

History 135J: The Age of Hamilton and Jefferson
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By submitting this essay, I attest that it is my own work, completed in accordance with University regulations.—Thomas Hopson

Thomas Clap, Ezra Stiles, and Yale's First Revolution

by Thomas Hopson

It had been a rough ten years for Thomas Clap. During his tenure as President of Yale College (1745-1766), disgruntled students had set off homemade bombs in the college yard, poisoned the food at commons, and threatened to “skin old Tom Clap’s hide.”¹ This pattern of disobedience came to a head in 1765, when a mob of students attacked Clap’s home on the eve of commencement. Having decided that the President deserved a “blessing,” the group threw two volleys of stones at the house’s windows, smashing them and injuring Clap with a shard of broken glass.² The next year would deal an even harsher blow. By then, out of either fear or protest, all of Yale’s tutors had abandoned the college; with the exception of Naphtali Daggett, Professor of Divinity, Clap was alone.³ As the situation worsened, even the Presidents’ “greatest confidants” began to push for his resignation.⁴ Accordingly, facing student opposition and lacking allies in the administration, Clap left Yale College in July 1766.⁵

At first glance, it is tempting to draw connections between the treatment of Thomas Clap and those of James Ingersoll and Thomas Fitch, prominent Connecticut politicians who made the

¹ “Investigation of ye alleged poisoning of college students in Commons,” 1764, in Thomas Clap, President of Yale College, Records (RU 130), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University; Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 181.

² Louis Leonard Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist: President Thomas Clap of Yale College* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 255.

³ Dana wrote to Stiles, “Yale-College was perhaps never in so confused a state as at present.” James Dana to Ezra Stiles, June, 17, 1766, in Ezra Stiles Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁴ Ibid.; Robert Sandeman to Nathaniel Barrell, July 18, 1766, in *Extracts from the Itineraries and other miscellanies of Ezra Stiles*, ed. Franklin Dexter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), 589.

⁵ *Connecticut Courant*, July 21, 1766.

grave mistake of defending the Stamp Act of 1765. After all, between 1764 and 1766, all three men were forced out of office under threats of violence and due to crumbling political support. And yet, because Clap never commented on the Stamp Act, his resignation is something of a puzzle.⁶ Although it coincided with a period of great unrest in Connecticut, the President himself remained aloof from the time's most inflammatory political debate. As such, and also because the President faced serious opposition as early as 1753, an account of his fall must draw on a larger narrative of colonial history.⁷

This paper attempts such a task, asking why and for what reasons Clap encountered popular opposition between 1753 and 1766. In doing so, it will trace the outlines of a political transformation both within the college and in Connecticut as a whole. It will also look at Clap in a comparative context, measuring the divergence in his principles from those of Ezra Stiles, his former pupil and future successor to the Presidency. The result of this project will be an account of political reinvention tracing how Yale transformed from a bastion of traditionalism in the 1740s to a "seminary of democracy" during the Revolutionary War.⁸

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⁶ Regarding Clap and the Stamp Act, David Robson writes, "if the issue was not religious and did not threaten his design for Yale, he was indifferent to it." David Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 48.

⁷ For an overview of Yale in the colonial period, see Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 53-73. For general commentary on Connecticut's reaction to the Stamp Act, see Richard Buel, *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), 11-20; David Alan Richards, "New Haven and the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765-1766," *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 46 (October 1971): 67-85. For Yale's patriot leanings during the American Revolution, see Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 260-261. For protest movements at other colonial colleges, see John Roche, *The Colonial Colleges in the War for American Independence* (Millwood: Associated Faculty Press, 1986), 17-41. For Connecticut's mobilization for the Revolutionary War, see Oscar Zeichner, *Connecticut's Years of Controversy, 1750-1766* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 1949).

⁸ Thomas Gage, commander-in-chief of British forces in North America, called Yale a "seminary of democracy" and its graduates "pretended patriots." Roche, *The Colonial Colleges*, 12.

Historians have offered two main explanations for Clap's fall. One theory, best expressed by Louis Leonard Tucker, blames the President's single-minded pursuit of order and religious orthodoxy. While Clap struggled to preserve these virtues through a strict, disciplinarian regime, his students resented and rebelled against his authority. This contest of wills snowballed, such that Clap responded to student unrest with new regulations, which in turn produced greater unrest. Clap is thus something of a paradox; his love for and insistence on order ultimately undermined his own position.⁹

There is certainly some truth to this narrative. Clap did believe in the deterrent power of punishment, a philosophy he expressed in *Some observations relating to the Government of the College*.¹⁰ He also issued some excessive punishments, once expelling a student for gambling.¹¹ However, an exclusive focus on his disciplinarian tendencies neglects the critical language and accusations of his opponents. When a group of students petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly for redress against the President, they discussed not only the severity of the punishments they received, but also the authoritarian process through which Clap governed the college. Using explicitly political language, they argued that the President had violated "the natural rights of Englishmen," a claim anticipated and first developed by polemicists Thomas Darling and Benjamin Gale in the previous decade.¹² In short, then, the ire towards the President went beyond discipline or religion; it also addressed questions of politics.

⁹ David Alan Richards makes a similar argument to Tucker. Richards, "New Haven and the Stamp Act Crisis of 1765-1766," 67-85.

¹⁰ Thomas Clap, *Some observations relating to the Government of the College*, 1764, in Thomas Clap, President of Yale College, Records.

¹¹ Thomas Clap to Joseph Bellamy, August 5, 1763, in Yale University Corporation Records (RU 164), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹² *Memorial to the General Assembly at Hartford*, March 1763, in Yale University Corporation Records.

The other group of historians, who draw a tight connection between Clap's resignation and the Stamp Act, also overstate their case.¹³ The President never wrote on the Stamp Act, but one could make an even stronger claim: to the best of historians' knowledge, no contemporary author *accused* him of supporting it. For someone with a host of enemies—especially those who could have gained by connecting Clap to an unpopular position—this is telling.

These historians' focus on the Stamp Act also poses problems of chronology. Clap had been the subject of popular protest since the mid 1750s, and in 1762 over half the student body went on "strike" in opposition to his policies.¹⁴ Of course, it may be the case that fervor towards the Stamp Act pushed students to a new level of aggression or violence in 1765. However, such an argument still requires an explanation of why the students were aggrieved in the first place.¹⁵

This paper contends that Clap was not only a disciplinarian, but fundamentally illiberal. Although he never supported the Stamp Act, his political and religious positions—particularly his opposition to religious toleration, condemnation of "visitation" policies, and denial of students' "right to appeal"—cast him in opposition to the emerging patriot, or Whiggish, sympathies in the colony. Clap's many enemies recognized and took offense at this philosophy, justifying their formal opposition and popular protests in political language. As such, one can understand the fall of Thomas Clap as Connecticut's rejection of illiberalism.

To make that case, it is necessary to reconstruct the major debates and controversies of Clap's tenure, focusing not only on the President's arguments, but also on those of his

¹³ Both Roche and Grasso connect the opposition to Clap with colonial resentment over the Stamp Act. See Roche, *The Colonial Colleges*, 20; Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy*, 182.

¹⁴ Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 253.

¹⁵ Several historians who have written on Clap offer no explanation for his disfavor. This group is generally interested in the President for other reasons, such as his rewriting of the Yale Charter or revision of the Yale curriculum. See Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1783), 510; Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 68-77; Robson, *Educating Republicans*, 83.

antagonists. Through reviewing the writings of Thomas Darling, Benjamin Gale, and the aggrieved Yale students, it is clear that Clap was *perceived* as a bastion of “arbitrary power,” a would-be tyrant intent on restricting the “rights of Englishmen.” Regardless of its accuracy, this perception was enough to justify the students’ conduct and force Clap’s resignation.

In rejecting Clap’s illiberalism, the Yale Corporation did advance an alternative: future President of Yale Ezra Stiles. By offering the Presidency to Stiles in 1766, the group signaled a willingness to accept the increasingly mainstream principles of religious toleration and political liberalism.¹⁶ This shift in the Corporation parallels a similar development in the philosophy of Stiles himself. Although a well-known patriot by 1764, Stiles began his academic career as the President’s greatest disciple, accepting his mentor’s Old Light convictions and opposition to the Great Awakening. That Stiles revised his worldview so quickly after leaving Yale and even distanced himself from his “great Maecenas” demonstrates the significant ideological shifts in Connecticut in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷ For this reason, looking at Clap and Stiles in a comparative context—with a particular focus on how Stiles drifted away from his former mentor—can illuminate the character and the significance of Yale’s first revolution.

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To understand the tenure of Thomas Clap, one must begin with a discussion of the Great Awakening. It was in this period of great separatism within the Church that Clap instituted his first policies of religious suppression, signaling a commitment to “orthodoxy” that he maintained until his resignation.

¹⁶ For personal reasons, Stiles did not accept the office in 1766. He ultimately became President in 1777.

¹⁷ Stiles used this term of endearment in several letters after Clap passed away. Ezra Stiles to Chauncey Whittelsey, January 29, 1767, in Ezra Stiles Papers; Ezra Stiles to James Parker, January 20, 1767, in Ezra Stiles Papers.

The Great Awakening first came to New Haven through the preaching of George Whitefield in September 1740.¹⁸ Over the following months, Connecticut's Congregationalists split into two camps; whereas the Old Lights believed that grace could be imparted through the use of means, the New Lights maintained that appealing to means for salvation ran contrary to true submission before God.¹⁹ This dispute over theology, however, paled in comparison to the cultural and political implications of the Awakening. The great effect of the revival, as Tucker describes it, was "a growing emotionalism in religious practice." Many sermons were now given by itinerant preachers who, unlike Clap, had little academic training. Moreover, these itinerants were known to whip their audiences into disorder, both by appealing to peoples' emotions and through condemning the rigid structures of the Old Light establishment.²⁰

As the newly rector of Yale College, Clap took the lead in opposing the New Lights.²¹ The opposition, of course, manifested mostly as censorship. When his students began to embrace the new emotionalism, Clap barred all itinerant preachers from the campus.²² When agitated students began to provoke their tutors, he passed a regulation to prohibit calling tutors "hypocrites, carnal,

¹⁸ Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 114.

¹⁹ This is, of course, a great simplification of a dense theological debate, the details of which are omitted because they bear little import on the subject at hand. For a more detailed description of the Awakening in New Haven, see, Francis Parsons, "Ezra Stiles of Yale," *The New England Quarterly*, 9, (Jun., 1936), 303.

²⁰ For an overview of the theological innovations of the Awakening, see C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 8-34. For the history of separatism in New Haven churches, see Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 86-89. For the style of itinerant preachers, see Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut, *The Great Awakening and Other Revivals in the Religious Life of Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 10-23; Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 117-118.

²¹ In 1740, the rectorship was the highest office at Yale College. The office of President was not established until 1745.

²² J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (United States: Rowman & Little, 2002), 68.

or unconverted men.”²³ When the situation went out of control in 1742, he suspended classes and sent his students home.²⁴

During this period, the rector had the full support of Connecticut’s General Assembly. In addition to sanctioning Clap’s conduct, the legislature acted on its own to shut down a New Light school in New London.²⁵ It also passed a document called the “Guilford Resolves,” which placed significant limitations on where and when non-establishment preachers could find a pulpit. Clap likely played a major role in drafting that legislation.²⁶

By all measures, the rector could claim this period as a political victory. Although his measures failed to fully restrain the New Light movement, he emerged from the conflict with greater influence than ever before. Far from angering the college’s trustees or Connecticut’s assembly, Clap garnered their favor and used it to overhaul the very structure of the college. The greatest of these reforms was the Charter of 1745, which freed Yale’s administration from the control of the General Assembly. By creating an “Incorporate Society” which could sustain itself regardless of legislative support, Clap paved the way for the centralization of power in his own person; under the new office of the Presidency, he would exercise near exclusive control over Yale’s affairs.²⁷

That said, the Great Awakening was Clap’s only opportunity to ‘get away’ with the promotion of orthodoxy at all costs. Although the techniques he employed later in his career would resemble those of the early 1740s, Clap would never hold the same support within the

²³ As the tutors were embodiments of the Old Light ethos, this likely dampened the discussion of New Light philosophy; Hoeverler, *Creating the American Mind*, 69

²⁴ *Boston Evening Post*, Apr. 26, 1742, in Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 134.

²⁵ Zeichner, *Connecticut’s Years of Controversy*, 24.

²⁶ Robson, *Educating Republicans*, 20; Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 130.

²⁷ The Charter is printed in Clap’s *Annals of Yale-College* and described in Tucker’s work. Thomas Clap, *Annals or History of Yale College* (New Haven: B. Mecom, 1766), 44-52; Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 73-74. One of the students’ main grievances during Clap’s Presidency was his near absolute authority. *Memorial to the General Assembly at Hartford*, March 10, 1763.

Assembly or in the colony at large. The next time students pushed back against his authority, they would have powerful allies.

The President's first crisis occurred in October 1753, when he attempted to centralize all students' worship and religious instruction within the college walls. Previously, although Yale was officially a Congregationalist institution, several of its students attended Sunday services at Anglican churches in West Haven. This troubled Clap, who shared what one historian called the "traditional Puritan abhorrence of the Church of England."²⁸ Alarmed by a growing population of Anglicans in the colony, he therefore acted to "preserve and secure the Religion of the College upon its original Foundation and Constitution."²⁹ Under the new rule, all students were required to attend services in the college dining hall and study under the supervision of the Professor of Divinity. As the College had not yet found a suitable Professor, Clap himself would fill the role in the interim.³⁰

Faced with considerable outcry in response to this policy, Clap wrote two pamphlets to defend his actions. The first, called the *Religious constitution of colleges* (1754), grounded the policy in a narrative of Yale's history and purpose. Drawing on precedents from Oxford and Cambridge, it argued, "Colleges, are *Religious Societies*, of a Superior Nature to all others... And therefore *all their Religious Instructions, Worship, and Ordinances, are carried on, within their own Jurisdiction, by their own Officers, and under their own Regulation.*"³¹ This was especially true in Yale's case. Clap contended that, under the common law standard, the Founder of a college—and also the entity with primary jurisdiction over its conduct—is he who makes the

²⁸ Louis Leonard Tucker, "The Church of England and Religious Liberty at Pre-Revolutionary Yale," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 17, (Jul., 1960), 320.

²⁹ Clap's describes his actions in *Annals or History of Yale College* (1766), 61.

³⁰ Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 106; Tucker, "The Church of England," 321.

³¹ Thomas Clap, *Religious constitution of colleges: especially of Yale-college in New-Haven, in the colony of Connecticut* (New-London: n.p., 1754), 4.

first donation for its support.³² Accordingly, the Founders of Yale were the ten Congregationalist ministers who wanted to “*Educate Persons, for the Ministry of these Churches, commonly called Presbyterian, or Congregational, according to their own Doctrine.*”³³ Clap thus concluded that, because Yale is a religious society committed from its founding to the preservation of “orthodoxy,” the edict of 1753 was not only permissible, but obligatory.

The pamphlet also engaged with the idea of religious toleration. Noting the objection that “*Liberty of Conscience, ought, to be allowed to all,*” Clap argued that Yale respected said liberty in the fullest sense. He wrote, “Liberty of Conscience [is] in him, who is allow’d, to take the Benefit” of enrolling in the college, referring to the fact that, even after the edict of 1753, the College would accept non-Congregationalists. However, once a student arrived on campus, Clap argued that he was bound to accept the rules of the institution; the privilege of conscience “extends no further, than to determine whether he will accept it upon those Conditions.”³⁴ Through this logic, the pamphlet rejects the Lockean liberal idea of religious toleration.

If the *Religious constitution of colleges* was a defense of Clap’s new policy, the *Brief history and vindication* (1755) went on the offensive against his antagonists. After reprinting the college’s charter to reinforce the founding argument, the pamphlet describes a group of persons that denied the “pure Doctrines of the Gospel” and “endeavored to introduce a *new Scheme of Religion.*”³⁵ Drawing from some of these authors, Clap summarized the principles of the “new scheme of divinity” as follows: “God has Authority over his Creatures as Creator, but only as Benefactor... [and] The only Criterion of Duty to God is *Self-Interest.*”³⁶ The President

³² Ibid.,” 2.

³³ Ibid.,” 7-8.

³⁴ Ibid., 2., 15.

³⁵ Thomas Clap, *Brief history and vindication of the doctrines received and established in the churches of New England* (New Haven: n.p., 1755), 18.

³⁶ The new divinity was distinct from the New Light movement. Ibid., 19.

proceeded to argue that such a philosophy does not deserve toleration: “tho’ every Man has a Right to examine and judge for himself, according to Truth; yet no Man has a Right, in the Sight of God, to judge wrong.”³⁷ Having argued that ‘error has no rights,’ Clap left little room for any religious toleration in his philosophy; orthodoxy could be promoted despite the dissenters’ misguided objections.

To respond to these arguments, Thomas Darling wrote a highly publicized and 130-page long pamphlet, *Some Remarks on Mr. President Clap’s history and vindication of the doctrines* (1756). In addition to reviewing the history of the college and the question of religious toleration, Darling also used political language, accusing the President of aspiring to the role of “Chief Dictator.” In this sense, *Some Remarks* was the first document to accuse Clap of political illiberality.

Darling’s work begins with an alternative history of the New England churches, one in which men “gloried in their religious liberty.”³⁸ This history was notable for criticizing the legitimacy of Yale’s original charters—a rhetorical move that the President, supremely loyal to the college, never could have made.³⁹ The majority of his pamphlet, however, was devoted to the subject of toleration. In that regard, Darling compared the Corporation’s practice of testing ministers’ orthodoxy to the “Roman Clergy [telling] the People that the Resolves of their Church are infallible.”⁴⁰ In addition to calling Clap a crypto-Catholic, the pamphlet accuses him of misrepresenting the new divinity, constructing a straw man “to render a Number of Men odious

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Thomas Darling, *Some remarks on Mr. President Clap’s history and vindication of the doctrines of the New-England churches* (New Haven: J. Parker and Company, 1757), 4.

³⁹ In particular, he argued that the ‘Corporation [undervalued] and [cast] Contempt upon the sacred Scriptures; by giving the Catechism and Confession the Preference as a Rule of Faith.’ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

to the rest of Mankind; and this done under a Clock of Orthodoxy.”⁴¹ On its most extreme note, it even alleges that Clap intended to “purge both Church and State” of the heretics.⁴²

It is with this allusion to purging that Darling transitions to a language of politics, articulating Whig principles in response to what could be called a Tory legalism. Regarding the authority of the Corporation to test its ministers, he wrote, “it is not to be feared that Others may learn from them to prevaricate in their Subscriptions to Civil Tests of Loyalty.” The concern was that these tests of loyalty rested on the same principle as Clap’s rejection of religious toleration; Clap’s vision of orthodoxy posed a threat to free government and free political discourse.⁴³ Darling also accuses Clap of corrupting personal ambitions. One allegation is that the President misrepresented the New Divinity in order to “acquire more Power, Authority, Influence and Riches in the Country.” The pamphlet also infers, from the President’s punctuality and “officious” demeanor at town meetings, that he “affects to be Chief Dictator there.”⁴⁴ Although these more personal attacks may have been misguided, they likely still affected the popular perception of Clap’s Presidency.

One notable element of Darling’s argument is that it treats religious and political concerns as fundamentally intertwined; the “right to private judgment” applied to both religious and political decision-making.⁴⁵ This assumption was fairly common in Connecticut’s politics; in a letter to Ezra Stiles in 1776, John Hubbard wrote, “A Man’s religious principles are made the Test or shall I rather say badge of his political Creed.”⁴⁶ Historians of the period also agree that this was

⁴¹ Ibid., 38.

⁴² Ibid., 40.

⁴³ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 42-43.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁶ John Hubbard to Ezra Stiles, January 2, 1776, in *Extracts from the Itineraries of Ezra Stiles*, 510. There is a similar passage in a pamphlet by Benjamin Gale. “All our liberties and privileges, both civil and sacred, are in; and indeed these are so inseparably connected, and mutually so dependent on each other,

a common association.⁴⁷ Accordingly, it is reasonable to believe that, even beyond Darling's pamphlet, people in Connecticut might have associated Clap's insistence on orthodoxy with political tyranny.

In the end, Clap revoked the rule a mere sixth months after its implementation. That is not to say, however, that the President accepted his critics' arguments; he would continue a defense of the rule for several years and revive the discussion in his 1766 work *Annals or History of Yale-College*. Instead, it was political maneuvering that forced Clap's hand. Samuel Johnson, a prominent Anglican with close ties to the Church of England, was threatening to bring the dispute before the English Crown, an appeal that could have severely harmed the college.⁴⁸ In this way, the debate over the edict demonstrates not only the growing opposition to Clap's illiberalism, but also the growing political power of his opponents.

The President's next great controversy played out in 1759 through a public exchange of pamphlets with Benjamin Gale. Whereas Clap's spokesperson repeated the same common law arguments as in the debate with Darling, Gale's *Calm and Full Vindication* employed a liberal, rights-driven philosophy to accuse the President of political misdeeds.⁴⁹

that such as rob us of the one, deprive us of both." Benjamin Gale, *A Few Brief Remarks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1760), 7.

⁴⁷ Tucker writes, "A religious issue at the outset, the Yale controversy gravitated into the neighboring realm of politics; religion and politics were virtually inseparable in eighteenth-century Connecticut." Zeichner agrees, "It was impossible to separate religion from politics in colonial Connecticut. The Tercentary Commission of the State of Connecticut compiled a concise summary of the role of party and faction in religious disputes. On that note, Goen observes that, by 1767, the 'political New Lights' were a force to reckoned with in the colonial Assembly. Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 199; Zeichner, *Connecticut's Years of Controversy*, 25; Richards, "New Haven and the Stamp Act Crisis, 82; Tercentary Commission, *The Great Awakening*, 17-20; Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 136.

⁴⁸ In his correspondence with Clap, Johnson put forward a case for religious toleration that was similar to Darling's position. Tucker sums it up as follows: "Johnson's position on these issues was explicit and symptomatic of the new spirit of liberalism that was beginning to permeate American educational theory." Tucker, "The Church of England," 326.

⁴⁹ Clap did not participate directly in this debate, but John Graham was a close confidant of the President and argued on his behalf.

Gale began this critique with the use of fines at Yale College, arguing that the system of “exorbitant fining” was created not to maintain discipline, but simply to raise revenue.⁵⁰ In this, these fines were highly effective and served to “enrich the college three or four hundred pounds, in 3 years, at the cost of the scholars.”⁵¹ At the same time, they represented a “scandalous and dangerous corruption of government” in that they were both “*arbitrary* and *illegal*.”⁵² Gale argues that Clap acted illegally by ignoring the wishes of the General Assembly and the trustees of the college. Although the college charter gave the President some power to establish rules “not repugnant to the laws of *England*, nor the laws of this colony as they shall think fit and proper,” Gale insisted that Clap’s dictates were ultimately subject to the review of the Assembly. The President, as mentioned above, denied that claim. Moreover, although Clap was supposed to share his legislative power with the college’s fellows, Gale argued, “the president and fellows have delegated a power of making laws, according to his own pleasure, to the president,” even though “this power cannot [ought not] be transferr’d.”⁵³ It was in this sense that Clap’s authority was “arbitrary,” a term that harkened back to constitutional disputes on the threat of tyranny in English history.

Gale also raised the argument that fined students had no right to a legal remedy or appeal: “It is one of the privileges of an English subject, that he may have copies of the judicial proceedings against him.”⁵⁴ With the phrase “privileges of an English subject,” it becomes abundantly clear that Gale saw the President not only as an out-of-control administrator, but also as a threat to Connecticut’s political liberties.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Gale, *Calm and Full Vindication* (New Haven: n.b., 1759), 17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17-28.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

The next year brought a fresh controversy and another pamphlet from Gale: *A Few Brief Remarks on Mr. Graham's Answer; and on His Vindication of Mr. President Clap*.⁵⁵ In short, the author intercepted a letter from Graham, a prominent New Light minister, to Clap and used it to accuse the pair of “party wickedness,” i.e. an attempt to alter the character of the General Assembly. If Clap had his way, Gale asserted, “none [would be] admitted, who were against reprinting the confession of faith, and platform of church discipline, at the publick expense of the government.” Similarly, “none [would be] admitted... who vindicate the cause... of Wallingford, who procured the ordination of the Rev'd Mr. Dana.”⁵⁶ The Dana affair was related to the issue of religious toleration. In 1758, an aspiring liberal reverend was accused of advancing dangerous “Arminian doctrines.” In response, Clap took part in an effort to block his ordination, an action that reaffirmed the President’s commitment to orthodoxy over toleration.⁵⁷ With *A Few Brief Remarks*, Gale is accusing Clap of trying to exclude all of Dana’s supporters from the legislature, which would have been akin to removing the supporters of religious toleration. In particular, Gale argued that the act of denying a congregation the ability to choose its minister was a violation of its “rights, privileges, and immunities.”⁵⁸ At its heart, then, this pamphlet was a critique of Clap’s illiberalism; the President’s greatest sins were his opposition to religious freedom and his alleged desire to manipulate a free election.

⁵⁵ “Mr. Graham’s Answer” is essentially a statement of Clap’s principles. Because Clap lays out the same arguments in his own writings, this paper will not discuss Graham’s work. John Graham, *A Few Remarks on the Remarker* (New Haven: Parker and Company, 1760).

⁵⁶ Benjamin Gale, *A Few Brief Remarks on Mr. Graham’s Answer* (New Haven: n.p., 1760), 11.

⁵⁷ More detail on the Dana affair, including the theological details of the disagreement, can be found in Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 216-220. This incident is also worth noting because it marks a change in Clap’s political loyalties. Once an ardent Old Light, the President realigned the College with the New Lights around 1759 in order to bolster its political capital. Darling, *Some Remarks*, 50; Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 210.

⁵⁸ Gale, *A Few Brief Remarks*, 12.

Over the next years, from 1760 to 1763, students' opposition to the President increased to greater levels than ever before. On September 12, 1761, Clap published a notice in the *Connecticut Gazette* condemning a riot "with a design to bring a scandal upon the college."⁵⁹ Although Clap insisted the mob was made exclusively of townspeople, a subsequent commentator noted that two thirds of the rioters were students.⁶⁰ Other incidents included half the senior class taking to the college yard in protest of a new testing schedule, and a student poisoning the food at the common dining hall.⁶¹ By far the biggest scandal, however, revolved around the question of appeals. In 1763, a group of students brought a petition and list of grievances before the colony's General Assembly. Their demands and proposed remedies offer a clear view of the students' position just three years before Clap's resignation.⁶²

The *Memorial to the General Assembly* listed six major grievances against Clap's administration, most of which expressed decidedly liberal or Whiggish sentiments. First, the memorial critiqued the view that "Y. College hath a jurisdiction exempt from... the control or visitation of the supreme authority of the colony" and argued that the Assembly, as a representative of the public, should have the "sole right of... reforming abuses" within the institution. Second, the document accuses Clap of having "undertaken to make corporate acts of [Presidency]... without the consent of the fellows," thereby "engross[ing] all power in the

⁵⁹ *Connecticut Gazette*, September 12, 1761.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, October 3, 1761.

⁶¹ Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 253; "Investigation of ye alleged poisoning of college students in Commons," 1764.

⁶² Tucker neglects this *Memorial* in his biography of Clap. To the extent that covers the dispute, he focuses almost exclusively on the President's rebuttal. He does add, though, that the Memorial "reflected a ground swell of public opinion" and that several prominent clergymen also signed on. Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist*, 223-226.

President.” Both of these grievances express republican or democratic sympathies; like Darling’s pamphlet, they are concerned with the sense that Clap is accumulating “arbitrary” power.⁶³

The bulk of the memorial is devoted to its third complaint, the discussion of the right to appeal. During Clap’s tenure, “no scholar [could] prosecute any suit in any common law court against any other scholar or officer of the College for any injury or fault, before the matter hath been heard by the President & Fellows on pain of Expulsion.”⁶⁴ According to the students, this policy allowed for the continuance of several unjust policies, including a rule that no student could attend “a meeting [a including church service] that [was] not established or tolerated by law, or not approved of by the President on penalty of being fined.” Moreover, the memorial insisted that the denial of a right to appeal was an “infringement on the *natural rights of Englishmen*” [emphasis added]. In this sense, the debate over appeals involved both issues of religious toleration and liberal political principles.⁶⁵

The last three grievances were fairly straightforward. The college laws were condemned for “savouring too much of arbitrariness and severity;” the students complained about fines for lesser, “diverse” offenses;” and it was observed that, because he holds both the legislative and executive power, the President is often the judge in his own case.⁶⁶ The *Memorial*’s suggested reforms, however, were striking. The petition urged that all the laws of the college would be “laid before the General Assembly for their inspection to be approved or repealed as should be judged proper.” Future laws would face the same scrutiny. Additionally, students would be

⁶³ *Memorial to the General Assembly at Hartford, 1763.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Regarding the thesis that Clap’s unpopularity stemmed from his disciplinarian policies, it is interesting to note that only the fourth and fifth grievances are focused on harsh punishments. The others all involve legal or political questions.

granted a liberty of appeal and a “committee of Visitation” would be appointed to rectify any remaining “abuses.”⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, Clap wrote a lengthy response to this *Memorial*. After all, despite his position on the rightful authority of the Assembly, he understood that an unfavorable ruling from the legislature could have weakened his position *de facto*. In brief, his *Reply to the Memorial* reiterated the common law arguments of his earlier writings and contended that the students’ work was a “misrepresentation.” Although there may have been merits to this claim, its legalistic foundations must have had little resonance among the rights-based philosophy of his critics.⁶⁸

This disconnect comes across in Clap’s response to the first grievance. Arguing that “[e]very College or university is a distinct corporation of government by itself,” he entirely ignores the students’ true concern: accountability. His response to the third grievance must have been equally unsatisfying. Regarding the right to appeal, Clap wrote, “The Corporation in making this law copied after a law of another college at Cambridge in New England.” In a liberal framework, the long existence of a law is an insufficient answer to concerns about its justice. Lastly, Clap seems to brush aside the sixth grievance, that he is sometimes the judge in his own case; such an outcome is “absolutely necessary in such a society as this.”⁶⁹

Historians can gain further insight into Clap’s position on natural rights through his *Letter on the Right of Appeal of Students in College*, which appears to be a draft of the speech he gave before the Connecticut Assembly in 1764. The most interesting section of the work asks, “whether every man has a natural right to appeal from every judgment in which he conceives himself to be [wronged.]” This, Clap argues, cannot be the case. The problem is that a language

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Thomas Clap, *Reply to the Memorial for a Visitation of Yale College* (ca. 1763), in Yale University Corporation Records.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

of natural rights conflicts with the “laws of the community.” As such, in weighing the question of a right to appeal, it must be asked, “whether the inconveniences [outweigh the] advantages to the community.”⁷⁰ In this way, Clap neutralizes the students’ language of natural rights, a discourse he finds largely unproductive in settling the College’s affairs.

Although Clap’s defense succeeded before the General Assembly, it is easy to see why his arguments fell on deaf ears among the students; whereas the *Memorial* was framed in the language of English Whiggism, Clap responded in the distinct language of legalism. As such, with their concerns unaddressed in the legislature, the students turned to more violent means.

It was at this point that Stamp Act fever hit Connecticut. Admittedly, it is challenging to identify the precise relationship between the Act and an increase in radicalism at Yale. When Grasso proclaims, “the students followed the Stamp Act protestors’ example,” the strongest claim he can defend is that the students emulated the protestors’ tactics.⁷¹ Even that, though, is hard to reconcile with affairs in New Haven. It is true that riots broke out in the colonies during the summer of 1765. New Haven, however, was free from political violence until January 1766, several months after the infamous raid on Clap’s house.⁷² That chronology makes it very difficult to claim the students ‘learned from’ the protestors. A more likely scenario—which, although difficult to prove in isolation, is otherwise consistent with the thesis of this paper—is that the resistance to the Stamp Act coincided with an outpouring of liberal, Whiggish sentiment throughout Connecticut. Because Clap was on the wrong side of that outpouring, opposition to his administration increased.

⁷⁰ Thomas Clap, *Letter on the Right to Appeal of students in college* (February 2, 1764), in in Thomas Clap, President of Yale College, Records; Grasso, *Speaking Aristocracy*, 174-175.

⁷¹ Because Clap never wrote on the Stamp Act, Grasso cannot defend a stronger claim, e.g. the students sought to oppose the Act or push for repeal through targeting Clap. Grasso, *Speaking Aristocracy*, 182.

⁷² “Though determined on resistance, New Haven was just as certain that it should be orderly.” Richards, *New Haven and the Stamp Act Crisis*, 79, 82.

Regardless, as popular opinion continued to turn against him, Clap became increasingly prolific and defensive with his writings. During his last two years in office, the President published two pamphlets that, although they did not mention the campus unrest directly, read like a vindication of his time at Yale. In *Some observations relating the Government of the College*, he defends the necessity of harsh punishments as a means of restraining “vice” through “fear of punishment or shame.” Although that defense of punishment as deterrence was fairly commonplace, the pamphlet also included one of Clap’s most illiberal claims to date:

The pupils of the College are mostly minors... and therefore are to be considered not as persons who are *sui Juris*, but as under the government of parents, masters, or guardians, so as not to have a full right to government themselves or to have the property or right of disposal of any thing further than the allowance of [the governors of the College.]⁷³

In arguing that the students had no legal rights, Clap again rebutted their calls for a “right to appeal,” which they had previously defended as a “*natural right of Englishmen*.” This pamphlet thus reinforces the divide between Clap and his liberal opponents; whereas the President spoke in terms of legal rights, i.e. claims for a remedy under the common law, the students appealed to an extralegal authority that could contest common law norms.

Clap’s second pamphlet of this period is notable less for what it says than what it omits. *The Annals or History of Yale-College* attempts the ambitious task of describing the affairs of the college since 1701. In doing so, it highlights the aspects of the history that best fit Clap’s view of the college as a religious institution for the training of Congregationalist ministers. Yet the 130-page pamphlet includes no reference to any disturbances on campus, even in its section on “the present state of the college.” Even at the end, the President decided, such arguments were unworthy of mention.⁷⁴

⁷³ Clap, *Some observations relating to the Government of the College*.

⁷⁴ Clap, *Annals or History of Yale College*, 80-89.

By 1766, the College was at its breaking point. “[A]ll the students except two or three” submitted a petition of grievances to the Corporation, noting “the want of tutors for the senior & freshman class... [Clap’s] neglect to publish a law granting appeals to corporation—and in general, [that]... the president (*pro arbitrio*) makes laws, and alters penalties for past crimes.”⁷⁵ When the students became rowdy, the President dismissed them early for a break, but then recalled them the next day. Amid all this confusion, Clap’s closest confidants “began to whisper... either he must be controul’d, or greatly alter his phylosophic (rather unphyosopic) government, or be discharg’d, or college is ruin’d.”⁷⁶ Just two weeks later, on July 1, 1766, Clap gave in to this pressure and resigned. Although he would preside over commencement exercises that September, his time at Yale had reached its close.

That said, the commencement ceremony gave Clap one final chance to express his vision for the college. In his last public statement, he urged the Corporation to never “turn aside from the Way of Orthodoxy... [and] never chuse a President or Fellow, who is lukewarm of indifferent to the Principles of Religion, thro’ whose Indulgence or Want of Care, any Corruption may steal into this sacred Fountain.”⁷⁷ He would soon be disappointed.

* * *

It is now appropriate to consider the life of Ezra Stiles, a leader of the American Revolution and the future President of Yale College. Although he was Clap’s protégé while at Yale in the 1740s, Stiles adopted more liberal, Whiggish views by the 1760s. At that point, when the Corporation signaled its willingness to promote him to the Presidency, he represented an

⁷⁵ These grievances, summarized briefly in a letter, are reminiscent of the Memorial submitted to the General Assembly in 1763. The only addition is the recent development that, by this time, all of Yale’s tutors had resigned. Clap and Daggett were the faculty members left. James Dana to Ezra Stiles, March 11, 1766, in *Extracts*.

⁷⁶ James Dana to Ezra Stiles, June 17, 1766, in *Extracts*.

⁷⁷ “Translation of President Clap’s Valedictory Speech at the Commencement in Yale College,” September 10, 1766, in *Extracts*, 62.

ideological alternative to his then unpopular mentor. In this way, one can view the ouster of Clap and the selection of Stiles as more than a change of administrators; it was a change of visions and, in truth, Yale's first revolution.

A discussion of this change must begin with Stiles' correspondence. Just days after Clap's death in 1767, Stiles wrote a host of letters to affiliates of the College, explaining his relationship with his former mentor. Most of the letters included a lengthy tribute to Clap's scholarship.⁷⁸ Several, however, also included minor criticism of the deceased and alluded to a dispute between the two men. A letter to Chauncey Whittelsey professed, "From 1742 to 1752, I found him my best friend... tho' upon his political conversion his love waxed cool."⁷⁹ Another letter to James Parker continued that thought, "But what shall we say of that transformation he underwent from 1754 to 1757? We know his views, his motives, his weakness."⁸⁰

With these references to "conversion" or "transformation," Stiles alluded to Clap's centralization of religious instruction at Yale in 1753. This is clear, in part, because of the dates in the above letters; by indicating that the friendship of Clap and Stiles ended in 1752 and was replaced by distrust in 1754, the letters show that the break between the scholars occurred in 1753. It is also noteworthy that the centralization of religious instruction was the President's first act to prompt widespread opposition in Connecticut. Because it was such a divisive aspect of Clap's tenure, it is easy to imagine how it could have alienated even a close friend. The break between Clap and Stiles thus related to dispute over collegiate policy; over ten years before Stiles was considered for the Presidency of Yale, he already had a different vision of the college than his former mentor.

⁷⁸ Ezra Stiles to Chauncey Whittelsey, January 20, 1767; Ezra Stiles to John Devotion, January 20, 1767; Ezra Stiles to James Parker, January 20, 1767; Erza Stiles to James Parker, February 27, 1767, all letters in Ezra Stiles Papers.

⁷⁹ Ezra Stiles to Chauncey Whittelsey, January 20, 1767, in Ezra Stiles Papers.

⁸⁰ Erza Stiles to James Parker, February 27, 1767, in Ezra Stiles Papers.

To understand the divergence between their ideas, it is useful to begin with Stiles' youth and intellectual development. Before Ezra Stiles arrived at Yale, his father Isaac had already befriended Thomas Clap over a mutual suspicion of the Great Awakening and a common opposition to New Light theology.⁸¹ Isaac Stiles, after all, made the first public attack on the New Lights in Connecticut, writing that their doctrine "loudly threatens a subversion to all peaceable order in a government" and breeds contempt for "authority both civil and ecclesiastical."⁸²

When Ezra Stiles arrived at Yale in 1742, he shared his father's firm Old Light convictions. As he would later write in a letter to Chauncey Whittelsey, the young Stiles was shocked at the "indecent mad and blasphemous religion" of itinerant preacher John Davenport.⁸³ In this regard, he stood out from his classmates, many of whom followed and subscribed to the New Light movement.⁸⁴

It is not surprising, then, that Stiles was drawn to his father's friend. Clap also took a liking to Stiles, so much so that he gave him a generous scholarship. Regarding their relationship, Stiles would later write, "President Clap was my Friend... and by procuring offices favored me so much that my fours Education at College exclusive of my Apparel did not cost my Father

⁸¹ Edmund Morgan, *A Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 28.

⁸² Isaac Stiles, *A Looking-Glass for Changelings: A Seasonable Caveat against Meddling with Them That Are Given to Change...* (New London: n.p., 1743), in Grasso, *Speaking Aristocracy*, 1.

⁸³ Ezra Stiles to Chauncey Whittelsey, March 6, 1770, in Morgan, *Gentle Puritan*, 37.

⁸⁴ Robson writes, "Yale's students were much taken by the message of the itinerant evangelists who made New Haven a regular stop on their tours." Morgan, *Gentle Puritan*, 45; Robson, *Educating Republicans*, 20.

Fourty Pounds sterling.”⁸⁵ The two also bonded over a common interest in astronomy, a bond they would share even as political differences tore them apart.⁸⁶

However, although Stiles stayed at Yale until 1755, he began to drift away from his mentor as early as 1749. That year, during the valedictory oration for his Master’s degree, he offered an early defense of religious liberty: “Tis Liberty, my friends, tis the Cause of Liberty we assert—a Freedom from the Biass of a vulgar Education, and the Violence of prejudicate Opinions—a Liberty suited to the Pursuit and Enquiries after Truth—Natural and Moral. This is the Advantage of Education, and this the Emolument of the Liberal Discipline.”⁸⁷ This support for toleration was reinforced when he relocated to a parish in Newport. As historian Edmund Morgan writes, “while New Haven was settled by the orthodox and continued to worry about orthodoxy, Newport was settled by heretics; and the right to heresy somehow survived.”⁸⁸

While Stiles was in this more tolerant atmosphere, he and Clap found themselves on opposite sides of major political disagreements. Whereas Clap opposed the ordination of Reverend Dana, Stiles supported it.⁸⁹ Additionally, Stiles wrote to the President in 1759 to criticize his “refusing an offer from a Newport gentleman to give the Yale library a collection of books, some of which contained deistical doctrine.” Censorship, he argued, could never succeed; the best way to refute deism was “to come forth into the open Field and Dispute the matter on even footing.”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ It is worth noting that Stiles wrote these kind words even after his political break with Clap. Autobiographical fragment in manuscript *Memoirs of the Family of Stiles*, begun by Ezra Stiles in 1762, in Morgan, *Gentle Puritan*, 46.

⁸⁶ Between 1764 and 1767, Clap and Stiles’ only (surviving) correspondence addressed current topics in astronomy. Ezra Stiles to Thomas Clap, February 19, 1766, in Ezra Stiles Papers; Thomas Clap to Ezra Stiles, August 27, 1766, in Ezra Stiles Papers; Morgan, *Gentle Puritan*, 60.

⁸⁷ Ezra Stiles, “Valedictory Oration,” June 15, 1749, in Morgan, *Gentle Puritan*, 73.

⁸⁸ Morgan, *Gentle Puritan*, 119, 189.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 198-201.

⁹⁰ Parsons, *Ezra Stiles of Yale*, 301-302.

Perhaps as a result of these disagreements, Stiles' relationship with Clap worsened in the 1760s. On that note, Stiles wrote to Chauncy Whittelsey in August 1766 that he had "of late Years very little Influence with [Clap]." Even though Stiles would have been "willing to act the Tutor [him]self, for half a Year" in the College's time of need, the President never made the offer.⁹¹ In fact, the two men had fairly little contact in the years before Clap's resignation; as mentioned above, their only (surviving) correspondence from these years discussed astronomy.

In Clap's absence, Stiles formed new political friendships, most notably with the President's great antagonist Benjamin Gale. The pair's frequent correspondence reveals that they held similar political beliefs.⁹² For example, one of Stiles' letters appears to provide a justification for visitation rights at Yale College, a position Gale had previously advanced in a "Calm and Full Vindication." Stiles' argument, in short, was that "the Security of American Liberty lies in the Honor of Republicanism;" because one "could with the house of deputies, consisted of 300, mislead of 130,... [but] Of the people [one could] mislead of a ninth only," political power should be vested in larger, democratic institutions.⁹³ This general principle—that greater oversight reduces the risk of corruption—implies that democratic oversight of the College is, at least on some level, desirable. Moreover, it mirrors the argument Gale made for visitation rights in his earlier pamphlet.⁹⁴ Gale and Stiles also discussed the ideal tactics for opposing the Stamp Act. Although Stiles opposed the more violent tactics of Connecticut's mobs, he did deem the

⁹¹ Chauncy Whittelsey to Ezra Stiles, August 8, 1766, in Ezra Stiles Papers.

⁹² Gale and Stiles corresponded often in the mid-1760s. In one year alone, they sent the following five letters: Benjamin Gale to Ezra Stiles, August 23, 1766; Ezra Stiles to Benjamin Gale, October 6, 1766; Benjamin Gale to Ezra Stiles, January 2, 1767; Benjamin Gale to Ezra Stiles, April 13, 1767; Ezra Stiles to Benjamin Gale, April 30, 1767, all in Ezra Stiles Papers.

⁹³ Ezra Stiles to Benjamin Gale, October 6, 1766, Ezra Stiles Papers.

⁹⁴ It may be too much to read an argument for visitation rights into this letter. If so, the point remains that Clap would have never endorsed such republican or democratic sentiments; he believed that the best way to prevent corruption was firm, strict discipline. Gale, *Calm and Full Vindication*, 30-32; Clap, *Some observations relating to the Government of the College*.

law a severe infraction of liberty and recommended a political alliance of Old and New Lights to oppose it.⁹⁵ Both of these arguments are beyond the pale of what Clap could entertain.

At this point—having cut off conversation with Clap, befriended one of his greatest rivals, and accepted liberal doctrines of toleration and political freedom—the break between Stiles and his “great Maecenas” was clear. In 1766, then, the two represented vastly different visions of Yale College and what the institution might soon become.

John Devotion, a member of the Yale Corporation, first offered the Presidency to Ezra Stiles on July 7, 1766. It is true that Stiles was not the Corporation’s first choice; by July 7, James Lockwood had already been offered and declined the position.⁹⁶ However, in a letter acknowledging, “Yale College has neither President *nor Tutor* [emphasis added] belonging to it,” Devotion nonetheless asked whether the College “might venture to Compliment [Stiles] with [a formal offer,] without Danger of repulse.”⁹⁷ Stiles, observing the troubles at the College, turned down the position. Responding to Devotion, he explained, “The title of President, tho eminent and honorable, is a laurel intertwined with thorns;” given the chaotic state of the College, Stiles chose to devote himself to a “much inferior” but likely more pleasant “service.”⁹⁸

As a result, Naphtali Daggett, the Professor of Divinity, became President *pro tempore*, as if by default. Although Daggett ended up holding the office for eleven years, a note in the

⁹⁵ Ezra Stiles to Benjamin Gale, October 6, 1766; Ezra Stiles to Benjamin Gale, April 30, 1767, both in Ezra Stiles Papers.

⁹⁶ Historians know fairly little about James Lockwood. From a genealogy of the Lockwood family, they know he served as a Justice of the Peace in Norfolk and as a representative in Connecticut’s General Assembly. They do not know, however, the character of his politics. Frederic A. Holden and James Lockwood, *Colonial and revolutionary history of the Lockwood family in America* (Philadelphia: Lockwood family, 1889), 48.

⁹⁷ John Devotion to Ezra Stiles, July 7, 1766, in Ezra Stiles Papers, Beinecke Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁹⁸ Ezra Stiles to John Devotion, July 25, 1766, in Ezra Stiles Papers.

Connecticut Courant shows that his tenure was originally meant to be temporary.⁹⁹ Accordingly, one might fairly say that, whereas the Corporation chose Lockwood and Stiles, it settled for Daggett, the only remaining faculty member at Yale.¹⁰⁰ As such, Stiles remains the most illustrative example of the type of candidate the Corporation wanted.¹⁰¹

In approaching Stiles for the Presidency, the Corporation certainly knew about his support for religious toleration and opposition to the Stamp Act.¹⁰² That they choose him either *because* or *despite* that fact thus constitutes a clear break from their past practice. Their choice endorsed a new vision for the college, one more fully in line with the liberal, Whiggish sentiments of the day.

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In sum, the unrest at Yale between 1753 and 1767 was primarily a response to the illiberalism of Thomas Clap. Although Clap attempted to justify his conduct under a legalist, common law framework, an increasingly liberal student body interpreted his actions through a different lens; whereas Clap appealed to the founding documents of Yale College, his students appealed to their “natural rights as Englishmen.” Having ousted Clap, the Yale Corporation then searched for a replacement that could assuage the concerns of the student body. In this regard, by seriously considering Ezra Stiles, the group showed a willingness to accept the increasingly mainstream principles of religious toleration and political liberalism. For a College founded to train Congregationalist ministers, this was a radical departure. Thus, insofar as the events of this

⁹⁹ The note reports, “Rev’ Mr. Naphtali Daggett, Professor of Divinity of said College, was chosen Professor pro-Tempore; and he is to execute both Offices *till a Separation is practicable* [emphasis added].” *Connecticut Courant*, November 3, 1766.

¹⁰⁰ James Dana to Ezra Stiles, June, 17, 1766, in Ezra Stiles Papers.

¹⁰¹ This could change if historians learn more about James Lockwood. See footnote 96.

¹⁰² Stiles both wrote profusely and delivered a Thanksgiving sermon on the topic of the Stamp Act. As such, within the small circle of the colony’s political elites, Stiles’ beliefs must have been common knowledge. Morgan, *Gentle Puritan*, 225.

period fundamentally altered the character of the College, they are aptly termed Yale's first revolution.

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