

[Boddice on Eustace, 'Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution'](#)

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Nicole Eustace. *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. x + 613 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3168-7.

Reviewed by Rob Boddice (Freie Universitaet Berlin) **Published on** H-Emotions (September, 2016)
Commissioned by Sara Hidalgo García

It is an unusual but useful task to review a book that is already eight years old. In a field such as the history of emotions, which has expanded and continues to expand so rapidly, eight years has yielded a generation's worth of scholarship. To revisit a pioneering work in the field is therefore to take stock of the fertility of that field. How far have we come? What innovations from 2008 endure? What now looks questionable? Nicole Eustace's *Passion is the Gale* was such an important indicator of the potential of the history of emotions, precisely because it was explicitly styled as "a history of eighteenth-century American emotion" at a time when the history of emotions could boast only a few in-depth case studies that put incipient theories and methodologies into practice (p. 3).

The book aims at comprehensive coverage of the expression and experience of different emotions and the ways in which they changed, were inflected by race, class and gender, and became central to revolutionary affairs. It manages this broad scope by limiting the geographical focus to Pennsylvania, though it is implicit throughout that Pennsylvanian emotions are more or less representative of US emotions in general. One significant caveat to this is that the emotions considered here are based on Anglophone experiences and preoccupations. Where the emotions in question are of non-English speakers, they are construed through an Anglophone interpretation. The language/experience vectors of indigenous people, slaves, Francophones, and Germanophones are, on the whole, not considered (with the notable exception of indigenous grief rituals, pp. 322-333).

The book is structured so as to take us from the general to the particular, with a narrative populated by copious examples, but driven in each chapter by threads of stories that attach to individual biographies, charting the vagaries of emotional expression, control, and transaction. We are then returned to a general account of the importance of emotions in historical analysis as the chronological shift terminates at the American Revolution and the "amalgam of patriotic love, just anger, communal sympathy, and political grief" that comprised "American spirit" (p. 388). In many ways, the book can trace its genealogy to the work of Peter and Carol Stearns, whose pioneering work in the history of emotions from a theoretical point of view also exemplified those theories through works of American history. Whereas the Stearnses' focus lay mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Eustace's account provides the essential prologue of emotions in the American colonies.

There are astonishing strengths in Eustace's monumental scholarship, which are principally contained in those chapters that tease apart the extraordinary social, political, and cultural factors

that both circumscribe and give meaning to individual experience, expressed in many different ways. Here we find both an empirical method for how to *do* the history of emotions as well as a tacit expression of the importance of this discipline for explaining historical change anew. These chapters, which comprise the bulk of the book, are exemplary for practitioners in the field. There are, however, weaknesses in the introductory chapters that deal with emotion in general. Eustace's sensitivity to discursive and rhetorical niceties from chapter 3 onward is not reflected in earlier pages, in which emotion, passion, sentiment, feeling, sensations, affections, agitations, and zeal are casually given as synonyms (for example, on p. 3 and pp. 76-77). Her appendix explains this as a stylistic choice--I recommend readers to consult this first--but that choice cuts against the grain of the historical intent of the book as a whole.

Recent trends in neurohistory and neuroplasticity suggest that emotional experience, not only how and why emotions occur, but when and what they mean, is intrinsically wrapped up in the context of a given experience. What we think is happening to us at a given time has a material effect on what actually is happening to us. Eustace clearly demonstrates this in most of her book, but this is why it matters that "passions" are not "emotions" and vice versa. Eustace's choice not to distinguish these terms cuts off a large section of the book from the kind of historicism for which she otherwise strives so elegantly. She gives a definition for "passion" (p. 20) from a modern edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, so that we lose the eighteenth-century sense of suffering love, grief, etc., *passively*. To set out to control the passions with which one was afflicted meant something significantly different to controlling one's emotions. The word "emotion" is also insufficiently scrutinized. When discussing "movement," for example, those who were "moved" are said to have been employing a metaphor or symbolism: "to move people can also mean to change their mental position, to stir them up, excite them, provoke them, evoke emotions in them" (p. 202). But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, movement, or rather *motion*, was a major component of debates about the material nature of mind in humans and the role of the blood and viscera in generating feelings. To be moved was to be physically in motion, internally. "Emotion" is literally outward (*e*) movement (*motio*). People did not have emotions evoked *in* them, but rather *out* of them. This directional flow and point of origin distinguishes emotion from passion--movement from passivity--and shows that in theory they are more opposite than kindred. There are clear examples of these meanings changing and clashing in Eustace's account and they are fascinating, but her use of "emotion" as a master category into which all such experiences fit prevents this overarching history of emotions--the slippage is indeed contained in our purpose--from being explored. The analysis of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733-34), which provides both the book's title and much of its early rationale, is built on this emotion/passion category confusion. It is the aspect of the book that has endured least well.

Yet Eustace clearly has a heightened awareness of the importance of subtle changes in the "language of emotions" and the ways in which such changes both informed and were informed by alterations at the level of experience. She is similarly sensitive to the ways in which rhetoric and the concept of the self are deeply interrelated: "While *disposition* and *personality* are near synonyms now, they weren't in the eighteenth century" (p. 67). Eustace employs no simple or master concept of "love," "anger" or "sympathy," but rather provides a beautifully detailed and engagingly written account of the intricacies of these feelings and their connections to status, power, gender, class, and race. Her account of love, for example, much as with her account of grief, unfolds a highly specific contextualization of interpersonal and social transactions, involving status claims, gender dynamics, and obedience to authority (or resistance to it) that thoroughly defamiliarizes what the feeling is. It

represents a significant challenge to universalizing assumptions either from philosophy or from the cognitive sciences, and demonstrates the historian of emotion's importance as a disruptor of easy narratives. With respect to anger and its fine-grained correlates--resentment, fury, wrath, rage--a clear shift in prescription and experience is documented, as the feeling repertoires of (especially) high-status males were expanded by the exigencies of war. Given Eustace's early focus on Pope, it might be interesting similarly to trace the reception of his translation of the *Iliad* over the same period. After all, while it is convincingly argued that the "wrathful" were met with derision, and certainly could not be linked to virtue, Pope's version of the Homeric epic clearly intertwined wrath and virtue in the character of Achilles. In the context of the Seven Years' War or the Paxton Crisis and its aftermath, such allusions might have been useful, especially for the increasingly complex relationship of manly virtue, love, compassion, and vengeful anger described in chapters 5 and 8.

At the heart of Eustace's argument is the emergence of a modern self in tension with the emotional basis for social cohesion. The complex debates about the wellspring of sympathy--does it come from self-regard or from the integrity of the social fabric?--are essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how common ties of feeling were intrinsic to both the concept of society and the construction of morals and virtues in this period. The rhetorical and experiential nuances of sympathy, compassion, mercy, pity, and humanity reveal a deeply stratified society, the power dynamics of which were reinforced by a pathetic openness, however limited, that was thought to be key to social cohesion. Adam Smith receives short shrift here, somewhat unfairly: reading his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *Wealth of Nations* (1776) together could well represent the difficult relationship between self-love and sympathy that Eustace describes. Smith ultimately shows that the actions stemming from sympathetic feelings are beneficial for the sympathizer. Moreover, Smith's first book must have had some bearing on the dramatic rise in usage of the word "sympathy" from the 1760s (pp. 274-275). Only in the appendix do we get a sense of this. Yet the difficulties of interpreting and navigating Smith's corpus in a way provide the vital clue to Eustace's vision of pre-Revolutionary American passions. Competing ideas about what and how to feel, what passions meant and how they could be controlled, and what end passions served, for good or evil, placed American politicians, settlers, soldiers, religious leaders, lovers, and grievors in a state of aporia. They worked out, in the crucibles of war, political and religious strife, and death what and how to feel and how best to feel for and about their emerging nation and the people in it, in the name of loyalty or the spirit of liberty. But doubt always lingered and feeling rules remained in flux. The emotional co-dependence of the modern self and civil society was never fully guaranteed and could, until 1776, remain passionately at odds.

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