien to

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89 Hill, 11.

90 Hastings, 25.

91 Anderson, 7.
the English tradition."92 In the wake of Minorca’s loss, major political dissension and unrest appeared as one of the few commonalities of British society. But no matter the charges or counter-charges that appeared in the public sphere, either through the press, in plays, in prose, or in song, reminders of Britain’s “shared character” appeared in nearly every diatribe. A pamphlet entitled *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain*, in speaking of the Byng affair:

> But this case is totally different when the rulers of a people are filled with follies and vices of every kind; when from their corruption of manners, and the insensible encroachment of M_______s, most dangerous mischiefs, and almost incurable usurpations of ill acquired power, threaten destruction to a freeborn people.”93

Despite rulers filled with “follies and vices,” a “corruption of manners,” and an “insensible encroachment of ministers,” the threatened destruction was not against the state or the standing government; the threat articulated lay against the horizontal reality that Britons were “a freeborn people.” A *Britannicus* pamphlet demonstrated the horizontality which existed within the anti-Byng sentiment which coursed through the streets of London:

> …when on a sudden hearing a hoarse Noise behind me, I turn’d round, and observ’d a naked Head, bolted thro’ a Cobbler’s Stall, from whence issued the following incoherent Expression; “Damn my Blood, if B___ don’t deserve to be scragg’d for not beating the French Fleet to Mummy, and landing his Forces at Mahon.” Upon which it immediately began to roar, instead of Ribbon he shall have a string, &c. I walk’d off, and could not help reflecting

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93 *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain, and in particular to the Free Citizens of London, Occasioned By the ill Success of our present Naval War with France, and the Want of a Militia Bill* (London: 1756), 4.
how ridiculous it was, for Men bred Mechanics, to pretend to determine on the Propriety of an Admiral’s Conduct in naval Affairs.\textsuperscript{94}

Though the author took umbrage with “Men bred Mechanics” pretending “to determine… in naval Affairs,” the above incident reveals the possibility that mechanics thought themselves horizontal enough to articulate such opinions.

As for political realities, the moment the ministry realized they responded too slowly to French intentions in the Mediterranean, obtaining an edge in the divisive political climate of 1756 Britain meant adopting a policy of an ends-justify-the-means. Minorca’s importance lay in trade, and in the eighteenth century atmosphere of burgeoning empire, trade and politics readily intertwined. Not soon after the announcement of Minorca’s loss, an anonymous pamphlet penned by “Britannicus” expressed the importance of the island:

It is a manly, a rational, and a patriot Concern; for the Loss is very great, if we consider the importance of the Island: An Island, the most happily situated; an Island, though unimproved, yet capable of the greatest Improvements; an Island, with the two best Ports in the Mediterranean; and which, therefore might have been made a Magazine of British Commodities, and the Center of a most extensive Commerce. This Island, so justly the Object of our Hopes; this Island, the Trophy of our Victories; this Island, which drew to Britain the Respect of Spain, the Confidence of Italy, the Submission of the Pyratical States of Barbary; this Island we have lost!\textsuperscript{95}

Britannicus’ pen gave tilt to commercial endeavors, warfare, and international respect: all major political realities in 1756. The political fallout over the loss of the island was aptly demonstrated by Pitt’s 7\textsuperscript{th} of May attack in the House of Commons even before news of the French landing on Minorca traveled the country via the media circuit. The

\textsuperscript{94} A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known. Some suppressed Letters, and Sundry Detached Pieces, Published in the Daily Papers, \&c. Relative to the Case of Admiral Byng (London: 1756), 12.

\textsuperscript{95} A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known, 26-27.
minister’s *casus belli* mentality seemed manifest in Dodington’s charge to Henry Fox that a scapegoat appeared in the works though three days before Byng’s engagement in battle. Again, the appearance of such Machiavellian politics manifested when the decision to sack Byng and company came only one day after receiving the intercept of the Galissonnière dispatch and before receiving Byng’s or any other officer’s account of the battle. This mentality surfaced once more when the ministers leaked to the *London Gazette* the names of the recalled officers.96 When Byng’s version of the battle finally arrived on the 23rd of June, ministers arranged for an “edited” version of his dispatch to appear in the *Gazette* three days later, and prints mocking Byng followed soon thereafter.97 The print entitled “Bung Triumphant”98 (figure 3) serves as an historical example of the political skullduggery which possessed the ministers. Virulently anti-Byng, the print not only instructed the masses as how to demonstrate against the accused admiral, but reflected early nationalistic attempts in unifying the heterogeneous make-up of the populace. A man dressed in a red coat with blue-striped white pants clutches and reaches into a basket labeled “Welch Onions.” The next figure is about to hurl “English Flints,” while another is seen scooping up “Irish Potatoes,” and another tossing “Scotch

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96 The ministers received the intercept of Galissonnière’s dispatch on June 3rd, 1756. On June 4th the inner committee, George II in attendance, made the decision to sack Byng and a slew of other officers. On June 6th, the ministry had the London Gazette release the names of the recalled officers.

97 By the 1750s, government habitually sent policy statements, parliamentary bills, and the actions of admirals and generals in their full to the press mostly out of fear that not doing so would invite charges of “secret machinations and the conspiracies of a cabal – the natural enemies of liberty.” McJimsey, 18.

Pebbles.” Interestingly, each figure dresses and speaks in a vernacular associated with the dialects of their ethnicities, and all have in their sights the lone figure with a noose about
his neck on a scaffold: Admiral John Byng. The addition of limbs and a severed head projecting from the arch’s balustrade adds an implied warning, and frames a set of flags with the inscription “whole not a rag in a flag.” This infers Byng’s cowardice as the ministry and others charged that the admiral kept his ship back so as not to receive enemy fire. A cow and a sheep hold up a shield of Byng’s ship, insinuating the admiral was sheepish and cow-hearted. The “Bung Triumphant” print, accompanied by other means of propaganda and media manipulation originating from the ministry, meant to stem the expected protest certain to emanate from the London once Minorca’s loss became known.

Yet, the protest did not confine itself to the City. Unrest over the loss of Minorca spilled often and frequently throughout the counties in a first wave of Admiral Byng mock executions that lasted from July to October, 1756. In addition to London (Covent Garden, Tower Hill, Whitechapel, and Whitehall), the following cities, towns, villages and neighborhoods experienced unrest over this matter: Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Cornwall, Derby, Devizes, Dublin, East Anglia, Exeter, Falmouth, Gravesend, Hertfordshire, Ipswich, Leeds, Market Harborough, Middlewich, Newcastle on Tyne, North Shields, Northampton, Reading, Richmond, Salisbury, South Shields, Southampton, Stokesly, Worcester and York.99 Even in far away Boston, on Guy Fawkes Day no less, John Byng’s effigy sat alongside those of the Pope, the Devil, and Guy Fawkes himself.100

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99 The historians are Cardwell, Rogers, and Wilson. The addition of Dublin comes from Some Proceedings of the Freeholders Society (Dublin: 1757).

100 Sherwood Collins, “Boston’s Political Street Theatre: The Eighteenth-Century Pope Day Pageants,” Educational Theatre Journal 25, no. 4 (December 1973): 408. Of course, colonial uprisings over the Byng affair would certainly have been delayed, thus the November destruction of Byng effigies in the colonies.
For the Old Corp Whigs and the king’s court, the admiral represented their culpability in the loss of Minorca and their poor handling of the preparations for war with France. Thus the ministry’s initial announcement in the *London Gazette* on June 6, 1756 that Byng and other officers were to be recalled was accompanied by their attempts to paint Byng a villainous coward. Vilifying the admiral defined Britishness, but in reverse: if nationalists employ heroes to define a nation, why not villains? By every means at its disposal, the ministry excoriated Byng’s character and grossly misrepresented the admiral’s actions in the Mediterranean. In a print entitled, “Cowardice Rewarded, or the Devil will have His Due”¹⁰¹ (figure 4), Mars and Neptune deride the admiral while

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Justice holds a noose about his neck. Mars breaks Byng’s truncheon and states “Mars takes from you these Instruments of War you was afraid to use, for thou art an Imposter, & no son of mine. For all my true sons, are men of Courage & Lovers of the Fair.” Neptune exclaims, “I have Banish’d him from the Sea, for no such Cowards shall Dwell in my Dominions.” Byng’s sword lies on the ground, and Justice’s scales are also in the dust. In her hand, where the scales used to be, is a long sword. Such prints proved effective in shaping opinion of the lower ranks against the admiral. Nevertheless, the ministry underestimated the reaction by plebeian society when it imputatively targeted Admiral Byng with cowardice. The resulting inchoate mob fury against Byng shocked Lord Anson, and Henry Fox in particular.102

Though Dodington’s diary entry (which hinted at the ministry’s search for a scapegoat three days prior to the actual naval engagement off of Minorca) holds the appearance of premeditated culpability dodging by the ministry, Byng’s treatment after recall reaffirms this. When compared to the other recalled officers, the callous nature of Byng’s arrest and imprisonment certainly proves a political calculation undertaken by the ministry to get Byng to take the fall. Of all the officers recalled, only Byng remained behind bars. To this, Henry Fox alerted Anson of the political repercussions of such treatment. Fox correctly asserted that the liberty enjoyed by the other officers, in

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102 Rogers, 61.
comparison with Byng, gave the impression that the admiral appeared a political prisoner of the ministry.\textsuperscript{103}

Fox’s warning to Anson, however, went largely ignored, for the aggression of the ministry against Byng primarily lay in the workings of Lord Anson, himself. Correspondence between Walpole and Mann at the end of November certainly reflected that point:

The Duke of Newcastle is already hanging out a white flag to Pitt; but there is so little disposition in that quarter to treat, that they have employed on Evans, a lawyer, to draw up articles of impeachment against Lord Anson. On the other hand they show great tenderness to Byng, who has most certainly been most inhumanly and spitefully treated by Anson\textsuperscript{104}.

Pitt’s demands for impeachment proceedings against Anson in November reflected the flurry of Anson’s summer-long diatribes against Byng, Pitt’s disgust with such attacks, and the general knowledge among peers that Anson acted as the mainspring within the ministry targeting Byng. Anson, from his Admiralty Office, sent “artful emissaries” to mingle at “all public assemblies, from the drawing room at St. James to the mob at Charing-Cross...”\textsuperscript{105} Anson’s father-in-law, none other than Philip Yorke, 1\textsuperscript{st} earl of Hardwicke, hired the hack writer David Mallet to defend the ministry’s position. In doing so, Hardwicke paid Mallet £300 for 3,000 copies of \textit{The Conduct of the Ministry Impartially Examined}, out of the secret service budget.\textsuperscript{106} Thus, opposition pamphlets, which insinuated that the ministry incited mob riots, were not far off the mark. “Even

\textsuperscript{103} Pope, 199.
\textsuperscript{104} Lewis, Smith and Lam, \textit{Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann}, 21:23.
\textsuperscript{105} Wright, 190-91.
\textsuperscript{106} Cardwell, 131.
every Contributor to them [mobs], whether by his Presence, or his Purse, seems to me to
have been thereby guilty of Injustice to his Fellow-Subject, and doing Violence to the
Laws of his Country.”107 Pitt’s disgust with Anson remained, therefore, within the
bounds of British justice.

On July 1, 1756, “Liverpool merchants” launched a privateer, a brigantine
ship of 150 tons, replete with “16 carriage guns (four, six, and nine pounders), 24
swivels, and 100 men…”108 The production of privateers during wartime was common,
but this particular vessel was built by “Mr. George Campbell, a member of the common
council” of Liverpool, and he quickly named the ship the Anson. Concurrently, the city of
Exeter launched the Hawke, the name of the commander who replaced Byng in the
Mediterranean. In August, Campbell launched the Brave Blakeney, the hapless general-
made-hero who surrendered the Port Mahon garrison to the French.109 Soon heroic bar
songs abounded about these vessels just as Byng’s cowardice lay prostrate before the
public press. It helped also that the Anson captured a French transport bound for Canada
on July 19, 1756.

Ye brave British sailors, true sons of the main,
Who scorn to submit to the insults of Spain,
Leave to landsmen their politick schemes and their talk,
And enter on board the Lord Anson and Hawke.

These two noble heroes, whose names our ships bear,
Made the Spaniards to tremble, the Frenchmen to fear;
Secure of success, then, your fortune ne’er balk,

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107 Some Reasons for Believing Sundry Letters and Papers, 3.

108 Gomer Williams, History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque, with an
account of the Liverpool Slave Trade (London: William Heinemann, 1897), 87.

109 Williams, 88.
But enter on board the Lord Anson and Hawke.

The wages, the ingots, the wealth of Peru,
The Spaniards are getting and hoarding for you;
You shall ride in your coaches, whilst cowards shall walk,
Who durst not engage in the Anson and Hawke.\(^{110}\)

Is it possible that Anson – the Lord of the Admiralty – commissioned these privateers to plunder French forces while at the same time hiring ballad writers to create heroic songs? Given the popularity of ballads among the lower ranks and the depth of the peerage and patronage systems among the political elite, the possibility that Anson asked for and received such favors exists.\(^{111}\) In the context of the Byng affair, the lyrics of this ballad are more than just a mere invitation for tavern goers to join the Anson and Hawke. Certainly the ballad addressed the “brave British sailors” to “enter on board the Lord Anson and Hawke.” However, the line “Leave to landsmen their politick schemes” coupled with “You shall ride in your coaches, whilst cowards shall walk,” were not typical of such musical summonses, but rather pointed to the extent to which Anson attempted to shape public opinion in the face of the Minorca disaster.

Other factions, such as the Tories and Patriot Whigs, also jumped on the opportunity to use the Byng affair toward political ends. Tories and Patriot Whigs chose to form a tentative alliance and began to pillory the ministry and the political status quo in concert. In fact, some of the Patriot writers were actually Tories who operated out of the Cocoa Tree and Half Moon Taverns in London.\(^{112}\) Their combined efforts attempted

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\(^{110}\) Firth, 225-26.

\(^{111}\) Firth claims that “a common form of song is one which takes the form of an invitation to enter on board a privateer under some popular captain.” Firth, lxxxvii.

\(^{112}\) Langford, 62.
to conjoin the bourgeois anti-aristocratic social rhetoric of the previous several years to a politically-charged, anti-ministerial opportunism which resulted from Minorca’s loss. Cardwell calls this calculated rise of Tory/Patriot Whig propaganda “militant nationalism” whose “novelists, poets, playwrights, artists and moralist…accused the aristocracy of cultural treason.” It is no surprise then that the initial barrage of attacks against the ministry by the Tory/Patriot alliance fell into the more known and comfortable rhetoric of cultural degeneracy. Not comfortable in defending Byng outright as a pawn in ministerial machinations, the Tory/Patriot alliance skirted the issue by wrapping the admiral within the larger cause of seeing that national justice was attended to. Thus, Tory and Patriot pens charged the ministers not only as corrupt, but steering the state in a dangerous direction. To allow such ministers continuance in office meant the loss of empire, trade and commerce. This tact greatly appealed to the merchant class and the Tory/Patriot propaganda readily merged with the great body of work already in circulation which berated the aristocracy for their corruption in manners, society and politics. As one pamphleteer explained:

They [ministers] know also that Jamaica as shamefully open to the hourly Invasion of the French, thro’ Neglect of a sufficient Squadron; and that the Trade of the other Islands is in the same ruinous Condition, from a similar

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113 The alliance “protested against the insidious moral, social, political and economic consequences of French influences, a disease which had infected the governing classes, and by the process of emulation, was poisoning the middling and lower orders. National identity, constitutional freedoms, inherent virtue, reformed religion, patriotic spirit and warlike valour were being contaminated. The aristocracy and their growing train of followers were seduced into a self-destructive obsession with riches, luxury, indulgence and social climbing. Labor, industry and commerce were neglected; national wealth and resources were fruitlessly consumed; selfishness, satiated effeminacy, and ennui were the result. During the period of the Seven Years War, literature, and especially drama, functioned as influential media for the promotion of this anti-French, anti-aristocratic ideology.” Cardwell, 79.
Inattention; and the Neglect, if it deserves no worse Appellation, of Minorca, is that a Proof of M--------l Attention to the Care of English commerce?114

Such attacks upon the ministry reflected not only the bourgeois values of wealth and trade, but the political opportunism to which the Byng affair made such rhetorical broadsides possible.

Other important patriot issues surfaced by way of propaganda and pamphleteering. According to A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain, the creation of a home militia was preferable to the spending of money on hired foreign occupiers:

…it is impossible to constitute any free government for preservation, within the reach of ambitious neighbors, without entrusting the whole people themselves, and not any part separated and distinct from the rest, with the arts of war.115

Patriots utilized the Byng affair to promote their civic causes, especially the creation of a home grown militia of over 30,000 to protect the “commercial state” with “good military discipline.”116 Redress and representation also became a hot topic issue during the Byng affair. Tory and Patriots found a welcoming ally from the freeholders of Ireland on this matter.117 When war with France commenced, restrictions on Irish exports to French destinations, particularly in the Caribbean, were enacted. The freeholders replied:


115 A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain, 26-27.

116 Ibid. See also: Cardwell who points out that, “War upon land required the expansion of the unpopular standing army, which was viewed as a potential weapon of ministerial oppression. To restrict the threat, patriots supported the recruitment of constitutional militia for home defense….” Cardwell, 24.

117 For information on the alliance of Ireland’s freeholders to the Patriot cause in London, see: Some Proceedings of the Freeholder’s Society, (Dublin: 1757). Interestingly, the Irish Freeholders
In a Country, where every man enjoys, in some sort, a share in the legislature; where the people have a right to consult together; to deliberate, and to resolve on instructions, to their representatives, or addresses to the throne; no measure of government, no accident of war, no misconduct in relation to foreign or political affairs, are above the sphere: neither is any invasion on the rights of the meanest, nor any infraction of the laws by the greatest subject, below their consideration.118

British rights, whether of the “meanest” sort or of “the greatest subject,” protected every true Briton, even those in Ireland.119 Ironically, the Patriot and Tory cause of redress protected not only the petitions and instructions of merchants to their elected officials and the Crown, but they also extended protection to the very mobs that, by and large, believed the ministry’s propaganda which charged Byng with the loss of Minorca. This presented a tricky political stance not easy to balance. Consequently, the Tory and Patriot alliance found it difficult to promote or convince the larger British community of the possibility of Admiral John Byng’s innocence. In balancing the two, the ability to petition and seek redress trumped Byng, for “the exercise of this indubitable right, has at all times preserved and sometimes saved” the British people “from Slavery.”120

Tories and Patriots did not abandon the Admiral. Famed Tory writer Samuel Johnson spent a great deal of time and energy defending him, both in publishing reviews generally felt Byng was grossly wronged and that “the angry Exertion of popular Zeal is a most dangerous and desperate remedy.” Some Proceedings,19.


119 And serves also as credence to the horizontality of the British nation in 1756.

120 A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain, 20. The quote evocates upon the lyrics found in the song “Rule Britannia” by James Thomson and set to music by Thomas Arne is 1740. “Britannia rule the waves / Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.”
of the myriad of pamphlets written on the subject, but also in writing on Byng’s behalf. “To hear both parties,” explained Johnson, “and to condemn no man without a trial are the unalterable laws of justice.”121 Johnson concluded that “the nation has been industriously deceived by false and treacherous representations.”122 Patriot minister William Pitt, especially upon the outcome of Byng’s Courts-Martial trial, worked to gain a pardon from the king, and at the cost of considerable political clout.123 A sense of justice, and the unfairness of Byng’s predicament became the manner by which the Patriot/Tory alliance proceeded in writing its propaganda. From the London Evening Post, August 7, 1756:

But should we suppose, what is hardly supposeable [sic], that those, who have been the apparent Cause of the Loss of Minorca, should, contrary to the Honour, Interest, and Justice of the Nation, be continued still in Power; would it not prove to the whole World, that we are destitute of all Spirit and Reason? And would not that be the greatest Inducement the French could possibly have to invade this Island?124

The injustice in the excoriation of Byng united the Tory/Patriot alliance, and the two camps wrote extensively on Byng’s demise from that viewpoint. The national persecution of John Byng stood “destitute of all Spirit and Reason,” and for that reason alone the writers asked, “would not that be the greatest Inducement” for a French invasion? The Citizen on September 21, 1756 insinuated that the ministerial persecution of the admiral lessened the quality of justice in the country:

121 Brian Hanley, Samuel Johnson as Book Reviewer: A Duty to Examine the Labors of the Learned (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 135.
122 Ibid.
124 A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known, 30.
Pray tell the People, that to pursue B__g, and leave the greater Offenders in Repose, is unbecoming the People of this Nation; and that whilst the M_____rs are exercising every Art, to call the public Attention upon the A_____l; that it is the Duty of the Nation to call them to a fair Enquiry, and shew them they are discovered in their Design.125

Pamphlets and newspapers, however, were not the only means of getting the message of the Patriots and Tories out into the streets. The alliance churned out hundreds of prints, poems and song to combat those of the ministry and their hired team of propagandists. “A Court Conversation,”126 (figure 5) reflected the many Patriot and Tory

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125 A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known, 42.

126 Stephens, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, no. 3492.
political issues while taking full swipe at the ministry. Front and center are Henry Fox, pointing to the Byng effigy burning outside, and the goose (George Anson) leaning on a broken anchor. In Anson’s hand is a document that reads “London Gazette” with instructions that read “Publish Letter”: a reference to the edited Byng dispatch. A map scroll is tacked to the wall but covered with cobwebs signifying the ministerial neglect of North America. A picture labeled “Siege of Port Mahon” falls on the heads of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, Newcastle, and Sir George Lyttelton. This causes a table to be upended upon which laid a “Council Book,” the Seals, a mace, and a now broken White Staff. A brutish dog fitted with a collar labeled “A. T. Stone”, referring to Newcastle’s secretary, shreds Parliament’s “Act of Settlement” while defecating on the Bill of Rights. The lower left of the print presents several Tory/Patriot complaints: “Place and Pension Ledger No.21”, and some folded papers upon which is written “R—ss—n (Russian) Treaty for 70000”, “H—r—n (Hanoverian) D° for l0000”, “H—ss—n (Hessian) D° for 12000”, all tied by a ribbon that labeled “Account of s—bs—s (subsidies).” Below the engraving is a short poem,

Quoth Anser to Reynard — ‘Methinks You had better
“Have not made so free, with this same cursed Letter”
Sly Reynard reply’d “Yet your L* *p must own
“Not Byng had been burnt—if the Truth had been known.”

This Tory/Patriot print also portrays a mob at an effigy burning. They drink liberally while a female figure serves herself, a licentious reminder of the merchant class’ take on such mob demonstrations. However, whether Tory, Whig, or Patriot much of the caricatures in print, or the rhetoric within papers and pamphlets, reflected a certain
element of fear and disdain toward the mobs. For pamphlets penned by the Tory/Patriot alliance, the mob, for the most part, functioned as an extension of ministerial artifice. Ministerial-backed pamphlets, on the other hand, attempted to distance themselves from the charge of funding mob violence, claiming instead that Byng hanging parties and effigy burnings “served merely as an Excuse for Idleness and Drunkenness.”

Still, the sheer amount of prints, pamphlets, song, and other forms of media propagated by the Tory/Patriot alliance probably contributed to the crumbling of the ministry beginning in late October. Walpole reflected on the power of Patriot propaganda on the British political scene:

Mr Pitt and Mr Legge, whose whole party consists of from twelve to sixteen persons…. You will wonder how fifteen or sixteen persons can be of such importance. In the first place their importance has been conferred on them…Minorca is gone, Oswego gone, the nation in ferment, some very great indiscretions in delivering a Hanoverian soldier from prison by warrant from the secretary of state have raised great difficulties; instructions from counties, boroughs, especially the City of London, in the style of 1641, and really in the spirit of 1715, and 1745, have raised a great flame; and lastly the countenance of Leicester House, which Mr Pitt is supposed to have and which Mr Legge thinks he has, all these tell Pitt, that he may command such numbers without doors, as may make the majorities within the House tremble.

In London, a disputed 1641 election of the city’s common council found several Pym backers coming to power. In an aldermen verses common council dichotomy, the Pym supporters triumphed over the more aristocratic-leaning candidates backed by the aldermen. In such a manner, Walpole interpreted Pitt’s rise to power whose popularity

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127 Some Reasons for Believing Sundry Letters and Papers, 2-3.
128 Lewis, Smith and Lam, Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann, 21:12-13.
among London merchants triumphed over an oligarchical elite. 1641 also witnessed a massive Irish Catholic rebellion, and Walpole’s mentioning of 1715 and 1745 reflected the Jacobite invasions.

The decision making John Byng the scapegoat over Minorca appears political. Yet, Minorca represented the empire and another pin upon the global realm that fell into neglect and ultimately into French victories. Therefore, the Byng affair transcended mere political implications.\footnote{There is a link between nationalism and the process of colonialism….” Gellner, 42.} The excoriation of Admiral Byng by the ministry represented a national crisis chased by a series of defeats against a known and common enemy. Here lies the initial impetus that drove the ministry, especially Anson, to promulgate to the public that Minorca’s loss belonged to Byng.

However, the ministry recoiled at the amount and intensity of the national blowback. “He has been hanged, quartered, and burnt in every Part of the City,” explained “Civis” about Byng in a small pamphlet called The Citizen. “Every ballad-singing Throat has been sung hoarse to his Destruction, and swarms of Hawkers flying all abroad, astonishing the Streets with their Cries, have been let loose.”\footnote{The pamphlet The Citizen, dated 21 September 1756, appears in A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known, 41.} Demonstrations against the admiral occurred in nearly every port city and industrial center, as far away as Dublin, and even in colonial Boston. The English tradition of dissent, the ability for Britons to rely upon the ancient rights of an English constitution, lent to such public demonstrations an air of horizontal comradeship. In this context, the Tory/Patriot alliance fastidiously integrated the social and political values of the
bourgeoisie into an effective and accusatory rhetoric – not just against the ministry – but against the political status quo of the nation, and in all its corrupt guises. With Byng behind bars, even while other recalled officers walked, the ministry held a convenient symbol, a national example of how not to be British. But the demonstrations against Byng signified to the Tory and Patriot alliance that any defense of the admiral must be cloaked within larger concerns: issues of national identity.
CHAPTER V

FORM AND IMAGINATION: THE PEOPLE

Walpole wrote to Mann explaining that much of the political pressure upon
the king arose from the merchants in London. “But the warmth on the loss of Minorca
has opened every sluice of opposition, that have been so long damned up…. The City of
London and some counties have addressed the King and their members, on our
miscarriages.”\textsuperscript{132} The loss of Minorca allowed the merchants to enter the political fray
during the tumultuous summer of 1756. A print entitled, “Britannia’s Revival, or the
Rousing of the British Lyon”\textsuperscript{133} (figure 6) reflected the political rise of the City of
London and the merchant class in general. Walpole’s mentioning of “instructions” from
London and the various “counties” and “boroughs” easily comes through in this print.
Merchants from the City of London, bulldog in tow, appear at the left. They hold a scroll,
an address, or a petition of instructions and aim to deliver it to the distraught Britannia,
reminiscent of the many instructions merchants throughout the provinces sent to the king.

\textsuperscript{132} Lewis, Smith and Lam, \textit{Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann}, 20:585.
The Lord Mayor, the aldermen, and the common council petitioned the king in person in August. The day
before their scheduled meeting with George II, the \textit{Public Advertiser} (August 19, 1756) printed the City
address in full, an address that blamed the government in full for the loss of Minorca and neglect of
America.

\textsuperscript{133} Stephens, \textit{Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires}, no. 3377.
asking for “an inquiry into the loss of Minorca, the establishment of a militia,” and to

Figure 6 - "Britannia's Revival, or the Rousing of the British Lyon," 1756, British Museum.
support their choice for Prime Minister: William Pitt.\textsuperscript{134} The battered Britannia, seated on
the British lion, extends her hand toward the City address while at the same time flings to
the ground the inscribed paper given to her by courtiers standing at the right. A chain
circling the neck of the British lion is held fast by these same elite courtiers. British men-
of-war list under disrepair with masts barren of sail while the French fleet lay on the
horizon, menacing but in full regalia. The poem at the bottom advises readers to
“distrust” those in high government since “by base arts” they keep Britannia oppressed.
The verses also highlighted Britain’s “love of arms,” a mighty and warlike people, but
now “torn by disgraces” by a bevy of “venal Courtier” that act “selfish & speculative”
lulling Britannia into a disgraced state. “British arms are foil’d by Gallick Gold,” a clear
reference to the rumor that Newcastle, Anson and Byng took money from the French in
exchange for Minorca. By the fifth stanza the hope for the nation resides with the Patriot
cause. Patriots are “honest” and filled with “zeal,” with “no wish beyond his country’s
weal.” These patriots implore Britannia to “Rouse” the Lyon and “as he roars, let nodding
Britons wake.” After all, “Jove’s Balance weighs our fates” of which “virtue,” in the
Machiavellian sense, will once again allow Britain “to conquer,” that “or be slaves.”
Valor must rise in order “punish Traytors who abuse their trust,” through “base
corruption” and “Lucre.” The pamphlet demanded “British rights restore” based on a
Romanesque Senate. And finally, in the last stanza, “Britannia nodding, signifies her
choice, / And hails in his, God’s & the People’s voice.” Thus, the aim of the print is clear:
“God” and the “People’s Voice” are one in the same and it is a wise king to take heed of

them, and think little of his court. And, interestingly, the last line of the print reads, “To the lovers of virtue, freedom and their Country this plate is dedicated…”

Such prints make clear, that the merchant class of Britain intended to exert its political prowess in the wake of the loss of Minorca. Instructions and petitions to George II became frequent and originated from nearly all the provinces, not just London.\textsuperscript{135} Such political posturing by the merchant class also proved to be the impetus behind an actual, if not eventual, investigation into the loss of the island. Thus, the activism displayed by this segment of the third estate resides well within the line of the traditional, though English, version of civic humanism.

As the merchants took their issues in press and prints before the ministry, court and king, mobs appeared throughout the year-long Byng affair. The mob represented both an influence upon politics and, at the same time, a force that politicos found necessary to court. No political faction, Old Corps Whig, Tory, Patriot, City or Merchant held the luxury of ignoring the mob, quite the contrary. When news of the loss of Minorca hit the streets and the propaganda against Byng disseminated, the lower ranks’ discontent over impressments and other past wrongs combined heartily with the middle ranks’ charge of elitist pusillanimity in the face of ‘The Other.’ The result of which created a rage-filled antipathy against the political status quo.\textsuperscript{136}

Our understanding of the lower ranks of British society is jaundiced, seen through the eyes of those that felt themselves worthy to write or to collect, rather than the

\textsuperscript{135} Cardwell, 133; and Rogers, 75.

\textsuperscript{136} Rogers claims that “Byng’s conduct was perceived as an affront to naval and traditional honour, sharpened no doubt by the vigorous impressment that had accompanied the mobilization of the fleets.” Rogers, 62.
workers themselves. We don’t know, for example, whether Walpole was being
disingenuous or serious when he wrote:

If shame, despair, or any human considerations can give courage, he [Byng] will surely contrive to achieve some great action, or to be knocked in the head – a cannon ball must be a pleasant quietus, compared to being torn to pieces by an English mob or a House of Commons.137

But what we do know is that the influence of the mob, or rather the fear of it, dramatically affected the manner in which all political factions proceeded throughout the Byng affair. The fear of mob violence drove the propaganda, forced political-decisions, and kept Byng behind bars.138 No documents written can so illustrate the point than an exchange of letters between Secretary of State Henry Fox and Lady Hervey, mother to Augustus Hervey who served as Captain of the Phoenix, one of the frigates that relayed the flag messages from Admiral Byng during the Battle of Minorca. Captain Hervey wholly backed Byng’s account. The Fox family and the Hervey family were close, and Fox himself received numerous letters from Captain Hervey affirming Byng’s bravery and honor.139 This certainly pained Fox; though not part of the inner circle of ministers, he knew of their machinations. His letters to Lady Hervey attempted to warn the Captain, through his mother, that politics was to play a more leading role than the want of truth:

The rage of people increases hourly. I don’t deserve blame but that won’t save me from it…and though I were to meet with no more than I deserve, that would not alleviate the concern I am under for this great and irretrievable loss,

137 Lewis, Smith and Lam, *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann*, 20:578.

138 Pope, 201-209. Those in the ministry convinced themselves that for Byng’s safety against an enraged populace, it was best to keep the admiral behind bars.

139 After the battle, and while making repairs at Gibraltar, Hervey, unaware that Byng and other officers had been recalled, wrote to Fox that, “We are preparing the fleet to return to Minorca with the greatest expedition, but the disabled ships will delay us some days…. I am glad the Admiral is hurrying everyone and I’m told will sail the instant the crippled ships are in any sort of readiness.” David Erskine, ed., *Augustus Hervey’s Journal* (London: W. Kimber, 1953), 321-2.
for seeing no good event to set against it, but on the contrary more distress than this country ever yet struggled with, civil war expected…¹⁴⁰

Fox genuinely feared the mob, and the anti-Byng demonstrations frightened him to no end. Yet, for the lower tier of British society, propaganda descended upon them; first from the ministry, then the Tory and Patriot alliance. Lady Hervey’s response to such propaganda followed two weeks later:

These are perilous times, my dear sir, God knows what may happen. The suffering, perhaps even encouraging a mob to declare they will have – or otherwise do themselves – what they call justice, is not only the most wicked, but the most weak and dangerous thing imaginable; if they are supported or allowed to make such insolent illegal declarations who knows whose turn may be next? …I fear, be it how it will, this poor man must be the scape-goat. I am sorry for it on his account, I am offended at it for the sake of justice, but I am hurt by it beyond expression as an English-woman.¹⁴¹

For Lady Hervey, to have the mob act as the ultimate arbiter of justice lay outside the bounds of true Englishness. The rule of law played a prominent role in the Byng debate. One of the few songs written defending Byng, sung to the melody of “God Save the King,” spoke of God, Country, King and Byng, the last stanza of which reads:

God save great George our King,
Let all base Traitors swing;
God save the King!
Let no Delusions sway,
Let us thy Laws obey,
And let each Briton say,
Long live brave Byng!

The law became the centerpiece of the Byng affair. For elites such as the Hervey and Fox family, however, having the mob act as the ultimate adjudicators in Byng’s or the nation’s demise was indeed “the most weak and dangerous thing imaginable.”

¹⁴⁰ Erskine, 323.

¹⁴¹ Erskine, 324.
Such animosity between the social divisions of Britain spilled out early and often into the press machines of 1756. On July 31, 1756, for example, the Ipswich Journal printed the rumor that Byng’s “lower deck resented his inactivity in Minorcan waters and had threatened to string him up if he avoided another engagement with the French.”

The imagined patriotism of these below deck sailors taking charge of an admiral, whose command included the entire extent of the Mediterranean, fed the domestic lower ranks with a conviction to take control of their own political transgressions.

Though the initial unrest after the printing of Byng’s edited dispatch appeared in the London Gazette on June 26, 1756, unnerved the ministry, the mobs assembled outside of Westminster also upset, or inspired, the various other political factions concerned with the politics of Minorca’s loss. As the initial fallout over Minorca unfolded, the Tory press charged the ministry with inciting mob violence and funding the all day celebratory effigy burnings of Admiral Byng. The “theatre of the streets” thus became a political medium during the summer of 1756, a way to deliver important political messages to the masses, especially in cities and towns outside of London where literacy rates fell well below that of major urban centers.

Mock executions, hanging days, effigy burnings, bonfires, large outdoor feasts with drink and ale provided, choirs, maybe even fireworks, drew large crowds. Money, of course, became the sinews of such orchestrated protests. The anti-ministerial factions needed only to look at the initial

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142 Rogers, 63.

demonstrations to guess where the money came from and they quickly challenged the ministers. Pro-ministry pamphlets, of course, rejected such incriminations:

But tho’ there is no setting Bounds to the Fury of an enraged Multitude, who hold the Honor of their Country sacred…does it follow that a Minister, a first Lord, or any Lord of the Admiralty, could descend so low, and demean himself or themselves so much, to become Ring-leaders in a Mob, already too much enraged, to crush an unhappy Man, already too, too much in the Power of the Law? None but a Mind susceptible to every Ill could be capable of suggesting, much more propagating such a Thought.¹⁴⁴

But Tory and Patriot writers propagated ministerial incitement of mobs at every opportunity. In newspapers and in prints, stories of payments secretly distributed from various staffers of the ministry to the waiting clutches of the mobs surfaced throughout the provinces.

Additionally, at the same time of the Byng protests, 140 food riots in 30 counties took place lasting a year and a half.¹⁴⁵ More investigation is necessary to decipher whether the Byng riots occurred spontaneously – as many in the ministry claimed – or whether the ministers doled out untold sums of cash to people already food rioting to create scenes of protest and ensure the anti-Byng message was received – as is the claim of the Tory/Whig alliance. Nicholas Rogers, while inferring and listing several incidences where money went from government staffers to lower rank citizenry for the purpose of mock executions, nonetheless states that “there is no evidence that the government actively promoted the demonstrations,” they were “too general and dispersed

¹⁴⁴ An Appeal to Reason and Common Sense, 49-50.

to have been carefully coordinated…” Wilson, on the other hand, claims that in early August in Southampton and Whitechapel, “Admiralty officers and clerks of the Victualling Office respectively gave crowds money to prepare and burn Byng’s effigy.” Still, these equate to only two locations within a narrow time frame amongst nationwide protests against both Byng and food distribution stretched over several months. Thomas Wright claims that if any one minister owns the larger portion of anti-Byng machinations, Lord George Anson of the Admiralty Office “was especially active in fanning up popular flame.” However, connecting these several incidences to the members of the ministry itself, let alone connecting the hundreds of Byng effigy burnings that occurred throughout the country, requires more research. Given the food riots, one of the “most severe in the eighteenth century,” the truth probably leans toward Rogers.

…Money has been given and distributed to the Mob, to dress a Figure in the Sea uniform; to make Fires, and burn him; and thus to keep the Popular Eye on Byng only. Tales have been invented of his designing to escape; that his Head begins to be turned; and a thousand Falsehoods to call the Attention of England upon him, and from them.

For many of the aristocracy, however, even the hint of paid protests threatened the British Constitution. David Erskine argues that such a perception of the masses by

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146 Rogers, 60-61.

147 Wilson, 181, n. 115.

148 Wright, 190-191.

149 Caple, 86-88. Only so much as such rioting discouraged travel and that such monetary inducement toward unrest would prove unwarranted.

150 “Civis” in The Citizen (September 21, 1756) in A Collection of Several Pamphlets very Little Known, 41-42.

151 Atherton writes that while it is true that the working class in Britain mid-eighteenth century “was not considered part of the Constitution or political nation,” one could not erase them socially,
Britain’s cultural as well as political elites forced the hands of the ministry to continue excoriating their villain savant, for they realized that “only the sacrifice of Byng would be effective to assuage and divert the fury of the King and the populace: this sacrifice they were prepared to make at the expense of an admiral who had been in a perilous position by their own error in of judgment.”¹⁵² Yet, the rancor and violence in the streets throughout the summer of 1756 so enveloped and possessed the government that pro-ministerial writers continued, out of fear, to deflect such charges. They did so by countering those who used “the Force of Rhetoric, Weight of Power, or any other Art,” that they were “equally criminal and equally an Affront to the Understanding of the People.”¹⁵³ All sides courted “the People.” And despite the rioting, the lower orders became during this crisis “too tenacious of their Honour….too penetrating in their Wisdom, and too honest in their Hearts” to deny.¹⁵⁴ During the Seven Years’ War, the lower sorts rose to the ranks of “a freeborn people,” they were “understanding” and “fair,” “unsparing censures” of justice,¹⁵⁵ and above all worthy to seek redress from their government:

For the Commons of these once happy realms, in their collective capacity, have ever maintained, and GOD forbid they should not, as often as they see occasion, exercise a power to represent their grievances to Parliament, and petition from every County as well as Borough in Britain, to have them

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¹⁵² Erskine, xxiv-xxv.

¹⁵³ *An Appeal to Common Sense and Reason*, 2.

¹⁵⁴ *An Appeal to Common Sense and Reason*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain*, 4; *An Appeal to Reason and Common Sense*, 2; *A Letter to Lord Robert Bertie*, 24.
redressed. The exercise of this indubitable right, has at all times preserved, and sometimes saved them from Slavery. 156

The lower ranks, thus, not only became elevated in their socio-political status, but by that very elevation became defined by what the rest of the nation was seemingly not. The corruption within the state did not belong to or possess the commons; lost honor, trifled ambitions, and the “unmanly” want of “Pleasures” besieged the aristocracy. 157 The defenders of the state then belonged with the commoners. “Gentlemen,” wrote Civis in a letter to The Citizen, 21 September 1756:

I am greatly pleased with your Intent of watching over the public Good, and of communicating your Sentiments of the present Dangers in the State to the People, who make so great a Part in this Constitution. Considering how carefully the M______rs conceal all that passes with Doors, an Undertaking of this Kind is at present become double necessary, that the Nation may not be totally ignorant of the Way by which Destruction is attempted, and left to say that their Ruin stole upon them without their knowledge. 158

Hobsbawm writes that national consciousness “develops unevenly among the social groupings and regions of a country….popular masses…are the last to be affected by it.” 159 In the case of Britain, all political factions sought to influence and render consciousness as a tool, to assist in overcoming the crisis that arose over the loss of Minorca. For John Brown in his pamphlet, An Estimate of Manners, the people became the center of national identity during the earlier Jacobite uprising:

How far this dastard Spirit of Effeminacy hath crept upon us, and destroyed the national Spirit of Defence, may appear from the general Panic the Nation was thrown into, at the late Rebellion. When those of every Rank above a

156 A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain, 20.


158 A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known, 39-40.

159 Hobsbawm, 12.
Constable, instead of arming themselves and encouraging the People, generally fled before the Rebels…\footnote{Brown, 91.}

The inference being, that while the elites panicked, the lower ranks did not. The ministers, in targeting the masses, awakened a groundswell of demonstrations that they not only could no longer control, but turned against the ministry itself.\footnote{Cardwell, 68.} The Leviathan had been unleashed.\footnote{Colley explains that “to most of Britain’s governors of this period, then, nationalism was like a Pandora’s box: something which was best left alone.” Linda Colley, “Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness, 1750-1830,” Past and Present, no. 113 (November 1986): 109.}
The loss of Minorca created immediate financial repercussions for the country. As Linda Colley explains, Britain national identity consisted of “one Protestant ruler, one legislature, and one system of free trade.” Without Minorca, free trade from the Mediterranean took a decisive hit, but so too did one-third of British national consciousness. The October 1750 edition of the *Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations* demonstrate the relative importance of Minorca. The “Minorcans traded to Barbary for corn, bees wax, coral, hides, etc., and employed twenty or thirty ships from 100 to 150 tons burthen annually in the corn trade.” Thus, the rancor expressed by merchants, as well as the working class over Byng and the loss of the island to France coexisted, unfortunately, with a poor harvest in 1756 and a subsequent food shortage. Rogers indicates that because of Minorca’s loss some 10,000 tinners in Cornwall lost their jobs. The worsted industries suffered as well, especially at East Anglia. The towns of Exeter and Devizes, “towns dependent on Spanish wool and dyes,” also felt the

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economic dislocation caused by the French taking of the Mediterranean island.\textsuperscript{165} Thus, much of the anti-Byng hysteria lay in the micro-economic necessity of placing food on the table. But in the macro sense, the loss of Minorca exposed the British proclivity for pursuing national wealth through “calculated commercialism,” a desire to invest in “blue water” policies which directed and governed nearly every facet of British politics and economics both at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{166} In this context, the ministry’s search for a scapegoat to take the fall over the loss of Minorca revealed foreordained knowledge of the coming anger over such news. Minorca’s loss, and Byng’s attachment to it, meant more than mere scrutiny: it meant financial instability in the former and a possible remedy in the latter.

Britain’s unique control over its state-finances in the early-eighteenth century, especially in comparison with continental nation-states, originated in its ability to extend the privileges of investments down past the ranks of the nobility and into the ranks of common traders and merchants: Britain’s bourgeoisie. In other words, high finance in Britain was socialized, no longer a purely state-directed noble institution but rather a market-driven liberalization of public credit extended to all those willing and able to participate.\textsuperscript{167} Work by J. G. A. Pocock on the involvement of speculative financing (stocks, bonds, etc.) on the one hand with the general public on the other, bound the latter

\textsuperscript{165} Rogers, 61-62.

\textsuperscript{166} “The blue water policy, aside from reducing military necessities, was cost effective…” Costs were saved in not having to pay for standing armies, and Britain tapped maritime sailors already skilled at sailing in times of conflict. Baugh, 41.

\textsuperscript{167} Mitchell, 120.
to conceive of themselves and identify with the state in entirely new ways. Suddenly, financial success for individuals was tied directly to the successes or failures of the state. As Robert Mitchell put it, “imagination served as the faculty of temporal projection that committed individuals to the state to which they had lent their money…” This new class of investors ‘imagined’ a future return on their investments, and they ‘believed’ that their state held the capacity to meet interest payments on bonded debt. Despite the fact that early- and mid-eighteenth-century Britain was one of the most heavily taxed nation states in all of Europe, Parliament remained stable and Whig-dominated, relations between the monarchs and Parliament remained cordial, and the political nation – or as Colley calls it: the cult of trade – repeatedly endorsed this economic arrangement despite many post-Restoration financial scandals, such as the South Sea Bubble.

Moreover, France and other continental competitors marveled and despaired over Britain’s ability to spend during times of war well beyond what its overly taxed population could conceivably support. The money to fund its many eighteenth-century wars came from public borrowing through the Bank of England, chartered in 1694. With each overseas conflict came a concomitant amount of borrowing which deepened as time went on. For example, during the War of the Spanish Succession, 31% of the costs of that conflict originated from monies brought in through the sale of British bonds. When the

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169 Mitchell, 117-18.

Seven Years’ War finished, 37% of wartime expenditures derived from such public borrowing.\footnote{171} If such borrowing wowed the Europeans, early-eighteenth-century British writers and philosophers, such as Joseph Addison in 1711, were wowed as well.

“My thought I returned to the great hall, where I had been the morning before, but... I saw, towards the upper end of the hall, a beautiful virgin, seated on a throne of gold. Her name, as they told me, was Public Credit.”\footnote{172} The extension of “Public Credit” to the general populace allowed George Berkeley in \textit{The Querist} to speculate “Whether the credit of public funds be not a gold mine to England?”\footnote{173} Satirically, according to Shebbeare:

\begin{quote}

Every Englishman’s notions of happiness is included in riches.... When they speak of the deserted towns of Italy, they talk their inhabitants as the most miserable of people, because they are not rich; trade, commerce, and bustle, are their only and eternal notions of felicity.... In truth, money is all that is zealously pursued in this nation; the inhabitants have placed the whole human bliss, in the possessing it...\footnote{174}

Defoe, Davenant, Addison, Berkeley and other thinkers recognized that this extension of financial privileges to the middle ranks sparked imaginative bouts of national aspirations and identity.\footnote{175} Interestingly, the financial revolution took place in tandem with the British free press. Publications tracked stock trades, annuities, and
\end{quote}

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\footnote{171}{Dickson, 9-11.}

\footnote{172}{Arnold Thomas, ed., \textit{Addison: Selections from Addison’s Papers Contributed to the Spectator} (London: Clarendon Press, 1886), 12.}

\footnote{173}{George Berkeley, \textit{The Querist: Containing Several Queries, Proposed to the Consideration of the Public} (1760; repr., Dublin: original 1735), 51-2.}

\footnote{174}{John Shebbeare, \textit{Letters on the English Nation; by Batista Angeloni, a Jesuit who resided many years in London, Translated from the Original Italian by the Author of the Marriage Act, a Novel} (London: 1755), 45.}

\footnote{175}{For example, Davenant exclaimed that Public Credit not only existed in “ye minds of men,” but hung “upon opinion, it depends upon our passions of hope and fear.” Mitchell, 118, 125-26.}
\end{footnotes}
interest-bearing bonds which carried the national debt forward in time while remaining outside the control of the state. These for-profit publications mirrored the financial revolution in that both responded only to collective “opinion” or “fancy.” For British readers who followed the ups and downs of stocks and the fluctuating interest rates on the British bearing bond, the affairs of empire affected them financially and emotionally.\(^{176}\)

But while the empire brought in goods from afar, the financial revolution triggered massive anxiety.\(^{177}\) When scandals hit, huge swings in commodity and stock prices wiped out fortunes within days or even hours in a country where bankruptcy earned jail time. Imagination, thus, worked in reverse, believing – as Jonathan Swift did in *The Conduct of the Allies* – that moneyed men, bankers, and MPs colluded in order to line their own pockets at the expense of the nation.\(^{178}\) Further, many of the political issues between Court, parliament, and merchants, centered on accruing and allocating limited national assets. But taxation also drew much rancor as political elites attempted to shift the burden of the land tax on to the merchant class in the form of excise taxes. In 1751, Dodington entered in his diary:

Sir Francis Dashwood from the Earl of Westmoreland desired to know, if I thought it prudent to make an overture to Mr. Pelham, as a party to join him, if

\(^{176}\) Mitchell, 125.

\(^{177}\) Amanda Vickery, “His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Household Accounting in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Past and Present*, 192 (August 2006, Supplement): 24-28. Amanda Vickery shows that the imaginative power to which empire held upon Britons, male or female. For Sarah Ardene, in 1745: it was the purchasing of Muslin from the Middle East, handkerchiefs from India, a waistcoat from Dresden. For the feasts of Sir John Hind Cotton, even in times of war (1760), his relishing of exotic beyond-the-border cuisine such as oranges, lemons, and Madeira Wines became a symbol of prestige. Consciously or unconsciously, consumption reinforced the benefits of British citizenry. See also: Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior & Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988).

\(^{178}\) McJimsey, 21-22. Swift attacked the Ministry for prolonging Queen Anne’s War so as to recoup investments. Swift also condemned the Godolphin and Marlborough administration for diverting resources away from the navy, funding armies on the continent to which Britain’s allies left exposed.
he would lower the land tax next year to two shillings in the pound, and reduce the army. I sent my duty to the Earl, and begged to know, if he thought we were united enough to make overtures as a party…. If we were united, we should, now, demand great and national conditions, for the safety of the whole, which will be easily obtained, at least, as the reduction of the army at present…. 179

The land tax subsequently fell to two shillings from four, but the army did not suffer cuts alone. Byng’s report on port conditions in Gibraltar (mast-house, boathouse, pitch house, smith shop, and cable-shed unserviceable), plus the condition of his fleet and lack of tenders, especially in the context of an expected conflict with France, reflected the political rift involving the taxation shift from elite-driven land taxes to merchant-based excises.

Thus, the effeminate charges levied against Admiral John Byng, the ministry, and the British aristocracy highlighted a tremendous anxiety which gripped merchants over taxation and defense policies, and a populace enveloped in the oft wild, oscillating throes of a most radical financial revolution. Cycles of booms and busts elated or vexed the population, whereby writers and essayists scrambled to link female metaphors to the perceived inherent uncertainty built into the financial system and the overly imaginative powers engendered by hysterical investors. Thus, by the 1750s, the rhetoric of the political middle class readily employed a bevy of gender-related remarks to protest against corruption. Pamphlets at the beginning of the Seven Years’ War also employed gender-based rhetoric ruminating upon the perceived feminization of the nation. “Our effeminate and unmanly Life, working along with our Island-Climate, hath notoriously

179 Wyndham, The Diary of the Late George ‘Bubb’ Dodington, 93.
produced an Increase of *low Spirits* and *nervous Disorders*, whose natural and unalterable Character is that of *Fear.*\(^{180}\)

This diatribe echoed many other British pamphleteers who felt that the new financial system lay too open to corruption and scandal, where backdoor deals between elitist politicos in cohorts with moneyed men chose to dishonor their fellow Britons in favor of self-interests.\(^{181}\) Such economic uncertainties turned up in plays where, in 1757, the Tory-backed production of *The Taxes* bemoaned the changing financial order at the expense of the everyday man:

> It is very certain, we are at a low ebb – if there was but one spark of the old English honour, rak’d up under the ashes, possible to be lighted up again – there might be some hopes. Ah! Tradewell! When we have been so long accustomed, to have our characters and consciences treated as saleable commodities, where shall we find the spirit to resent such usage – How would THIS have been taken by our ancestors?\(^{182}\)

Minorca’s loss set in motion a domino effect of anti-ministerial and anti-corruption movements. The administration, as we have seen, attempted to attach blame for the loss of Minorca to Admiral John Byng. From trade alone (not including bankers, insurance men, stockjobbers, and other people dependent upon the financial sector), the stoking of the nation’s collective imagination did not take much effort.\(^{183}\) William Pitt, the Tory Party, and much of the City wasted little time in attacking the financial system and its

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\(^{180}\) Brown, 89-90.

\(^{181}\) Pocock argues that “Economic man as masculine conquering hero is a fantasy of nineteenth-century industrialization. His eighteenth-century predecessor was seen as on the whole a feminized, even an effeminate being, still wrestling with his own passions and hysterias and with interior and exterior forces let loose by his fantasies and appetites, and symbolized by such archetypically female goddesses of disorder as Fortune, Luxury, and most recently, Credit herself.” Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 114.

\(^{182}\) Bacon, 14.
henchmen in the ministry. Patriot Whigs assailed the system of funding wars through the sale of bonded debt, and connected Newcastle’s personal and precarious financial state to an imagined bankruptcy of the nation.\textsuperscript{184} The print entitled “BRITANNIA in DISTRESS” (figure 7) links the loss of Minorca to the perceived state of British finances, thus playing

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\columnwidth]{britannia_in_distress.png}
\caption{"Britannia in Distress," 1756, British Museum.}
\footnotesize{Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3524. Reprinted with permission.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{183} Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 60-69. Colley claims that one in five Britons directly worked in trade.

\textsuperscript{184} Cardwell, 122-3.
upon the fears of the collective imagination in regard to corruption in the Old Guard Whigs. A portico labeled “The S___e” (The State) crumbles under the weight of courtiers who gathered to push a large bag representing pensions valued at “80,000,000” ready to be dumped on the figure of Britannia below. As courtiers push the bag, “Degenerate Britons,” in the form of the ministry, pull it. Lord Hardwicke, the Duke of Newcastle, Lord Anson, and Henry Fox heave on ropes labeled “Min—ca Lost” (Minorca), “Am—ca Neglected” (America), “Tr—de not Protected” (Trade), a popular slogan during the summer of 1756 intended to bruise the ministry. Patriots, meanwhile, work hard to replace two failed columns, “Trade” and “Publick Credit,” endeavoring to do so even as two figures sulk nearby labeled “Manufacturers in the dumps,” a forceful reminder of the connection crafted between Britain’s bourgeoisie and the Patriot Whigs. Britannia shouts to the courtiers and ministers, “Oh thoughtless Sons know you not in destroying me you destroy yourselves.” Several courtiers reply, “We shall bring it down and Bury her in the Overthrow,” and “On with it,” plus “More weight.” Another inscription reads “A Parcel of Poor Men of mean fortunes of 8, 10, or 20,000 p. Ann: out of Pity to such indigent Circumstances Are Paid Pensions of some Thousands, pr Ann. to keep them from want Putting an Helping hand.” The overall theme of the print warned investors that with such leadership, in court and in the ministry, the same leadership that brought about the loss of Minorca, will destroy the nation.185

Finances and the nation were linked, and Minorca’s loss outraged London City traders and Merchants who began an aggressive October campaign involving the

issuance of instructions to the king. These instructions requested the repeal of the 1716 Septennial Act, thus requiring more frequent voting and turnover of parliament to ensure its purity, a strict and transparent auditing of all public funds, and restrictions placed on pensions and the advancement of courtiers into false titles.\textsuperscript{186} Minorca’s loss threatened the British sense of self, its empire, and its financial foundations. As the “Britannia in Distress” print alluded to, the very fabric of the state appeared to be “tott’ring” under a “cumberous load” of corrupt leadership in politics and finance. Merchant discontent at the political status quo is a reminder from Colley that one-third of British national identity lay in the country’s ability to extract wealth from its empire. The bourgeoisie angrily condemned the ministers for their inattentive leadership:

\begin{quote}
...immediate happiness must arise, and be estimated, from the Manners and Principles of the Whole; yet the Manners and Principles of those who lead, not of those who are led; of those who govern, not of those who are governed; of those, in short, who make Laws or execute them, will ever determine the Strength or Weakness, and therefore the Continuance or Dissolution, of a State.
\end{quote} \textsuperscript{187}

In other words, those who make laws – Parliament – and those who execute them – the king – determine whether or not the state, indeed the British nation, remained a viable entity. For Brown, in 1756, both parliament and the king lacked the “principles” necessary to support the continuance of the state, evident not only in their “manners” but in the physical reality of the loss of Minorca and the ensuing clamor over Admiral Byng.

In regards to finances and nationalism, Hobsbawm asks, was it “historically fortuitous that the classic era of free trade liberalism coincided with that ‘nation-

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{186} Cardwell, 133. \\
\textsuperscript{187} Brown, 25.
\end{flushright}
The British system which afforded capital and state investments to the third estate certainly bound those investors to an imaginative perception of participating in something larger than themselves: the empire and nation. Byng’s life depended on his ability, hampered as it was by his imprisonment, to convince an enraged British populace that their perception of him as a cowardly and effeminate elite who sold his soul and Minorca to the devil and France (respectively) held no water. But the reality of the British economy, its dislocations and loss of jobs caused by the French taking of Minorca, coupled with the perception held by many Britons that moneyed men, courtiers and peers acted in self-interested and corrupted ways doomed Admiral Byng despite a difficult but spirited defense. The perceived financial calamity at the beginning throes of the Seven Years’ War by the trading class is reveled in the 1756 slogan, “Minorca lost, America Neglected, Trade not Protected.” Byng’s quixotic task was to convince his nation that he was not part of that slogan.

188 Hobsbawm, 25.
CHAPTER VII

FORM AND IMAGINATION: RELIGION

Admiral John Byng’s ability to shake the charges levied against him proved all the more difficult given the deep and unique British proclivity toward religion. The year-long Byng crisis witnessed extensive religious symbolism in print and overt moralistic dictates in writings and speeches. Both the ministry and the Tory/Patriot alliance embedded religion into their propaganda and satire as the Byng affair developed following the loss of Minorca.

From the Reformation forward, England’s long list of diverse and Dissenting Protestant sects created a “machinery,” according to J. D. C. Clark, of released political passions, fanatical pursuits of British liberties, and an increasingly important penchant toward commerce. Clark not only listed the many variances of Protestantism since the British Reformation, but added their incontrovertible polities, theologies, and different means of soteriological pursuits, all of which, claims Clark, connected religion deeply to seventeenth and eighteenth century political thought and action. The twenty-ninth edition of John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim, printed from London at about the time of Byng’s execution, summed up the common purposes between church and state. When a neighbor by the name of ‘Obstinate’ queries the ‘Pilgrim’ “What are the Things you seek, since you leave all the World to find them?” the pious Pilgrim replies, “I seek an Inheritance

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189 Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 494; and Clark, 272. Clark not only listed the many variances of Protestantism since the British Reformation, but added their incontrovertible polities, theologies, and different means of soteriological pursuits, all of which, claims Clark, connected religion deeply to seventeenth and eighteenth century political thought and action.
incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away: And it is laid up in heaven, and safe there, to be bestow’d at the Time appointed on them that diligently seek it.”

In the aggrandizement of religious complexity in Britain, religion and politics mixed to advance the nation-state within the dictates of the moral and the divine. Thus, both the work ethic and the purity of society became not only private, individual goals, but also the astute goals of the state, both of which combined to supply a wellspring of English identity, a sort of civic religiosity to which all Protestant Britons, not just elites, were to strive toward. Such recurring battles among Protestant faiths, let alone over the Catholic question, ruminated a predominate national belief that Britain (in accordance with its special place geographical location, guarded as it were by a spiritual people) represented a modern Israel, an Island Fortress, “hedged around God’s special care but under the threat of immoral invasion” from within as well as from the outer world.

Religious revivalism grew as the eighteenth century progressed, in part because of increased global wars and the vicissitudes of Empire building, but also and particularly the numerous confrontations with cross-channel rivals, France. The print entitled “Bung Triumphant” (figure 2), shows Methodist Minister John Wesley, preaching in his favorite manner: outdoors, arms stretched attempting to save souls. Whoever designed this anonymous print, the merger of religion and politics did not stretch one’s imagination. Eighteenth-century celebrations of Guy Fawkes Day consecrated and, indeed, canonized the blending of religion and politics by linking enemy Catholicism to perceived threats.

190 Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World, to That Which is to Come. Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream* (London: 1757), 5.

against the state, a nearby and handy target for budding English nationalists. Pamphlets concerned with the crisis of Admiral Byng also, and often, lamented against or promoted religion as a way to express political points. A pamphlet complaining of mob violence against Byng’s effigy explained:

I am sorry I am obliged to say, this Behavior in my Countrymen bears not the Stamp of Christianity. Behavior like this, indicates the greatest Ungenerosity, nay savage Barbarity, and which would far better become the wild Indians in America, than the more civilized Sons of Polite Britannia.\(^{192}\)

Since the Reformation, authors such as John Foxe and John Bale worked to influence the commoners’ perception that Christianity in England pre-dated the Catholic Church.\(^{193}\) These origins certified not just a consciousness, not just an awareness, but an active and calculative supply of Protestantism into English culture. Thus, from the sixteenth century onward, nearly the whole of the British Isle lay exposed to the idea, sporadically reinforced, that God chose Britons to conduct His missions on earth.\(^ {194}\) Puritans took these ideas to the extreme and became civic religious soldiers demanding improvements to both government and society.\(^{195}\) It is no surprise then that one of England’s first social reform groups, the Societies for Reformation of Manners (est. 1691) pillared itself upon the foundations of civic religion.\(^{196}\) Overseas trade, which

\(^{192}\) A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known, 11.


\(^{194}\) Smith, 119.

\(^{195}\) The idea of religious militarism is borrowed from Pocock’s reviews of Machiavelli’s Discorsi and Il Principe. “…Machiavelli seems to depict [virtue] as built on military and civic religion, as if those two were the two socializing processes through which men learned to be political animals.” Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, 202.

\(^{196}\) Gregg, 17.
increased material goods and wealth, met with religious-based warnings of over-
consumptive behaviors. Fear of contagions from outside the fortress Britannica also
raised the cackles of England’s religious conservatives.

And despite – or in spite of – increased interests in science, increased
urbanization and industrial endeavors, the call for moral fidelity and civic responsibilities
shrilled ever louder at the outset of the Seven Years’ War. “The Principles here to be
estimated,” wrote John Brown, “are such only as to tend to counterwork selfish passions.
These are, the Principles of Religion, the Principle of Honour, and the Principle of public
Spirit.” Religion, honor, and a dedication to doing good for one’s country resoundingly
consumed much political and religious thought mid-eighteenth century.

However, in order to perform one’s civic duty, manliness became a necessary
prerequisite. Leaders as far back as the seventeenth century charged the vices of luxury,
over-indulgence, and lack of self-control were affronts to manliness, effeminate markers
which threatened to crumble social order. Linking religious duties to the success or
failure of the state, John Shower’s oratory before the Society for Reformation of Manners
in 1697 gives a sense of the deep seeded religiosity already constituted within English
national identity:

Great Numbers of Subjects, that in time of War, might defend their Country,
are effeminate, debauched, diseased, and made uncapable of bearing arms…. By unrestrained, unpunished Vice and Wickedness, the very Genius of a
Nation is changed, a generous and brave People dispirited: By Luxury and
Debauchery they are softened and dissolved into Cowardize: They lose their

197 Brown, 53.
198 Gregg, 17-18.
Reputation abroad, and have no Strength at home; and are easy Prey to Foreign Enemies.\textsuperscript{199}

Charges of effeminacy and debauchery in British society continued well into the eighteenth century and along the way, picked up an international flair. In a 1723 sermon, Edmund Gibson incriminated “a neighboring nation” of taking “measures to Enslave us; and indeed there is not a more effectual way to enslave People, than first to dispirit and enfeeble them by Licentiousness and Effeminacy.”\textsuperscript{200} France sent such contagions via the British aristocracy whose cosmopolitan visits infected them with desultory manners. The threat of a Catholic French invasion at the genesis of the Seven Years’ War had many British parishioners in church, including Thomas Turner, praying for theurgic intervention, or at the least, guidance for, or deliverance from, those corruptible and effeminate elements known to exist within the state’s court and ministry.\textsuperscript{201} As the Byng scandal blossomed, an accusatory half-century’s worth of effeminate manners within the greater society morphed to focus almost entirely upon Britain’s corrupt governing elite. With a slight at Admiral Byng, John Brown drew upon imaginative Britons to:

\begin{quote}
...consider the natural Effects of these effeminate manners, on Fleets and Armies. And here, ‘tis supposed, it will be readily acknowledged, that the Conduct and Fate of Fleets and Armies depend much on the Capacity of those that lead them...Chiefly, indeed, of those who are highest in command.\textsuperscript{202}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{199} From John Shower’s sermon before the Society for Reformation of Manners in 1697, in Gregg, 18.

\textsuperscript{200} Gregg, 22.

\textsuperscript{201} Vaisey, xxxviii.

\textsuperscript{202} Brown, 79.
Brown, and others, lumped Admiral John Byng in with an imagined corrupted state where religion, honor, virtue, public spirit and “love of our Country”\textsuperscript{203} no longer existed and, through allegation, were caused by “a general contempt for religion by the fashionable world” a “present age deep in the Speculation of Infidelity.”\textsuperscript{204} John Brown pulled no punches, the loss of Minorca was not to be attributed to any one man. Admiral Byng’s alleged cowardice merely reflected the degeneracy of Britain’s landed and political elites. “It is the Pride of Equipage, the Pride of Title, the Pride of Fortune, or the Pride of Dress,” wrote Brown, “that have assumed the Empire over our souls, and leveled Ambition with the Dirt.”\textsuperscript{205}

Thus religious symbolism and rhetoric, filled with anti-corruption rage, challenged and mocked British governance as Admiral Byng awaited trial. In a print entitled “A Scene in Hell, or the Infernal Jubilee” (figure 8), the body of Admiral Byng, labeled “Cowardice,” turns on a rotisserie along with the bodies of Newcastle and Fox, marked “Luxury” and “subtlety” respectively. In the adjacent “Great Hall of Pandemonium,” devils gather already feasting upon the hearts of the three men and drinking from goblets labeled “T___t_rs Bl__d” (Traitors Blood). The crowned Lucifer states “On this heart depended a Nation’s Hopes, now baffled by its Cowardice, O Princes spare it not.” Another demon points to Fox’s heart and quips, “This subtle Heart no Honour knew, But made a K__g and C__ntry rue.” Yet another fiend points to

\textsuperscript{203} Brown, 64.
\textsuperscript{204} Brown, 55.
\textsuperscript{205} Brown, 58-59.
Newcastle’s heart and declares, “As sure as Newcastle’s on the Tyne, This heart with

Figure 8 - "A Scene in Hell, or the Infernal Jubilee," 1756, British Museum.
Source: © Trustees of the British Museum, no. 3378. Reprinted with permission.

t’other Two did join.” To emphasize the influence of French contagions, cooks in the
next room prepare other servings including a “Dish of Pope’s Eyes.” One of the devils
explains that “Though I’m no French cook, I know Whats What as well as Cloe,” a
reference to Newcastle’s personal French chef. The conversation continues, “Dam the French and their Cooks too,” and “O Don’t dam em for if they come to Hell they’ll poison the Devil,” and “No lets have none Here We shall be as bad off as Engl__d if they was.”

Prior to the eighteenth century, Robert Burton, Thomas Willis, Francis Bacon, and Thomas Hobbes articulated theories of the “anatomical location of the faculty of imagination” in order to explain religious fanaticism. Similarly, in the eighteenth century, men such as Daniel Defoe and Charles Davenant attempted to use the “workings of the imagination” to explain fluctuations in stock prices and public confidence over the level of corruption existent in British government. Accordingly, a movement from the overt religiosity of the seventeenth century to the overt capitalism in the eighteenth century emerges. But one does not replace the other, rather the two are blended in a uniquely British perspective on the exigencies of empire. Here, work and civic duty blend equally with moral and outwardly expressed Christian values.

During the Byng affair, the use of religious symbolism in prints attacked not only Admiral Byng, but ministers and aristocracy. Religious symbolism against the ministry takes on an Augustinian flare in the print “The Revolving State, or The Reward for Negligence” (figure 9). Here we see “Time” dispensing with the ministry as “Justice” leads Pitt and the Patriots to take their place. The old ministers fall into the

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207 Mitchell, 117-20.

Figure 9 - "The Revolving State," 1756, British Museum.
clutches of eternal damnation while small cherubs fire cannon-shot at them. A small poem below the etching reads,

One Moment gives Invention to Destroy,
What to Rebuild would a whole Age employ.
Minorca lost!—thro' Negligence—not Gold,
Still Britain may be happy—if not Sold,
One honest Statesmen if well back'd at Helm,
Would Soon retrieve our dying Trade and Realm.

The “one honest Statesmen” refers to William Pitt, the Patriot minister, and the poem advises that “if well back’d” Pitt and his Patriots would lead Britain back to glory and righteousness. The ministers, accused in the press of selling Minorca to the French, is referenced in the line, “Still Britain may be happy – if not Sold.”

Religious symbolism against the aristocracy can be seen in “Britannia in Distress” (figure 6). Toward the upper left, two figures “Folly” and “Comus,” the latter the Greek mythological god of all night festivities and chaos, party with Britain’s high society. “Folly” carries a dice-box, dice, a mask, and a windmill. “Comus,” crowned with vine, holds up a goblet of wine and remarks, “These are the Objects of Polite Minds to Think is the Property of Mean Souls.” Even more condemning of the aristocracy are the two figures in front of “Comus” and “Folly,” seen tearing pages from the Holy Bible and flinging them to the ground.

Thus, religious symbolism and rhetoric remained a tool utilized by ministerial writers and printmakers, as well as those within the Tory/Patriot alliance. With Minorca’s loss and Byng’s manliness in question, the moralistic values of the bourgeoisie spilled forth. Political factions used religion to capture a sort of moral one-upmanship, a proselytizing attempt to capture the hearts and minds of the people while the nation endured a string of failures against Catholic France. Religion, in this sense, became the
national and horizontal unifier, that whether pro-ministry, or pro-Byng, religion held the key to speak to all Britons.
CHAPTER VIII

A NEW DEFINITION OF NATIONALISM

In order to assert that nationalism played a role in the execution of Admiral John Byng, a review of the current scholarly debate on nationalism is warranted. Certainly, consensus on nationalism remains incontrovertibly distant. A quick review of the debate reveals that many scholars outright deny nationalism’s existence unless it meets a narrowly defined timeline of a post-Napoleonic, industrial world.209 On the flip side, there exist those who champion the idea that nationalism is as ancient as the Old Testament itself.210 Some claim that nationalism is driven by elites, a top-down herding of the masses moved toward a vision of the country that could only be held by the politically effectual or powerful.211 Others tend toward a more bottom-up approach, providing numerous examples of where nascent concepts of nation existed within epic poems, religious stories, oral traditions, celebrations of heroes and martyrs, and much more.212 Further assertions hold that these pre-industrial concepts held dear by ‘the

209 For such a modernist interpretation see Hobsbawm.

210 Smith.


212 Smith.
people’ were only later tapped into by nineteenth-century elites attempting to unify the masses behind the concept of nation.\textsuperscript{213} Still others argue that nationalism is a protean beast, ever changing, ever morphing, and experienced differently for each and every state that attempted to employ it or be moved by it.\textsuperscript{214}

Despite those who deny that nations have existed since the Middle Ages, nearly all historians agree on the point of divergence within this nationalism debate: the French Revolution, or the decade immediately before or after. Historians who believe nationalism is a reaction to changes wrought by modernity tend to steer the debate of nationalism beyond the era of revolutions. Historians who believe nationalism not only preceded industrialism but, indeed, forced modernity itself, attempt to highlight incidences of nation building prior to the era of revolutions.

However, and in near unanimity, historians of nationalism often point to Britain as the first ‘nation-state.’ Liah Greenfeld, in fact, dubs the first chapter of her book \textit{Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity}, “God’s First Born: England.”\textsuperscript{215} But Greenfeld’s arguments are of a nationalized England prior to the Act of Union, 1707, before Scotland gets added to the mix. If ‘England’ was a nation prior to the Act of Union, was ‘Britain’ a nation after its passage? Linda Colley suggests that this new British nation was “an imagined political community” layered or “superimposed…onto

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\textsuperscript{213} For such a primordialist interpretation see Hastings.

\textsuperscript{214} Greenfeld.

\textsuperscript{215} Greenfeld writes that “by 1600, the existence in England of a national consciousness and identity, and as a result, of a new geo-political entity, a nation, was a fact.” Greenfeld, 30.
much older alignments and loyalties.”\textsuperscript{216} J.D.C. Clark retorts differently, that aside from the already ancient forms of religious symbolism, “efforts in Britain to devise national symbols, to integrate provincial and regional consciousnesses in a new Britishness, were relatively few and fragmented.”\textsuperscript{217} For Colley, the British nation “was an invention forged above all by war,” especially with France. This Catholic enemy “brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England into confrontation with an obviously hostile other,” which then encouraged them “to define themselves.”\textsuperscript{218} Clark retorts that “wars in the long eighteenth century often opened up internal tensions” rather than act as a unifying force, prompting his example of the “Whig wars” (under William III and Anne) which “stoked Tory-Jacobite resentment….”\textsuperscript{219} Thus, Clark emphasizes the internal political dissensions caused by war, while Colley acknowledges that though the “main ideological threat posed by the next two wars with France [Seven Years, & American Revolution] was not religious but overwhelmingly political,” the political threats remained external, not internal to British unity.\textsuperscript{220}

The answer to such historical debates may be found by focusing on the Byng affair, a single event in British history roughly from May 1756 to March 1757. In the attempt to scapegoat Byng before the populace, the ministers purposely, or inadvertently, defined for the nation on \textit{not} how to be British. Here, in the effort to “integrate provincial and regional consciousness in a new Britishness,” Admiral John Byng himself became

\textsuperscript{216} Colley, \textit{Britons: Forging the Nation}, 5.

\textsuperscript{217} Clark, 264.

\textsuperscript{218} Colley, \textit{Britons: Forging the Nation}, 5.

\textsuperscript{219} Clark, 275.

\textsuperscript{220} Colley, \textit{Britons: Forging the Nation}, 4.
that symbol. The ministry’s propaganda vilified the admiral, concluded and proclaimed to its people, that Byng’s conduct was opposite of a true Briton. But the reaction, or nationalistic rancor which followed the ministry’s propaganda, loomed larger and more intense than the ministers conceived possible. Minorca lay at the heart of the matter, and while the lower orders appeared to swallow the ministry’s malediction toward Byng, after all the admiral was a peer, the middle orders of British society seized upon the crisis as an opportunity make political headway against entrenched oligarchs in the governance of the state. In the arsenal of the middle ranks posited more than a decade’s worth of anti-aristocratic rhetoric. Out of power politically, the Tory/Patriot Whig alliance dipped into the well of middle class angst and began to pour stinging rebukes against the established oligarchs largely along issues of national identity. The Byng affair, then, became a battleground fought by various social segments over issues of national identity. To what degree these public arguments forced the execution of Byng is the purpose of this chapter.

On the definition of nationalism, however, Historians find it exceedingly difficult to classify, let alone agree upon “any single platonic notion of what constitutes nationalism and nationhood.”221 Yet, like moths drawn to a candle’s flame, historians and scholars continue to offer up definitions while exposing themselves to stinging rebukes from their peers. Forgive me for my attempt.

First, the modernist’s definition of nationalism is too restrictive and often times anachronistic. It sets up false barriers such as education, literacy, and industrial

221 Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 386, fn. 6.
revolutions. But more importantly, the modernist definitions of nationalism either leave out or demean the role of the state in the historical process of nation creating. The birth of modern European states emerged slowly from the grip of medieval European feudalism. Clark claims that the evolution of European statehood proceeded through accretion – a natural, slow, and progressive process – and further, that such incremental steps played a significant role in the concepts of national identity.

I argue that “nationalism” flowers from the residue of Renaissance era civic humanism, where the term “nation” (or patrie or other associated uses) becomes the argumentative foundation used toward the reasonable end of influencing those who are, or can be, politically effectual. In other words, nationalism is the process of politicizing a nation-state, which post-Renaissance was new, as opposed to the term or concept of nation, which was not. As Hobsbawm succinctly observed, the reason nation or nationalism is missing from much of the historical writings of liberal thinkers “is due not so much to a failure to think the problem of nation through, as to the

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222 Clark, 250. Clark claims that the evolution of European statehood proceeded through accretion – a natural, slow, and progressive process – and further, that such incremental steps played a significant role in the concepts of national identity.

223 Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, 335. Pocock claims citizenship was limited within the state. Also, that humanist’s ideals not only became inherent but woven into the political fabric of England.

224 Greenfeld, 4-9. Liah Greenfeld places the acceptance of a positive connotation of the word “nation” among European social elites at around the late thirteenth century. Greenfeld also reminds us of the evolution of the term and its different meanings over time, from a group of foreigners, to collegiate community, to an elite council of church officials, to a “sovereign people,” and finally to the thirteenth century when nation meant a unique people distinguishable from those from another realm or state.
assumption that it did not require to be spelled out, since it was already obvious.\textsuperscript{225}

Further, nationalism is sensitive to time and space, era and geography. Moreover, the prompting of nationalism arises due to either the changes wrought by modernity and innovation from without, or alone or in combination with social and cultural changes from within. Therefore, nationalism is at first a reactive process to the elements of radical change and then a prescriptive process – not always “top-down,” but always based on historical myths which already existed from “below.” By juxtaposing the year-long Byng affair against the modernist’s dictates of the concept of nationalism, not only does Britain appear a nation, but a “nation” that practiced or implemented numerous campaigns of national intent before, during, and after the Byng affair.

During the Renaissance, humanists understood war as man-made and thus, a political decision. According to Hale, the secular conception of warfare led “to the wide expression of reasons why war should actually be provoked…”\textsuperscript{226} Humanists, of course, saw themselves as advisors in the conduct of statecraft and war.\textsuperscript{227} Similarly, sixteenth-century English humanists increasingly saw themselves as counselors to the king, individual participants through Parliament in the “bringing about a more just and a more prosperous distribution of the common weal.”\textsuperscript{228} From the Reformation forward, the

\textsuperscript{225} Hobsbawm, 24.

\textsuperscript{226} These reasons were: “how it could be used to improve a national community: a foreign war diverted men from making trouble at home; it rid a country of social dross; it acted as a stimulating tonic to a lethargic body politic.” J. R. Hale, 

\textsuperscript{227} Machiavelli’s \textit{The Art of War}, published in 1522, replete with diagrams and charts, is such a case in point.

\textsuperscript{228} Pocock, \textit{The Machiavellian Moment}, 339.
business of identifying and building the enterprise of what, and who, constituted the English state tapped human and physical resources for its construction. Consequently, the need for ever larger bureaucracies: magistrates, courts, parishes, ministerial offices and the growing number of ancillary offices that served them, and so on, in the maintenance and promotion of the state, created a new wealth of benefactors who saw in the relegation of state services a compelling reason to serve. In this instance, then, statehood contained an inherent predilection toward national ends. The larger the state bureaucracy grew, the more the people identified positively with the state, its goals, and the means to achieve them.  

By the eighteenth century, the civic-minded citizen – and in this instance, only those considered a citizen – imagined Britain, not just as a state but as a nation. This moved those citizens and constituted their energies toward something bigger than themselves. In other words, “the formation of political and social interests and the development of culture and society cannot be explained simply in terms of themselves, but as a rule emerge out of interaction with the structure and activities of the state at that particular time.”

The Reformation also brought about new religious ideologies which argued for civic action in creating a purer social dimension to the art of state-craft. The idea that a moral citizen must contribute to one’s country not only survived the Enlightenment, increased urbanization and industrial practices, but thrived in many facets of English

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230 Theda Skocpol, Introduction to Bringing the State Back In, eds. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Theda Skocpol (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2.
social and political thought at the onset of the Seven Years’ War. The powerful response to Pitt and the concomitant rise in the political stature of the Patriots, reflected the sturdy survivability of civic-minded values deeply embedded into Britain’s bourgeoning middle ranks.

On my first arrival here, and indeed in several visits during the course of the winter in London, I was, at every opportunity, entertained by a reverend friend of mine [Dr. Stone, the Archbishop of Armagh], with the highest encomiums and panegyrics on the virtue and abilities of Mr. Pitt, of the necessity government had of such men, and of the public misfortune, that *all* the able men were not joined together as they ought to be.\(^{231}\)

Pringle’s letter to Pitt reinforced the perception that the success of the state, indeed the forwarding of the nation, necessitated not just a few virtuous men, but “all the able men” that constituted Britain’s citizenry. Pringle, thus, limited citizenship to those that possess “virtue and abilities.” The masses need not apply in order for nationalism to exist. Indeed, eighteenth-century British nationalism emanated from the passionate, but the few, bourgeoisie merchants and bankers who either were, or could be, politically effectual. Thus, in the Byng affair, the vehement anti-ministerial propaganda and the numerous calls for investigations over Minorca’s loss, came from outside the political gates of parliament. Merchants organized and exemplified the role of civic humanist as they dispatched from “sixteen counties and nineteen boroughs,”\(^{232}\) addresses, instruction and demands, both to king and parliament. Newcastle and company failed to stem this nationalist movement where from August through December of 1756, George II met with a barrage of memorials which insisted that culpability in Minorca’s loss went way


\(^{232}\) Wilson, 183.
beyond Byng and, in fact, lay at his minsters’ lack of leadership and foresight. Rather than accept a politically domicile role, Britain’s middle class, long filled with grievances against the century’s perceived era of corruption, took to pen and protests.

Such civic humanism continued after Byng’s execution in March, when the following month George II dismissed Pitt from office. The Tory and Patriot alliance rallied behind Pitt in a most unusual campaign, demonstrating that civic voices demanded the king’s and parliament’s attention: that of the Gold Box campaign. Work by Paul Langford shows the extraordinary schemes invented by the bourgeoisie to signal their discontent.\textsuperscript{233} Pitt’s overwhelming popularity, once suggested as George II’s ardent hatred toward him and his concomitant sacking, rested on his seemingly incorruptible nature, the antithesis of the perception of the ministry and Court held by those who could claim political effectiveness, i.e., the many citizens throughout the empire.\textsuperscript{234}

The give and take of these advisory roles originating from numerous sectors of British society that seemingly confuses historians into thinking that there existed very little in the way of a national consensus involving the sanctity of the state. However, it is precisely because of the rancor and discontent associated with Admiral Byng and the ministry, the rise of the Patriot Whigs, and the direct and indirect schemes to maneuver into a position to advise and influence the king and parliament that we witness a nation sensing itself as more important than the state. As Adrian Hastings argues, a state “is not


a nation” until the nation “senses primacy over the state.” Historians miss the awkward, often unsuccessful but yet still heartfelt proclamations from the national citizenry as they attempted to steer their derelict state back within the folds of a national belief system based on ancient cultural mores. Such was the case in Britain at the outset of the Seven Years’ War.

This brings up a dilemma in nationalism: the problem of the corrupted state. In the context of a war against France, the patriotic vexations, religious angst, and unremitting need to advise, counsel, and influence, suggests that the bourgeoisie exerted more than their fair share in pointing out the many wrongs in British society. As J. D. C. Clark explains, “The fact that significant numbers of men would not fight in a particular war, or fight at the behest of a particular ministry or monarch, did not mean that they were lacking in awareness of or identification with their national identity. On the contrary, it might mean they were so highly conscious of that identity as to possess cogent reasons for thinking that the government of the day was betraying it.” Once Byng became the anti-hero and paraded in the national press via newspapers and satirical prints, ballad-hawkers and song, Byng appears as not the problem, but the symptom of scandalous and villainous oligarchs filled with contagions and bent on selling out the country to neighboring France. In other words, the bulk of the politically effectual, to a significant degree, presented Admiral Byng as ‘exhibit A’, proof that the country’s ills resided not in the nation, but in the aristocracy, in the system of peerage and patronage that diluted the national spirit, and threatened the very meaning of what it meant to be a

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235 Hastings, 25.
236 Clark, 263.
Briton. The movement to target Byng resided with the ministry, but the movement to have the unfortunate admiral executed resided with the people.

In advancing the second part of this approach to nationalism, the term “nation” influences those who are, or can be, politically effectual. In the early stages of nationalism, the benefits of the state need only extend as far down in the social and political hierarchy as to those who can actually affect the state, positively or negatively. As the Renaissance waned and warfare became more intense with ever larger armies, the need for more money, more materials, and more men radically altered the structure and the function of the state. Money: *bellowm nervi sunt pecuniae*, the sinews of war. It was the accumulation of it to which advisers such as Gian Giacomo Trivulzio reminded to his “prince,” Louis XII of France, that in order to invade Milan in the year 1499, “Three things are necessary: money, more money, and still more money.”

That money, and the accumulation of things that can be turned into money, did not pass the scrutiny or rational of Machiavelli. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli warned “to make the matter clearer, let me say that in my opinion princes control their own destiny when they command enough money or men to assemble an adequate army and make a stand against anyone who attacks them.” The facts remain that ever larger theatres of war, more intense in terms of both carnage on men and carnage on state resources, forced a nascent reality that states absolutely necessitated involving more and more citizens to take an active part in its defense, maintenance, and promotion.

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237 Hale, 232.

Such invitations, however, involved the extension of state benefits and this usually came in the form of active political participation. As Pocock reminds us, in the early stages of state construction, not every individual counted “as a citizen; that could only happen if there were revival of the ancient notion of political virtù, of the zoon politikon whose nature was to rule, to act, to make decisions… the vita activa, operating in a communal climate where men were indeed called to assemble and make decisions…”\textsuperscript{239} In comparison to France where kings dictated to subordinates, England possessed a parliament, practiced common law, and held an absolute prejudice toward its own ancient constitution. The former tended toward monolithic politics, whereas the latter there existed a “more many-sided…more civic” approach to politics.\textsuperscript{240} Parliamentarians and bureaucratic office holders, through civic activism, enjoined their personal knowledge and beliefs toward the promotion of the state: no longer confined to members of a shire or borough, but rather zoon politikons, citizens invited to participate in the act of building the nation. Further, such civic-minded activities percolated through a lens of perceived ancient customs, through a verifiable precedence of law and religion. Traditions became hereditary, not offices. Nor were these perceived pieces of heritable traditions meant for any one person or family, but heritable to the known body politic or nation. England’s political animals saw themselves as civic-minded citizens within a nation-state who, by their virtù and vita activa, held the helm of their state’s destiny. As Machiavelli explained, hereditary states “are much less trouble to keep in hand than new ones are; it is simply a matter of not upsetting ancient customs, and of accommodating

\textsuperscript{239} Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, 235.

\textsuperscript{240} Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, 339-40.
oneself to meet new circumstances.” New circumstances, or fortuna, tended to be external, though not always. And the most external forms of fortuna were the ever larger and more intense theatres of war throughout the European landscape. England accommodated such fortune with a “tendency toward concentration,” a growth in centralizing their government at the expense of local administration and provincial identity. In other words, the English nation-state began to emerge. However, such a nation extended only to its citizens, its zoon politikons or political animals: those who obtained, possessed, and actively sought to affect politics within a state they identified with. Thus, based on this approach in nationalism, the Byng affair represented, for a defined group of individuals, a nationalistic crisis.

Yet the ministry targeted the masses in its initial push to scapegoat Byng. Did the ministry intend for the lower echelon of society to become citizens of the nation? If so, in whole or in part? And if in part, which segment: those that lost work as the result of Minorca’s loss? Or did the mob, on its own accord, intend to become zoon politikons, citizens capable of affecting the state, and thereby claim for itself membership into the British nation?

In either case, anti-ministerial propaganda claimed that among the abuses of the ministry lay its insistence “to excite a people.” That in doing so the “junto of such as are destitute of all manly virtues” for the “leaders are found to invert Themistocles’s art,”

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241 Machiavelli, 3.

242 Hale, 222, 244.
thereby effecting “to reduce a great and mighty people to the very brink of ruin.”243 The fear of the mob became a central issue in Byng’s arrest and trial. Yet, anxieties over the role of the mob ran in reverse as well. When Parliament banned exports from Ireland to the French Caribbean, some Irishmen wondered “if this injury have been done them, in order to gratify the prejudices of our common people…by the indignity with which they treated the effigies of Byng.”244 In a letter to the Westminster Journal, September 4, 1756, came the implication that the targeting of the mobs by the ministry occasioned nothing more than contrivances to escape the blame over Minorca’s loss. “Byng I say, may be a Tool, for there are Tools in a State as well as in a Workman’s Shop, and every one of these have their particular Uses…”245 Byng, in his last letter to William Pitt, heartily promoted this perspective, that “the People have been tutored to demand,” a sentence that would result in his death.246

In attempting to answer the question why the masses were invited to participate in the Byng affair, what becomes evidently irrefutable is the fact that the ministry did target the masses, and thereby brought them into a consideration of the political, economic, and international ramifications over the loss of Minorca. Within the immediacy of funding the initial anti-Byng effigy burnings and hanging day celebrations, lay an unstated and indirect invitation to the mobs to assert themselves and thereby affect national politics over Minorca’s loss. Perhaps the ministry sought a public ally into their

243 A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain, 4-5. Themistocles (524-459 BC), an Athenian, rose to power as a populist gaining the bulk of his support from the lower classes.

244 Observations on the Embargo, 4-5.

245 A Collection of Several Pamphlets Very Little Known, 35.

246 An Exact Copy of a Remarkable Letter From Admiral Byng, 20.
excoriation of the admiral, to deflect what would be for certain a demanding and angry merchant class. In either case, for the year-long trial leading up to Admiral Byng’s execution, the masses, either by accident (their own civic activism) or by design (ministerial payola), appeared as citizens of the nation, political animals asked to affect the meaning and direction of the state, and ultimately John Byng’s life.

That nationalism is sensitive to time and space, era and geography, unfortunately needs stating. The modernist’s definition of nationalism fails simply because of its truncated view, failing to allow the possibility of history as a process. If, as Greenfeld suggests, the term “nation” is protean, then so too is nationalism.247 I would argue that nationalism’s many evolutions bear at least three distinct forms, religious-based nationalism, political/economic-based nationalism, and ethnic-based nationalism. Only the latter of these three meet the modernist’s interpretations of nationalism. Any particular state, in any period of its history, may or may not employ all of these forms of nationalism. For example, world-system historians such as Immanuel Wallerstein would be apt to point out that in the mid-eighteenth century, the further east one traveled in Europe, the likelihood of regional aristocracies willing to negotiate and/or power share with the rising merchant classes diminishes.248 In England’s case, after a stretch of religious nationalism, the state embraced its merchants, bankers, and financiers in the evolution of the nation-state. The nobility and the merchant class thereby asserted a new style of political and economic nationalism. Coming on the heels of nearly two centuries

247 Greenfeld, 1-9.

of religious nationalism, a messianic air to nation building wove into the fabric of the
new economic and political paradigm. Religion, wealth, and war became the new
nationalism of an English nation committed to creating a vast and global empire sung to
the tune of “Rule Britannia.” As Hobsbawm asserts, you know it’s a nation when the
people associate themselves to its storied past, fill themselves with praise and practice of
the vernacular, possess a “long-established cultural elite,” and then promote a “propensity
for conquest.”

We find then, especially after the Glorious Revolution, an economic and political nationalism grounded in the supremacy of British law. Theoretical protections of
the ancient constitution, to a some degree, relieved the external and internal pangs
associated with the building of empire. Admiral John Byng became caught up between
the ideal of empire and the reality of implementing British law within it. The execution of
an admiral for not doing his utmost reflected the inability of British law to keep up with
the vestiges of a growing, remote, and ever abstract British empire. After Pitt failed in
obtaining a pardon for Byng from George II, the admiral wrote Pitt…

According to the modern Interpretation of our Law, whoever shall be lucky
enough to escape the Broadsides of the Enemy, must be exposed to a still
more dangerous Artillery…Since mere Accusation, if but prudently founded
on the 12th Article of War, is sufficient to ensure Execution.

The technicality of the language of the 12th Article, indeed, was all that was necessary to
condemn Byng to death by firing squad: a pertinent reminder that the largesse of the

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249 Hobsbawm, 37-38.

250 “Notwithstanding the widespread belief that Byng was to some degree the victim of
political artifice, there was a strong demand that the admiral should pay…and a corresponding fear that his
rank and influence might shield him from justice and undermine the respect for rule of law.” Rogers, 63.

251 An Exact Copy of a Remarkable Letter from Admiral Byng, 2.
British empire taxed the legalese of British law. A pamphlet written by “An Old Sea Officer” held on its title page a Latin phrase, “Summum jus, summa injuria,” or “The rigor of the law is the height of oppression.” In defending Byng the author argued:

I remember, that Court-Martials in my younger Days were held to be Courts of Honour and Conscience; and, by these rules only, was the Conduct of our Commanders to be tried…. If the Party appeared innocent in point of Fact, they never dreamt of pronouncing him guilty in Point of Law.252

Law, once perceived as a tool to defend abstracts such as “honor” and “conscience,” morphed during the era of empire building to become a tool to levy accusations, and therefore a tool for nationalists. For a country that prided itself upon the infallibility of law, Byng’s trial and execution struck at the heart of national identity, over the growing concerns of Britishness and empire, and how Britons, civically, go about the business of protecting it.

Thus, Byng’s execution lay within the bounds of British nationalism, and British experiences which could not possibly have occurred in any other nation-state within Europe, or anywhere else in the world for that matter. The forms of nationalisms that England experienced were wholly unique. Therefore, it makes no sense to define nationalism according to the dictates of the English/British experience, and then attempt to fit the rest of the world within that definition. It makes no more sense that deriving a definition of nationalism based on Chinese history and the forcing the history of Peru into this definition.

Britain uniquely transferred their religious nationalism into a new form of civic citizenry when the new nationalistic paradigm centered on politics and economics.

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252 A Candid Examination of the Resolution and Sentence of the Court-Martial on the Trial of Admiral Byng; as Founded on the Principles of Law, Evidence, and Discipline (London: 1757), 2.
This shift is reflected in the rise of “Societies” throughout the empire. Societies became part of the history that defined nationalism as a partial yet proscriptive process. For example, just as the Seven Years’ War approached, the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (SEAMC) incorporated in London. 253 By the middle of the war, and across the Tory/Whig dichotomy, major political names appeared on the society membership list; William Pitt, The Duke of Newcastle, Henry Legge, Lord Anson, Charles Pratt, Lord Holderness, Charles Townshend, the Earls of Chesterfield, Lichfield, and Hartcourt and numerous other politicos and Court attendees. Charging dues, and granting funds in national pursuits, SEAMC actively pursued improvements to their country along six broad categories; agriculture, chemistry, colonies and trade, manufacture, mechanics, and the polite arts. 254 SEAMC merely followed previous examples of numerous societies dedicated to the betterment of the British nation such as the aforementioned Society for Reformation of Manners (1697), or the Dublin Society (1731), or the Royal Society (1660), or the Society of Antiquarians (1751), and so on. As the eighteenth century bore on, more and more societies opened. Each society, in its own way, sought to fund or research specific projects related to the betterment of Britain. Societies often operated in concert with the government, gathering or analyzing information to make it useful for the state. 255 The growth of Societies and the attendance


254 Allan, 434-36.

255 This explosion in collected information and the attempt to make numbers turn into ‘useful knowledge’ meant that “at bottom the emphasis on useful knowledge constituted a change in perception, the growth of a new vision of state and society,…. Mathematics and arithmetic were seen not merely as discrete forms of intellectual endeavor but also as an exemplary mode of reasoning applicable to the
of them by aristocrats and bourgeoisie signaled a transition, a catalyst so to speak, for the
continuance of civic engagement whereby “nation” prospered over title and self-interest.
Societies became part of the proscriptive endeavor at nation building and were well
entrenched as the era of reformation in the early part of the nineteenth century
approached.

Nationalist movements, however, need not always be top-down, state-driven,
or sponsored by the nobles. Occasionally, as the ample example of British nationalism in
the middle part of the eighteenth century proved, the middle ranks of society rooted their
values, supplanted their national identity issues into a forceful historic presence. For John
Brown, the danger to Britain in 1757 was not from France, but from England. The nation
fell under the assault of a wayward and landed gentry whose attention to peerage, over
consumptive behaviors, and cosmopolitan femininity ate away at the organic fabric of the
country.

It’s Destruction, by external Violence, will probably be no more than
temporary. It’s chief Danger must arise from such Causes, as may poison the
Root, or attack, and destroy the natural Spirit itself… that is, they must be
’some Degeneracy or Corruption of the Manners and Principles of the
People.” 256

For Brown, such degeneracy and corruption came from above. His full out
assault on Britain’s oligarchs in An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times
reflected the values of Britain’s middle class. As Cardwell put it, London to the MPs
appeared potentially “damaging because its example was frequently emulated by the rest

256 Brown, 19-20.
of the country.”  For the more radical Whigs, the ancient constitution not only belonged to everyone, but everyone persisted in owning it since time immemorial. Yet, a general feeling emerged among the merchant class that ever since the Hanoverian ascendency (at the least), political and economic power tended to concentrate in fewer and fewer hands. Suspicions arose that the possession of a political franchise meant very little, let alone the energy, money, and ability to obtain enfranchisement. Thus, writers such as John Brown represented the crowning of a new form of nationalism which targeted elites for their abuses against the nation. Several years before the Seven Years’ War, bourgeoisie writers let loose a long string of national identity issues unto which, it was charged, British nobility failed to comply. The charge that Britain’s aristocracy corrupted or outright abandoned religion reflected the revivalism of the early part of the eighteenth century, but also mirrored the previous century where Puritans claimed that “Popish elements” corrupted the state and the church. One hundred years later, religion merged with wealth which merged with empire, to possess the cultural mind set of England’s middle ranks.

The middle ranks of Britain bought into a nationalized financial system which transformed the manner in which all ranks of British society perceived the acumen of the nation-state. This middle class buy-in fundamentally transformed the way in which the

257 Cardwell, 146.

258 “That the concept of the nation coincided with the whole people was an idea disseminated, deepened, and consolidated by writers in English in the fifty years before the outbreak of the Hundred Years’ War in 1337, defining a nation in terms of its territory, its people, and its language.” Clark, 270.


260 Clark, 272.
bourgeoisie imagined their country. Imagination wrought new allegiances, shaped new thinking, and committed a new activism centered on the viability of the nation-state. In the 1750s, the charges of pusillanimity among the aristocratic political and financial leaders must be seen in this backdrop. Elites were not destroying the country, they were negating the nation, refusing the ear and civic advice of Britain’s middle class.

Some of the communication between the middle ranks and Britain’s political elites took place, at least indirectly, through coffee houses. Such establishments allowed an egalitarian leveling and weighing of political and economic events between these two sectors of British society.

In Lloyds Coffee-House shall lie a List of an hundred, thirty nine Ships taken by the Enemy in some sixty-four Days; their value is moderately computed at five hundred thousand Pounds; Distress, Ruin, Bankruptcies are the apparent Consequences. Yet in the same Coffee-House a Man shall assert, that the Fleet was never better…

Further, Lloyd’s Coffee House, like hundreds of others centered in London, or the thousands which dotted the empire, became places where “tradesmen, mechanics and apprentices” sat in the same rooms as “members of the commercial, professional and polite classes.” Coffee houses became meeting places, centers of debate, watering holes where representatives of various guilds and lobbyists, society members and manufacturers gathered, and where information flourished. Coffee houses played an eminent role in the dissemination of newspapers, periodicals, prints – even ballad singers

261 Mitchell, 117-18.
262 An Essay on Political Lying, 5.
263 Cardwell, 11.
and hawkers frequented local coffee shops in hopes of sales and picking up the latest in national rumor. Political hack writers frequented coffee shops to gauge the effectiveness of their work, or to spy on the popular opinion of their competitors. In the coffee houses a single newspaper edition “could pass through the hands of 20,000 coffee-house patrons in one day.” In the realm of nationalism, coffee houses served a mean cup of national conversation, and a way for Britain’s bourgeoisie to affect communication between themselves and the political and economic elite.

The turnpike riots of Bristol in 1749 serves as an example and reflected the attempt by Britain’s lower ranks to articulate their grievances over perceived abuses of aristocratic power. The “Jack-A-Lent” riots, as they became known, pivoted on the actions of mere “country people…rarely central figures in collective protests in eighteenth-century England.” It is in this context the ministry’s actions must be taken into account. When the ministry attempted to create before the masses an image of Admiral John Byng as a coward unwilling to engage in manly battle, there existed previous decades, if not centuries, of violent rioting throughout the country over various issues relating to the hardships of commoners’ lives. The moment the ministry made it a priority to make the masses an audience to the alleged cowardice of Byng, the fear of mobs entered into politics.

\[264\] Ibid. See also Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 231; Pope, 67; and Lincoln, 45.

\[265\] Randall, 46-54.

\[266\] On “manliness,” “reputation” and the inseparability of the two in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, see Gregg, 18.
Mob association became, then, a politically charged vice during and after the Byng affair. During the Gold Box campaign, for example, Court representatives charged those campaigners as rabble, mere members of a mob easily swayed. In the 14 May, 1757 edition of *The Contest*, a weekly supportive of Pitt, protested that the campaigners were:

*Not a cabal - Not a faction of ministerial dependants - Not a tribe of adulating parasites - But the lord mayor and court of aldermen of the city of London, and of the several great corporations of England; men, who have an extensive property, and consequently a real interest, in the welfare of the kingdom and the honour of the crown. These are the men, who have been vilified as rabble, by the paltry tools of faction, and their audacious patrons - These are the mob, whom they accuse of popular encroachments, because they have generously expressed their satisfaction in the conduct of a ministry*  

What brought Pitt to replace Newcastle, and would bring Pitt back to power again, was the imagining of William Pitt as incorruptible by members of a powerful merchant class. The king consented to Pitt in November of 1756 because of the immediacy of the war. The civic and lawful clamor over Pitt’s sacking in April the following year not only prompted Pitts recall, but exists as proof of the nationalistic prowess, not power, to which the bourgeoisie possessed during the Seven Years’ War. Power belonged to parliament and the Court, two centralized political institutions that, for the most part, remained entirely in control of Britain’s nobility. As Gellner suggests, “nationalists fulminate” against the distribution of power, and by and large, the merchant class possessed little of it. The recourse left to Britain’s bourgeoisies, therefore, engendered open and searing attacks against the political status quo. Nationalism arose because the middle class,

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267 Langford, 57-58.
268 Cardwell, 145-46.
269 Gellner, 4 and 85.
denied of power, began to define what Britain ought to be against the manner in which the political and economic elites ran the country. In such a microcosm, the Gold Box campaigners are nationalists. When unable to convince town leaders to confer keys of freedom to Pitt and Legge, campaigners often resorted to extending freedoms in other ways. Towns denying power to Pitt backers, forced guilds to bestow their freedoms. In the case of Dublin, a “Corporation of Brewers and Malters” made Pitt and Legge honorary members. Nationalism need not be “top down.”

Throughout the Gold Box campaign, however, heavy use of propaganda levied by both pro-Pitt and anti-Pitt factions found its way into newspapers and periodicals. However, in the study of media’s role in the rise of nationalism, Gellner argues that content pales in comparison to the “pervasiveness” of communication: “What is actually said matters little.” If Gellner’s observation survives scrutiny, then in order for one to claim nationalism alive and well in mid-eighteenth-century Great Britain, one must discover a pervasive media presence bent on purposeful deliveries of national issues intended to overwhelm nearly every segment of British society. I would argue such pervasiveness existed in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, that no matter how a Briton citizen conducted his or her daily life, the national issues of the day invaded and would be near impossible to escape. From the local coffee house to a friendly game of cards (see figure 2, Byng’s Turn to Ride), the loss of Minorca and the arrest of Byng dominated and

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270 Langford, 61-65.

271 “It matters precious little what has been fed into them: it is the media themselves, the pervasiveness and importance of abstract, centralized, standardized, one to many communication, which itself automatically engenders the core idea of nationalism, quite irrespective of what in particular is being put into specific messages transmitted.” Gellner, 127.
demanded the attention of the political nation. In other words, the nation did not have to go looking for the news of Admiral Byng; the pervasiveness and variety of the media carried the news to the nation.

An extreme example of the pervasiveness of this media lies in the study of mid-eighteenth-century British Courts-Martial narratives. Alryyes discloses that when one reads these proceedings, they were “not exact transcripts of the military trials, but crafted literary texts, in which a narrator/editor claims to incorporate a court-martial’s minutes, in whole or in part, surrounding it with prefatory and concluding matter.”272 In other words, nuance, tone, effect, the sale of newspapers guided the coverage of Courts-Martial proceedings and directed the actions of editors and writers in shaping the Byng discussion. Readers following the Byng Courts-Martial proceedings through the reading of newspapers, therefore, did not read word-for-word transcripts of court proceedings, but rather suffered through commentary and bellicose opinion to get to anywhere near to the heart of the matter. Media’s role in covering the Byng affair was not to record, but to influence.273

The bulk of mid-eighteenth-century British readers expected such journalistic liberties. They were part of the normal mode of interpreting events, especially since 1695, when Parliament failed to pass restrictions on the press trade. Few newspapers operated independently of either Whig or Tory or any other political influence, though a few did exist. Political literature of the early- to mid-eighteenth century blossomed alongside the rise in the popularity of novels, stock reports, currency listings, almanacs, religious

272 Alryyes, 526.

273 Alryyes, 526-31.
sermons, how to books, satire, newspapers, periodicals, and yes, Courts-Martial proceedings. Add also plays, poetry readings, broadside ballads, hawkers and criers, printmakers and engravers, and it became quickly apparent not only of the diversity of political literature, but that political factions attempted through nearly every media available to reach and convince nearly every member of British social stratum in some manner or another.274

When the Admiralty Office leaked its “edited” version of the Byng dispatch from Minorca, it did so in full cognizance that the media network of 1756 worked tremendously well. Many Whigs, after all, perceived Robert Walpole’s downfall as an aftermath of the excoriation that Walpole suffered at the hands of an unrelenting Tory press. The Newcastle administration attempted to fire the first salvo, to influence a priori all known facts in the case of Minorca’s loss. In this context, the ministry’s use of money to influence mock Byng executions and hanging days became another medium by which to compel a desired political outcome.

Undoubtedly, concepts of “nation” involve expressions of passionate ideals and engender factious deeds and statements that make appearances of national unity a mockery. But unity is not the signal flare of nation-spotting, quite the contrary. Consequently, the battle over national identities: loud, boisterous and ugly – if not outright deadly – belongs utmost in the historian’s mind when researching the tortured processes of nationalism. Political parties prior to the accession of George III, provided eighteenth-century Britons an ability to address and redress along certain political,

274 “The great diversity of artistic quality, and political knowledge and sophistication, revealed in poetry, ballads, fiction, prose satire and drama demonstrates the presence of a thriving literary-political culture, which incorporated all stations of society.” See Cardwell, 2-5.
economic and national issues. Societies and organizations provided means to improve the stature of the nation in arts, sciences, history and other endeavors. As long as the state possessed the ability to accommodate “oneself to meet new circumstances,” then such a state, based on its “ancient customs” ought to be able to steer clear of “trouble.” The nationalism of Britain reflected a clear recognition of ancient ideals long perceived as open and available to every civic-minded citizen. The unintentional national question that arose in the Byng affair, however, was whether or not “the mob” merited citizenship.

When we look at Britain and the question of nationalism, rather than asking when did Britain become a nation, asking who made up the nation makes it easier to understand the nationalistic processes at work. Thus, England experienced a religious-based nationalism post Reformation, followed by an economic and political form of nationalism following the accession of William and Mary, with concomitant success of the financial revolution. Both can better be understood by looking at who participated, following their agendas, how they implemented their ideologies, and what benefits or non-benefits befell those who participated.

In the context of the dawning of the Seven Years’ War, the promoters articulating issues of national identity became clear. By 1750, bourgeois civic engagement helped to identify the role that proper Britons were to play. Consequently, religion, honor, and a dedication to doing good for one’s country resoundingly reflected the values of this new and rising political middle class. The bourgeoisie of this period

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275 Hill, 104-15, 144. Hill points out that George III detested political parties and did as much as his Court could to weaken them. Not until after the loss of the American Colonies were political parties able to make a comeback.

276 Machiavelli, 3.
reflected, to some degree, the Puritanical conservative activism of the century prior, when one looked backward in order to move the nation-state forward.\textsuperscript{277} Elitists’ cosmopolitanism gave affront to such conservative middle class values. Peerage and patronage among political elites reinforced a perception of corruption, not only in politics, but in the values, manner, style, dress, and consumptive behaviors that seemed as foreign contagions sent by the French to infect the whole of the British nation. Thus, Minorca’s loss and Byng’s arrest tore open a nationalized debate.

\textsuperscript{277} Gregg, 17.
CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

John Byng spent his last remaining days writing letters and reflecting. At Gibraltar, John Byng’s world came crashing down. He sailed back to England with the disgrace of recall coursing through him only to discover at his arrival that orders for his arrest had been made. He petitioned to be free of imprisonment so a proper defense could be affected. Denied that he presented two sets of witnesses to testify on his behalf; one set was denied due to reasons of war and their pressing services needed elsewhere. Most of his peers abandoned him, and toward the end of his confinement, he counted on one hand the number of friends who remained by his side. In prison, Byng read every scrap of newspaper only to learn that vicious lies skewed his actions and name in the national press.

Still, cleared of cowardice but guilty of not doing his utmost, Byng wrote to Pitt with stern clarity, “Happy for me that I know my own Innocence, and am conscious, that no Part of my Country’s Misfortunes can be owing to me. I sincerely with the shedding of my Blood may contribute to the Happiness and Service of my Country…” 278

In the annals of history, executing admirals is clearly out of the norm. The story of John Byng calls to historians not only due to its oddity, but due to the vehement nature upon

278 An Exact Copy of a Remarkable Letter from Admiral Byng, 21.
which Byng was scourged and the voluminous paper trail that followed his demise. At the time of his arrest, John Byng wore other hats, he was a son of a Viscount, a peer, and a member of parliament. His execution, therefore, becomes ever more perplexing within this context. Something else beckons as an explanation, something beyond culpability, beyond politics and economics, though they all played a starring role. In the foreword of a 1756 pamphlet entitled *A Serious Apology and Modest Remarks on the Conduct of a Certain Admiral in the Mediterranean*, we have a small clue:

> ...the Folly and Injustices of determining in Matters of Moment by Hearsay, an Error too frequent amongst the English – It hath heretofore been though necessary by Power, occasionally to sacrifice a Victim to State Policy, with intent to amuse and divert the Populace from diving into Political Mysteries, and tracing Effects up to their Prime Causes.279

References to “power,” sacrificing a “victim,” “state policy,” “intent to amuse and divert the Populace,” “political mysteries:” all good clues, every one of them, but that they are “amongst the English” reveals a deeper conceit. For, after the battle, it was well acknowledged, that “The Admiral has now more dangerous Enemies to combat with, than he had then.”280

Did nationalism kill John Byng? The evidence suggests it certainly played a role. To what degree and significance I will leave for other historians to decide. But this curious form of nationalism, which Cardwell insists is “militant,” involved one curious aspect that challenges the historical perception of the term.281 The nationalism, unto

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279 *A Serious Apology and Modest Remarks*, iii-iv.

280 Johnson, *Some Further Particulars in Relation to the Case of Admiral Byng*, 36.

281 Cardwell, 79. Though the Byng riots involved expressions of violence, I do not see – nor agree – with Cardwell on the middle class expressions of anti-elitism as militant, but remaining on the whole within the bounds of the British veneration of the rule of law. Militant perhaps in rhetoric only, but...
which John Byng fell victim, educed from Britain’s middle orders: hooked on religion, wealth and war, the values most earnestly pursued by Britain’s merchant class.

This nation was justly incensed at the encroachments and cruelties of the [French] enemy and their emissaries; so that whatever sums of money should be asked, were sure to be granted, whilst the [British] people were in this mood. The Harvest was now growing ripe for Money-lenders and Jobbers; and Place men and Pensioners, like a flight of Egyptian locusts, were found without number ready for devouring the spoil.\textsuperscript{282}

There were no parades, no long lines of working class volunteers banging at recruiters’ doors demanding to fight the French, quite the contrary. Men from the lower ranks ran from impressment gangs long into the conflict. Instead, demands for a home grown militia, an issue articulated by Patriot Whigs and by the merchant middle class emblazoned prints, pamphlets, and papers throughout the country. Money for Hessians, money for Hanoverians, money for mercenary occupiers on British soil enriched the anti-elitist rhetoric with scathing indictments of the political status quo. According to the ranks of the middle class, both parliament and the Court were filled with Francophiles, unpatriotic, corrupt, effeminate, and overtly cosmopolitan men.\textsuperscript{283} Ireland’s freeholders challenged “other parts of the kingdom” to “come over to defend his majesty in Great Britain…that they would be as effectual a security against the French invasion, as either the Hessians or Hanoverians.”\textsuperscript{284} But the placemen in the Commons and the Pensioners in the House of Lords, at the Court’s beckoning, chose the more expensive and
certainly not militant in arm-banded party soldiers roaming the streets of London looking to beat up aristocrats or damage their property.

\textsuperscript{282} \textit{A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain}, 8.

\textsuperscript{283} Langford, 292-3. All throughout the Seven Years’ War, representatives of the middle ranks levied an unrelenting barrage of rhetoric filled with “anguish about unpatriotic cosmopolitanism” and “Francophilia” within Britain’s political nobility.

\textsuperscript{284} \textit{Observations on the embargo}, 5.
unpatriotic route of defending the British soil with German mercenaries. Meanwhile, untold numbers of “Money-lenders and Jobbers” descended upon London – the political and financial heart of the realm – like a “flight of Egyptian locusts…ready for devouring the spoils.”

It is within this background of perceived corruption within Britain’s aristocracy that the added insults of Braddock’s death in a hasty retreat along the Ohio, plus the loss of Oswego in the Great Lakes region magnified the calamity of Minorca’s loss in the Mediterranean. As one pamphlet explained, it was more than “universally known, that Rumors of an approaching Rupture between France and Great Britain prevailed long before this Affair was so much thought of.”

For Britain’s merchant class, the continuing defeats at sea and in the field signaled nothing more than dissolute and immoral behaviors of a wayward aristocracy, including its officer corps. Imaginations ran wild and charged the ministry, along with Byng, with selling Minorca to the French for their own personal gain. The print entitled, “Oh! How Are the Mighty Fallen?” (figure 10), is an example of such imagined rumor. A Frenchmen, bearing scourge-whips and wooden shoes, pours gold coin across the floor. A mad scramble ensues with Admiral Byng at the bottom, crushed by the weight of Henry Fox and Lord Hardwicke. In Fox’s hand is a bag labeled 3,000,000 and ribbon that states “Large fees for the Bottomless Pitt,” a reference to Fox’s capricious behavior and willingness to be bought at any price. Pitt, the incorruptible champion of London merchants, is of course, “bottomless.” Around Hardwicke’s neck is a label that reads “Pension 3,000” a reference to the Matrimony Bill

and what it cost to convince Hardwicke to support it. In Byng’s hand are two ribbons labeled “wine” and “2 Tartans,” a reference to the small capture and prizes taken by Byng’s fleet prior to the Battle of Minorca. To the far left is Newcastle, with a woman’s fish tub on his head. Both of his hands are on a sack which itself rest on top of a French treasure chest. The sack is labeled 8,000,000 a reference to the amount of pension money divvied to the political nobility each year. Next to the French treasure chest is a deflated bag labeled “M.T.” (empty), a reference to Newcastle’s many near bankruptcies juxtaposed against his extravagant lifestyle. In the background is Lord

Figure 10 - "Oh! How are the Mighty Fallen?" 1756, British Museum. 
Anson, a known gambler; he drags an E.O. table as he prepares to dive for the French gold. A spider has spun a web over a portrait of Justice, insinuating neglect. The spider says in poem form, “Sure no vast difference betwixt us lies / Since you catch Men as I catch Flies.” Byng at the bottom of the pile screams, “Oh the Devil take your lime I am limed & twigg'd too with a Pox to you,” and rather prophetically, “Murder Murder was it for this that I had the pleasure of saving the K—gs Ships.” The words, “I had the pleasure,” was a satirical reference to Byng’s flowery writing style.  

Though the ministers pinned the blame for the loss of Minorca on Admiral Byng and worked the propaganda machines to make it stick, the middle class of British society demanded an investigation. In their ranks, confusion over the admiral’s actions persisted, but there was no denying where the real problem lay. In the London Evening Post date 7 August, 1756, a writer with the pen name “Britannicus” spoke for merchant class:

…for though it will be readily admitted, that if Mr. Byng’s Instructions were right and honourable, his Conduct hath been very culpable, and that he deserves severe punishment: Yet even then it was not Mr. Byng’s Fault, that a Fleet was not sent up the Mediterranean Time enough to prevent the Invasion of Minorca; it was not Mr. Byng’s Fault that the Garrison of Fort St. Philip was not augmented before such Invasion; it was not Mr. Byng’s Fault, that so small a Fleet, as ten Ships of the Line only, were sent to relieve that Place, when it was well know, that the French Fleet was much stronger; and when there easily, and without any Hazard at Home, might have been sent double that Number…

The merchant class wanted accountability, a nation free from dissolution and effeminacy. As John Brown explained, the only leadership which the political oligarchs demonstrated
was “the general contempt of Religion…” which allowed Britain’s aristocracy to fill up their senses with “fashion” and pursue a world “deep in the Speculation of Infidelity.”

This aristocracy threw Admiral Byng to the *mobile vulgare*, i.e., “the mob,” a theme Patriot and Tory writers continually referred to. When William Pitt approached George II looking for mercy for Byng after the Courts-Martial proceedings, rioters once again took to the streets and pamphlets quickly ensued. “And I protest…when I see…those *vocal Gentry*, who begin again to multiply in the Streets, should a second Time infect the *Populace*, till nothing but the *Blood* of one or more *distinguished People* can serve to appease them.” For the Tory writers nothing seemed more base than using the mob as a tool for political ends. But for most of the merchant and middle class, long accustomed to an interface with the working poor, there existed more honor and grit in the lower ranks of British society than that of its upper tier. “An English sailor,” came one appeal, “who has Properties and Blessings invaluable to defend, will hold out to the last, and, like *Withrington*, fight upon his Stumps, for his Wife, his Children, his Country, and his King.”

The loss of Minorca, in short, struck all segments of British society. In addition to national pride, the loss of the island meant the loss of jobs for Britain’s lower orders, and loss of trading income for the country’s merchants, traders and bankers. In a way, the loss of Minorca unified or drew closer the relationship between the middle class

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288 Brown, 55.

289 *An Appeal to the Nation*, 2-3.

290 *An Appeal to the Nation, Being a Full and Fair Vindication of Sir John Mordaunt, and the other Gentlemen employed in the Conduct of the late Secret Expedition* (London: 1757), 42.
and lower ranks of British society. In coffee shops throughout the realm, not only did traders and mechanics sit at the same tables, drink the same brews, but they grumbled in unison over the sorry conduct of a war everyone knew was long in arriving. Issues of national identity blustered forth in the early defeats of the Seven Years’ War which caused all political factions to focus on the differences and the similarities between all segments of British society. John Brown’s *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*, while excoriating the aristocracy, plugged what he believed to be an organic commonality between all Britons, that of British liberty:

> This great Spirit hath produced more full and Complete Effects in our own Country, than any known Nation that ever was upon Earth. It appears, indeed, from a Concurrence of Facts too large to be produced here, that whereas it hath been ingrafted by the Arts of Policy in other Countries, it [liberty] shoots up here from its natural Climate, Stock, and Soil.291

Colley reminds us that profit and self-interest fed the roots of the peculiar form of British patriotism.292 The commercial traders, merchants and shippers certainly anticipated greater wealth and political clout due to their activities on behalf of the nation, but they also emphasized the means to obtain it; civic virtue, personal integrity, and moral fortitude, all of which were completely at odds with the elite practice of the ‘cult of peerage.’293

> It is in this context, Byng’s arrest, trial, and execution took place. Admiral John Byng represented opportunity and political immediacy to any faction that desired to spin their issues and grievances before the court of public opinion. And in the long

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291 Brown, 19-20.


293 Cardwell, 25.
British tradition of civic activism, attacks against John Byng became so common as to appear “universal.” Thus, the expunging of propaganda upon the political nation: prints, pamphlets, newspapers, ballad hawkers, anthologies, magazines, all seemingly attempted to tie issues of national identity to the crisis at hand. What emerged from this outpouring of national bloodletting was a gaping incongruence between those who practiced the cult of trade (bourgeois-driven) and those who practiced the cult of peerage and patronage (elite-driven). Perhaps in the sensing of such a division, the ministry found the justification necessary to scapegoat Byng. “Trade and manufactures must be confessed often to enrich countries,” wrote Tory writer Samuel Johnson in the March 1756 edition of the *Universal Visitor*, “and we ourselves are indebted to them for those ships by which we now command the sea, from the equators to the poles…” The loss of Oswego and the disgrace of Braddock added additional umbrage to the failure to protect Minorca. Portraying Byng as the villain, therefore, offered a better alternative than facing down the civically active merchant and trading class. Historians still struggle to find reason in the collapse of the Newcastle administration. The Prime Minister tendered his resignation October, 26, 1756. There were no calls for an election, and he still held a sizable majority in both houses of Parliament. Some historians postulate that Newcastle fell because of his ineptitude in the game of peerage and patronage.

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294 Cardwell, 54.


However, one does not become Prime Minister through sophomoric politics. The rancor over Minorca’s loss, the disaffection over Minorca’s loss, the unrelenting press which raised and challenged the ministry and the Court over issues of national identity, the economic hardships caused by Minorca’s loss, all seemingly coordinated with a messianic, religious air, brought down Newcastle. An organized middle class annunciated their arguments loudly and showed a clear unhappiness with aristocratic power over national issues such as mercenaries verses militias, blue water defense verses continental engagements, and a ministry continuously insistent on choosing officers that showed “an absolute ignorance of every qualification…”297 In Admiral Byng, the nation had a prisoner; General Braddock, at least, had the good sense to die in combat.

In exploring the role of nationalism in the execution of Admiral John Byng, David Bell’s, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, explains that nationalism was “a political program which has at its goal not merely to praise, defend, or strengthen a nation, but to actively construct one.”298 But, nation-construction never rests. England forged and hammered out issues of national identity when Puritans murdered a king. England forged and hammered out issues of national identity defining republican values as predominate and preferable to monarchical tyranny in the accession of William III. England forged and hammered out issues of national identity during the Act of Union in 1707, defining roles, realm, and empire – transforming their flag and morphing into a new nation in the process. The nobility in

297 References comparing Admiral John Byng to General Edward Braddock abounded in the literature over Minorca’s loss: *A Modest Address to the Commons of Great Britain*, 9; and Shebbeare, *An Answer to a Pamphlet*, 32.

298 Bell, 3.
Great Britain did not practice nationalism: they feared it. England had already cycled through several constructions of its nation, and the British nobility knew and understood those passions.\textsuperscript{299} The answer to whether or not nationalism played a role in the execution of John Byng, however, is best sought in the conversation William Pitt held with George II in seeking a pardon for the convicted admiral. Pitt the Patriot, the torch bearer of the bourgeoning middle class, explained to the King that on the matter of Admiral John Byng, the House of Commons seemed inclined to mercy if it so pleased him. The King turned to Pitt and said, “Sir, you have taught me to look for the sense of my people in other places than the House of Commons.”\textsuperscript{300}

Thomas Tuner, the simple mercer from Sussex, saw unfairness in the sentence delivered to the admiral. Turner considered the admiral’s death an appeasement made by the state to calm “a clamorous and enraged populace,”\textsuperscript{301} as if some sort of blood sacrifice. In a way, Turner reflected closely the Tory/Patriot Whig alliance, for the admiral represented more than alleged military incompetence. Wrapped up in the effigy burnings of Byng lay empire, economics, and politics. The press excoriated Byng, but it also tasked the ministry and Court to supply inquiries and explanations for how Minorca came to be occupied by the French.

Byng’s attempt, with a few Tories and Patriots defending him, to lift the ponderous heavyweight attached to the imaginative powers of those that believed his accusers ultimately failed. Samuel Johnson hoped prior to Byng’s trial that:

\textsuperscript{300} Osborn, 113.
\textsuperscript{301} Vaisey, 92-3.
When the proper Time comes, every Man that is open to Conviction, will be convinced, that he [Byng] acted in all Respects suitably to the great Trust repos’d in him; that without impairing the Honour, he never once lost Sight of the real Interest of his Country…”

But during the Byng affair, negative press in all forms of media played heavily upon its readers imaginations. Stories of political favoritism and corruption, as well as economic collusions and mistrust heightened tensions when Minorca fell into French hands. The moral angst over the nation’s wayward oligarchs, to which the middle orders demanded civic reform throughout the decade of the 1750s, if not the preceding century, worked against John Byng: simply put, he was one of them. The concomitant turmoil over Minorca’s capture by the French angered nearly every segment of British society. Once more, the British nation found its “Honour” impaired. Within the context of a string of losses against an odious French enemy elsewhere in Britain’s vast and growing empire, the loss of Minorca set in motion a perniciously long summer where politics and culture collided. The “Interest” of the “Country” emerged assailable, whereby various political factions and social segments within the country vehemently voiced their concerns, acted upon their interests, and in doing so, articulated definitions of national identity. The execution of Admiral John Byng cannot be relegated to ministerial politics alone.

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302 Johnson, Johnson, *Some Further Particulars in Relation to the Case of Admiral Byng*, 36
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