

Paul Downes



HOBBS, SOVEREIGNTY, AND EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE

Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture

Hobbes, Sovereignty, and Early American Literature pursues the question of democratic sovereignty as it was anticipated, theorized, and resisted in the American colonies and in the early United States. It proposes that orthodox American liberal accounts of political community need to be supplemented and challenged by the deeply controversial theory of sovereignty that was articulated in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651). This book offers a radical reevaluation of Hobbes's political theory and demonstrates how a renewed attention to key Hobbesian ideas might inform inventive rereadings of major American literary, religious, and political texts. Ranging from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritan attempts to theorize God's sovereignty to revolutionary and founding-era debates over popular sovereignty, this book argues that democratic aspiration still has much to learn from Hobbes's *Leviathan* and from the powerful liberal resistance it has repeatedly provoked.

Paul Downes is Associate Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Democracy, Revolution, and Monarchism in Early American Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), which was a cowinner of the MLA Prize for a First Book. He has also written a number of essays on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American fiction. His work explores the concepts of democracy and sovereignty as they have been instituted and imagined in the early United States and in the discourse of transnational humanitarian intervention

Jacket photograph: John Trumball, *Declaration of Independence*, 1819.

Jacket design: Newgen Knowledge Works Pvt Ltd

Printed in the United States of America

CAMBRIDGE
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ISBN 978-1-107-08529-9



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Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107085299

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First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Downes, Paul.

Hobbes, sovereignty, and early American literature / Paul Downes.
pages cm. – (Cambridge studies in American literature and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-08529-9 (hardback)

1. American literature – Colonial period, ca. 1600–1775 – History and criticism.
2. American literature – Revolutionary period, 1775–1783 – History and criticism.
3. Sovereignty in literature. 4. Hobbes, Thomas, 1588–1679 – Influence.
5. Hobbes, Thomas, 1588–1679. *Leviathan*. 6. Politics and literature – United States – History – 18th century. 7. United States – Intellectual life – 18th century. I. Title.

PS186.D69 2015

810.9'358–dc23 2014048686

ISBN 978-1-107-08529-9 Hardback

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The inequality that now is, has bin introduced by the Lawes civill. I know that Aristotle in the first book of his Politiques, for a foundation of his doctrine, maketh men by Nature, some more worthy to Command, meaning the wiser sort (such as he thought himself to be for his Philosophy;) others to Serve, (meaning those that had strong bodies, but were not Philosophers as he;) as if Master and Servant were not introduced by consent of men, but by difference of Wit: which is not only against reason; but also against experience.

— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, [chapter 15] 1651

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ray Ryan and all the editorial staff at Cambridge, without whose patience and professionalism this project would not have reached any kind of conclusion. I am also very grateful for the extraordinarily generous and insightful comments offered by the readers of the initial manuscript, Mitchell Breitwieser and Eric Slauter. Alexandra Howard provided impeccable research assistance.

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