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John Adams and Cicero: From Inspiration to Confidant

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Abstract

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This Thesis asks to what extent was there a classical influence during America's earliest days. The scope of this thesis is narrowed by looking at the unique relationship between a founding father of America and a great orator of antiquity. The two men used for the comparison are John Adams and Marcus Tullius Cicero. The central idea of this thesis is that John Adams looked to Cicero in times of uncertainty. The friendship that Adams establishes between him and Cicero takes place continuously over his lifetime. While other historians have compared Adams to Cicero at distinct moments in his life, this thesis will show that Adams chose Cicero to be an inspiration, companion, and source of solace at many times during his life. The argument traces the progression of the friendship from Adams's earliest days as student, through his professional life, and into his retirement. Special care has been taken to emphasize primary resources. Most examples come directly from John Adams's diary, autobiography and letters. Cicero's speeches are also used to help establish the connection between these two men as well.

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Acknowledgments

What is the Cause of Procrastination? To day my Stomack is disordered, and my Thoughts of Consequence, unsteady and confused. I cant study to day but will begin tomorrow. Tomorrow comes. Well, I feel pretty well, my head is pretty clear but Company comes in. I cant yet study tomorrow, but will begin in earnest next day. Next Day comes. We are out of Wood, I cant study: because I cant keep a fire. Thus, something is always wanting that is necessary- John Adams's Earliest Diary 1758

When John Adams lamented the trials of procrastination above he was a twenty-three year old man. As a twenty-two year old woman, two hundred and fifty-two years later, I must confess not much has changed. There were times in researching and writing this thesis where I saw myself as Sisyphus pushing a boulder up a never-ending hill. Hours would go by and I would write one sentence, only to decide that it was not what I meant. Luckily for me, the wonderful community at Emory University got behind me, and together we got my “boulder” to the top of that hill.

There are certain people that must be acknowledged for their guidance and participation during the creation and completion of this thesis. I would first like to thank my thesis director and advisor, Dr. Cynthia Patterson, for the consistent support she has shown to me over the last two years. I have made use of her office hours to just “talk” about John Adams and Cicero. She has always offered words of encouragement and a fresh perspective when, I, like John Adams, felt unsure of my capabilities. Another source of inspiration for this project is Dr. Barbara Lawatsch-Melton. It was in her class the spring of my sophomore year that I was first introduced to the idea for this thesis. The hours I have spent in her office discussing this project were invaluable not only for this thesis, but for my own affirmation that I had chosen the right course of study at Emory. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Rosemary Magee who has encouraged me to believe in the serendipitous nature of the world. During my preparation to embark on my own “uncertain” journey following my time at Emory, I have thought about her advice often. It has acted as a “source of solace” and calm for me as I confront my future.

I would like to thank my friends and my family for being so supportive throughout my life and college career in particular. I would also like to especially acknowledge my mother, who has ingrained in my mind the idea that an education is one of life's greatest gifts. Without her love and support I would surely be a lesser version of who I am today. Finally the Emory Community in general has offered me some of the most spectacular opportunities and experiences in the last four years, some experiences were quite trying...and I will miss ALL of them!

Introduction

But when evening comes I return home and go into my library. At the door I take off my muddy everyday clothes. I dress myself as though I were about to appear before a royal court as a Florentine envoy. Then decently attired I enter the antique courts of the great men of antiquity. They receive me with friendship; from there I derive the nourishment which alone is mine and for which I was born. Without false shame I talk with them and ask them the causes of their actions; and their humanity is so great they answer me. For four long and happy hours I lose myself in them. I forget all my troubles; I am not afraid of poverty or death. I transform entirely in their likeness. - Niccolo Machiavelli, 1513 (quoted by Eugene Rice, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe* 1970 pg. 66)

These are the words of Niccolo Machiavelli on December 10, 1513. At the time he wrote this letter he had been exiled from Florence and living in poorer conditions than he was accustomed to. In a word, his future was uncertain. In reality, he was alone, or so one would think. During Machiavelli's hour of desperation he turned to "the great men of antiquity" where he became lost "for four long and happy hours" in conversation. At the end of these conversations with these ancient heroes he had transformed "entirely in[to] their likeness."

There is a quality about "the great men of antiquity" that has created the tendency for later men and women, in uncertain times, to establish friendships with them. Machiavelli seems to attribute his desire to associate with these figures to their "humanity." It should be known, however, that the "nourishment" of these wise and friendly ancients, whom Machiavelli speaks of, was not limited to the world of Renaissance Italy, but extended broadly and even had its effect in colonial America.

In colonial America, many of the founding fathers, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, had created a relationship with the ancients

much like the one Machiavelli describes above. An interesting example of one such relationship is the friendship between John Adams and Marcus Tullius Cicero. An examination of John Adams's diaries, correspondences, legal papers and autobiography reveal that in John Adams's most uncertain moments he was never truly alone for he had formed a friendship with Cicero. In time, it is evident that this friendship was no mere haphazard decision but that Adams chose Cicero because Cicero upheld the virtues and skills which Adams himself wanted to uphold. One might say that at the end of John Adams's lifelong conversations with Cicero, Adams had transformed himself into Cicero's likeness.

This thesis is written with the extensive use of primary sources both for Adams and Cicero. The sources for John Adams are *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, *The Adams Papers* and the *Papers of John Adams* each edited by L.H. Butterfield. The sources for Cicero are primarily *Pro Milone*, *De Officiis*, and *Pro Sexto Roscio*. Though my research draws mostly from Adams's sources, both sets of primary sources are essential to a paper of this nature. These sources act as the most important driving force in the paper as they present the actual voices and ideas of both Adams and Cicero. These primary sources support the case that Adams had a unique relationship with Cicero that was an element of both his personal and private life.

The Earliest Diary of John Adams edited by L.H. Butterfield is a compilation of excerpts from John Adams's "diary" spanning the dates June 1753-April 1754 and September 1758-January 1759. The term diary should be used loosely in reference to this book because in some places of this book it is

hardly a diary at all, but rather a quick note on the weather or a note on a class lecture. This early book of Adams's papers primarily deals with Adams's time as a student at Harvard and those years soon after when he returned to Braintree, MA to pursue a career in Law. Adams's diary entries while at Harvard follow a clear cut chronological order, whereas the entries after Harvard seem more random. Additionally the entries after Harvard are often not diary entries at all but rather drafts of letters. Thus this book can be broken down into two time periods, during and after Harvard, with a two-year gap separating them. Butterfield accounts for this gap in years as due to a loss of parts of the manuscript, rather than to Adams having given up writing. Even with the gap and the sometimes elusive entries in this book there are still many times that Adams acknowledges Cicero in this source. This is seen especially with his decision to become a lawyer, as discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. Adams's decision in relation to Cicero will be developed later in this paper.

The Adams Papers edited by L.H. Butterfield is the source referred to most frequently in this paper. This opus is a four Volume work composed of Adams's diary entries and autobiography. Volume One covers the years 1755-1770 and Volume Two the years 1771-1781 in the form of diary entries. Volume Three contains diary entries up to 1782, including Adams's autobiography through 1776. The final volume, Four, is Adams's autobiography from 1777-1780. Butterfield writes of the nature of the autobiography:

This summary gives no notion of the complex, a better word might be chaotic- structure of John Adams's Autobiography. A glance through the last portion of Part One ("John Adams") will, however, do so. Adams wrote

most of this large fragment from an unaided memory, never stopping to consult his own Diary or files of correspondence or the contemporaneously published *Journals* of the Continental Congress, which he had in multiple copies on his bookshelves (Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Vol. 1, xlv).

The autobiography is therefore a somewhat unreliable source, but it is nonetheless useful in determining how John Adams thought of himself and how he wanted others to think of him. It is particularly helpful in comparing him to Cicero because it allows the “ideal image” in which Adams thought of himself to be compared with the Roman orator. This source is limiting, however, in that it only covers up to the year 1780 and Adams’s died on July 4th, 1826.

Another group of primary sources I use are the *Papers of John Adams* again edited by L.H. Butterfield. This large set is composed of fourteen-volumes that cover general correspondences and legal documents ranging from the years 1755 through 1783. I was not able to read through this set in its entirety; but not all of the papers, were relevant to the focus of my paper. I did, however, use some volumes of this set extensively, primarily Volume Three in order to gain a greater understanding of the Boston Massacre trial. This was especially useful when doing research in connection with James Farrell’s article “*Pro Militibus Oratio*: John Adams’s Imitation of Cicero in the Boston Massacre Trial.”

My thesis is of course not the first exploration into a relationship between the Classics and the Founding Fathers, nor is it new in its comparison between John Adams and Marcus Tullius Cicero. This study is unique, however, in tracing Cicero’s role in Adams’s life as a metamorphosis from a person in the past to a personal friend, who held a special role in the daunting moments in Adam’s life.

Carl Richard, James M. Farrell, and David McCullough have investigated the idea that there was a distinctive connection between the thoughts of the Founding Fathers and the great men of Classical Antiquity. While there are many historians who agree in emphasizing this connection, one of the most preeminent American historians, namely Bernard Bailyn, has argued that the role of Classical Antiquity was not in reality as influential in the revolutionary ideology as some have suggested. As my thesis unfolds, I will be indirectly challenging Bailyn's argument with strong support from both primary and secondary sources.

In his book *The Founders and the Classics*, Carl Richard also challenges Bailyn's dismissal of classical influence during the Revolutionary period. Richard writes extensively on the colonial education system and how this acted as a starting point for the founders' introduction to an association with figures from antiquity. While his study covers a much larger platform of players in the Revolution, he does not omit the Adams and Cicero connection. He writes at one point that Adams "clung more tenaciously to a theme which the other founders also embraced: the theme of the lone-wolf hero (Socrates, Demosthenes, and Cicero are all good examples) who sacrifices short-term popularity, which can be purchased only by vice, for long-term fame, which can be purchased only by virtue...(Richard 63)." While Richard does not concentrate his discussion on Adams and Cicero in particular, his work does strengthen my case.

The second chapter of my thesis is based largely on an article entitled "*Pro Militibus Oratio*: John Adams's Imitation of Cicero in the Boston Massacre Trial" by James M. Farrell. This article is one of several in which Farrell draws

connections between John Adams and Cicero. A professor of communications, Farrell focuses his work on how Adams implemented the rhetorical skills of Cicero to benefit himself in a professional sense. Farrell's article is important for my thesis because it shows that Cicero was not only a friend, but also a business associate-of-sorts for Adams. Farrell's work helps add dimension to my thesis by creating a new perspective from which to view Adams's attraction to Cicero.

Recently John Adams has come into popular discourse again, thanks largely to the popular biography of John Adams written by David McCullough. This work is over six hundred pages of beautiful prose dedicated to the life of John Adams, and within this opus McCullough does not fail to address the relationship between Adams and Cicero. He writes in an effort to characterize Adams, "He drew inspiration from his Roman heroes. *The first way for a young man to set himself on the road towards glorious reputation, 'he read in Cicero,' is to win renown. 'Reputation,' wrote Adams, 'ought to be the perpetual subject of my thoughts, and aim of my behavior* (McCullough 44)." So McCullough, who is perhaps the preeminent expert on the life of Adams, does not fail to mention and acknowledge that Adams used Cicero as a moral compass in his life.

Not all historians of the American Revolution, however, regard the Classics as an influential force within the era. As noted earlier, Bernard Bailyn who wrote the provocative *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, offers another evaluation of the classical influence. He writes: "But this elaborate display of classical authors is deceptive. Often the learning behind it was superficial; often the citations appear to have been dragged in as "window

dressing” with which to ornament a page or speech and to increase the weight of an argument...” (Bailyn 24). My thesis begs to differ with that notion. An examination of Adams’s chosen relationship with Cicero reveals that the relationship did not form out of “show.” Indeed Adams writes about Cicero in private diary entries and personal correspondences, so whom was he trying to deceive by doing that? While this thesis will not carry out an argument exclusively with Bailyn, the evidence presented will surely challenge his view on “window dressings.”

This thesis is divided into three chapters. Each chapter is representative of a different aspect of Adams’s relationship with Cicero. Each chapter also contributes to the understanding of a mature and changing interaction between these two great minds. The first chapter addresses the way in which Adams would have encountered Cicero and how this unlikely friendship developed between these two great minds. The second chapter highlights the idea that Cicero’s presence in Adams’s life began to take on greater meaning because of the sorts of legal experiences Cicero shared with Adams. Finally, the third chapter addresses Adams’s insecure feelings and the worry he had that he would be slighted in history. In this final chapter, I suggest that Adams was able to find comfort in Cicero’s failures-- and despite these failures, his eternal fame.

Chapter One

Cicero: A First Friend in Uncertainty

A new experience is an uncertain time. Uncertainty breeds anxiety. The uncertain agony of uncertainty can be as influential as the excitement it causes. What if the one encountering the new experience is already anxious by nature? A new experience can be made more agonizing when one is as insecure and as prone to self-doubt as John Adams was throughout his life. Often a major source of John Adams's insecurity as he encountered new experiences was the idea of confronting the unknown *alone*. The portentous unknown always seems less so when accompanied by a friend: for young John Adams, that "first friend" was Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Who was Cicero to young Adams? Well, at first just a friend, but soon to be an impetus for much greater achievements. *When did they meet?* Surely they had first been introduced years before under the guise of a Latin lesson. *Who introduced the two?* Most likely Joseph Marsh, Adams's first private grammar school teacher. However, while Adams did develop security in the ideals that Cicero portrayed, this relationship was not as predictable as one might expect.

John Adams would have first been introduced to Cicero much in the way any typical colonial student would have first encountered the most influential minds of antiquity. Young colonial students would first begin their training in the classics at the young age of eight years old. Training in the classics began at such a young age for a good reason. That reason was that entrance into any colonial college was dependent upon a well-displayed knowledge of the classics.

The college entrance exams remained consistently focused on the works of the “Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero and poet Virgil, the fourth-century B.C. Athenian statesmen Isocrates or historian Xenophon, the eighth-century B.C. Greek epic poet Homer, and the Greek New Testament” (Richard 13). Since this list was quite standard throughout the colonial educational system, during both the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it is reasonable to conclude that the all of the founders of America were exposed to similar classical authors and figures with whom they themselves could choose to identify.

Adams, though known to be very gifted, did not always enjoy school, which might seem to make his fondness for a figure from history such as Cicero, unlikely. David McCullough relates in his biography of Adams, “He cared not for books or study and saw no sense in talk of college.” Adams recounts in his autobiography:

My Enthusiasm for Sports and Inattention to Books, alarmed Father, and he frequently entered into conversation with me upon the Subject. I told him [I did not?] love Books and wished he would lay aside the thoughts of sending me to Colledge. What would you do Child? Be a Farmer. Well I will shew you what it is to be a Farmer (Butterfield, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams Vol. 3, 257).

Adams’s father allowed John to pursue what he thought were his interests by inviting him to spend a day farming with him. After that experience Adams soon returned to school, evidently finding school more pleasant than farm work.

Adams soon pinpointed his unhappiness at school to the deficiencies of his school master’s lesson plan so he spent his free time teaching himself, “*I believe and applyd myself to it at home alone and went through the whole Course,*

overtook and passed by all the Schollars at School, without any master. I dared not ask my fathers assistance because he would have disliked my Inattention to my Latin" (Butterfield, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams Vol. 3, 258).

Thus on his own, Adams was not interested in Latin and thought his time to be better spent in pursuing mathematics and science. He writes in his autobiography, "My school master neglected to put me into Arithmetick longer than I thought was right, and I resented it" (Butterfield, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams Vol. 3, 258). Again, it seems that any sort of figurative friendship between John Adams and Marcus Tullius Cicero would be highly unlikely, given Adams's early aversion to Latin. It follows then that John Adams felt affection towards Cicero more as a person than as a writer. Adams needed inspiration for a reason to study Latin. In the writings of Cicero, Adams would find common causes with which he could identify. However until Adams studied Cicero, he was not drawn into the classical element of academia. When Adams voiced his dislike of his school master to his father, Adams was soon enrolled with "*Mr. Marsh [who] was the son of a our former Minister of that name, who kept a private Boarding School, but two doors down from my Fathers*" (Butterfield, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 3, 258) and subsequently began adopting a new approach to his Latin studies. Adams's new appreciation for Latin, and for Cicero in particular, is best illustrated in his copy of the book of Cicero's *Orationes*, which he signed "John Adams Book 1749/1750" six times- clearly an item he both valued highly and took great pride in possessing (McCullough 34).

After only a year under the classical guidance and training of Mr. Marsh, Adams soon hesitatingly found himself applying to college:

On the day appointed at Cambridge for the Examination of Candidates for Admission, I mounted my horse and called upon Mr. Marsh, who was to go with me. The Weather was dull and threatened rain. Mr. Marsh said he was unwell and afraid to go out. I must therefore go alone. Thunder struck at this unforeseen disappointment, And terrified at the Thought of introducing myself to such great men as the President and fellows of a Colledge, I at first resolved to return home: but foreseeing the Grief of my father and apprehending he would not only be offended with me, but my Master too whom I sincerely loved, I aroused myself, and collected resolution enough to proceed (Butterfield, Diary and Autobiography of ,John Adams, Vol.3, 259-260).

This passage an entry from John Adams's autobiography was written years after it actually occurred. Despite the time lapse between the actual event and Adams's recollection of it, it is quite clear that Adams's fear of being alone, "I must therefore go alone," is highlighted. This fear of facing the uncertainty of trying to pass the Harvard entrance exam is only accentuated by the way in which Adams remembers the ominous weather, which is perhaps a literary device to mirror the storm-like mix of emotions he had towards the notion of facing the unsure times without companionship. One thing is certain: John Adams was uncertain of himself for his entire life. Coming to know Cicero and Cicero's experience in the Ancient Roman Republic might give Adams a different perspective of his own life. If Adams could see himself in the likeness of a man well known and respected throughout the ages then surely others would take on this view of Adams himself, or at least he hoped this to be true.

Adams's small scale anxiety attack as he approached Cambridge continued to be a typical response to stress. The record shows that Adams graduated from Harvard and went on to do great things. In this chapter I suggest that the model of Cicero helped this awkward man rise above many difficult occasions. The account in his autobiography continues:

The Latin was soon made, I was declared admitted and a theme given me, to write on in the vacation. I was as light when I came home as I had been heavy when I went: my master was well pleased and my parents very happy. I spent the vacation not very profitably chiefly in reading magazines and a British Apollo. I went to college at the end of it and took the chamber assigned me and my place in the class under Mr. Mayhew. I found some better scholars than myself, particularly Lock, Hemmenway, and Tisdale... With these ever I lived in friendship, without jealousy or envy (Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Vol. 3, 259-260).

This passage offers insight into a quality of Adams that would plague him for his entire life. That is the tendency to compare himself with his contemporaries. He writes, "I found some better scholars than myself, particularly Lock, Hemmenway, and Tisdale... With these ever I lived in friendship, without jealousy or envy."

Given the nature of autobiographies, however, one must view the claim that he was neither jealous nor envious with a measure of skepticism. Would he admit this in his own life story? Additionally the comment alone is illustrative of the self-conscious manner with which Adams approached his life. He was always aware of his placement in society and with whom he was competing. This aggressive and competitive nature almost forced Adams to find a friend from antiquity, for if his best friend had been a contemporary, his perceived competition with them would have surely weakened any true emotional connection. Later in his life,

Adams's competitiveness can be seen in his difficulty in accepting that fact that he was not chosen to pen the Declaration of Independence.

As mentioned earlier, Adams was very self-critical and absorbed with his place in colonial society, and he clearly desired power and fame. Cicero also possessed these personal qualities. In an article entitled "John Adams and the Psychology of Power," Robert Calhoun summarizes what becomes apparent after a reading of the numerous volumes of John Adams's diaries, autobiography, and letters:

Adams's liberation from the constraints of childhood, his growing up in Braintree, education at Harvard, first employment in Worcester, profoundly shaped his attitude toward power. His parents gave him Shaw's words, "the gift of freedom"; they set standards, provided encouragement, sacrificed to send him to Harvard but left him alone to find his own identity and role. This liberation from authority coupled with an implicit obligation to rise socially and earn public esteem through public service, made Adams especially self-conscious and self-critical. Freed from the need to obey demanding parents, Adams became highly critical of his own foibles, clumsiness, and lapses from strict discipline and conscious of his own ambition and vanity (Calhoun 522).

Similarly Marcus Tullius Cicero also felt the need to rise above a "non-elite" placement in Roman society in order to achieve the popularity and fame he so desired. Cicero was born in Arpinum in 106 B.C., about seventy miles east of Rome (Bailey 1). He was born to the equestrian class, which was the second highest class in Rome, below the Senators. This spot in the social stratification system allowed Cicero to associate with the senatorial nobility (Williams 2). Surely, John Adams related to this element of Cicero's life. D.R. Shackleton Bailey's summary of Cicero's feelings towards his placement in Roman society is

highly reminiscent of Calhoun's description of John Adams's journey in forming his own identity above, "The complement of Cicero's inner insecurity, whatever its origins, was a dynamic impulse to be first. From a boy, as he wrote his brother, he took his watchword from Homer's Achilles, 'Far to excel, out-topping the rest!' (Shackleton Bailey 5)." It is interesting that like Adams, Cicero, looked towards what would have been a societal hero, Achilles, to help inspire him to rise from his placement in society. It definitely seems that Adams's decision to take Cicero as a model for his own life and for his to climb to the top of colonial society was no mere coincidence: these two shared the same struggle at different times.

Cicero was a *novus homo* in Roman politics. A *novus homo* is defined as "new man; first of his family to hold a Roman senatorial office (Williams 85)." These "new men" had to work especially hard to secure and sustain a position in Roman politics. Those who were born to the Senatorial class did not have to work as hard to maintain a position of society that was theirs by birth. Prestige and authority worked in a similar manner in Colonial America: it was not so much earned as it was something one was born into. This can best be seen with the example of Harvard class placement. A student received their ranking in their academic class based on the "dignity of family" (McCullough 37). The placement was not based on more conventional methods such as alphabetical order or the grades they actually earned. Although, Adams was actually third in his class at Harvard in academic achievement, he graduated with the rank of fourteen out of a class of twenty-five. He might have been dead last in his class, but luckily his

mother was from the Bolyston family and his father a deacon in the clergy which helped his rank in terms of “dignity of family”(McCullough 37).

After his graduation from Harvard in 1755, John Adams once again faced uncertainty: *What should he do with his life?* In his autobiography, Adams alludes to the guilt he felt knowing that his family had to make sacrifices for him to attend college at Harvard:

I was so often requested to read as any other, especially Tragedies, and it was whispered to me circulated among others that I had some faculty for public Speaking and that I should make a better Lawyer than Divine. This Last Idea was easily understood and embraced by me. My inclination was soon fixed upon the Law: But my Judgment was not so easily determined. There were many difficulties in the Way... I had no Money; and my Father having three Sons, had done as much for me, in the Expences of Education as his Estate and Circumstances could justify and as my reason or my honor would allow me to ask (Butterfield, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 3, 263).

From here Adams went on to teach Latin for a year at Worcester before beginning his study of Law in a serious manner. In the diary entries from his time preparing for a career in Law, John Adams expresses his loneliness and unhappiness in a diary entry on Tuesday June 10th, 1760, “I grown habitually indolent and thoughtless. I have scarcely felt a glow, a Pang, a Transport of Ambition, since I left Worcester...” (Butterfield, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol.1, 133). At these times he also feels the most closely connected with his fellow-lawyer-comrade, Cicero.

In a letter dated October- November 1758 to John Wentworth, who was a classmate and friend of Adams from Harvard until the Revolution, where he left

the colonies in exile as a Loyalist (Butterfield, *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, 67), Adams relates that his decision to study law is connected with his “friendship” with Cicero. Adams at this point was studying law so thoroughly and for so many hours of the day that he likens himself to a hermit whose only friends are those that he engages with in his studies. He writes in a letter to John Wentworth in October- November 1758:

My letters, for the future will come to you, not from a School House but from the cell of an Hermit. I am removed from Worcester to Braintree where I lived secluded from all the Cares and Fatigues of busy Life in a Chamber which no mortal Visits but myself except once in a day to make my Bed. A chamber which is furnished in a very curious manner, with all sorts of Hermetical Utensils. Here, no Idea of a Lady, of Diversions, of {gay life} Business or of Pleasure ever enters. Here I read, smoke, think, and sleep. Old Roman Lawyers, and Dutch Commentators are my constant Companions (Butterfield *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, 64).

Here, Adams is clearly feeling alone, shut away from the world he actually lives in. Yet, he is not alone at all, since he has friends in the form of “Old Roman Lawyers, and Dutch Commentators.” Most likely this “Old Roman Lawyer” was none other than Marcus Tullius Cicero, who also worked hard for success in the courts in order to rise in society.

If there is any doubt that the “Old Roman Lawyer” that Adams claims as his companion is Cicero, this doubt is removed by the fact that in the same letter he credits Cicero for determining his career as a lawyer. “And now I have mentioned Studies, I find my self entering an unlimited Field. A field in which Demosthenes, Cicero, and others of immortal Fame have exulted before me! (Butterfield, *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, 65).” This statement is very telling

for many reasons. One reason it is so significant for the relationship between John Adams and Cicero is that it shows that John Adams is directly fashioning himself after Cicero in his decision to become a lawyer. Secondly it illustrates Adams with a career motive: fame. Finally, this desire for fame and grandeur sounds similar to Cicero's decision to emulate Achilles because he was, "Far to excel, out-topping the rest!" (Shackleton Bailey 5)." Despite living in very different times, the two men had much in common. It is no wonder that Adams adopted Cicero as a friend and companion in the moments he doubted himself most.

Important to any friendship is not only admiration, which John Adams surely held for Cicero (especially perhaps for his "immortal fame") but also an appreciation for the other's philosophy on life. In a letter that has no addressee, but is thought to be an exercise on literary technique (Butterfield, *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, 81), Adams expresses his opinion that it is not enough to know mere arbitrary facts about leaders in history but one must understand and engage with their ideas and beliefs to truly know them. He writes:

And I would pay no more Admiration to a man who could [tell] me the exact Highth of Cicero, or the number of Hairs that grew upon his Head, a Pice of Knowledge that I can not now attain, than I would to one who could tell me the exact Numbers of Letters, Comma's and semicolons that are all in his Works, which [I] have the means of knowing. We are not therefore, to measure of Admiration of a man by the Number alone, but by the {Importance, Usefulness and} Utility and Number jointly of the Propositions that he knows, and his dexterity in apply[ing] them to Practice (Butterfield, *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, 71).

This passage illustrates that with the help of Cicero, John Adams began to develop a true appreciation of true achievement. For Adams it is not enough to, at this point to rattle off facts about subjects, but it is more important to understand and familiarize oneself with the ideas and techniques implemented in the minds of those great minds that came before him.

While this thesis thus far has offered ample evidence as to why Adams adopted Cicero as a friend and model on the basis of background and intellectual compatibility, it has not yet shown that Adams chose Cicero because like all true friendships this companionship made him feel “good.” But, indeed the relationship between John Adams and Cicero was good for Adams’s health. In a diary entry dated Thursday December 21st 1758, John Adams acknowledges that as he engages himself with Cicero’s writings he is aware of the positive effects it has on his health. He realizes that reading Cicero is a fun activity for him that offers improvements to his mind and physical well being:

Yesterday and to day I have read loud, Tullius Orations against Catiline. The Sweetness and Grandeur of his sounds and the Harmony of his Numbers give Pleasure enough to reward the Reading if one understood none of his meaning. Besides I find it, a noble Exercise. It exercises my Lungs, raises my spirits opens my Pore[s], quickens the Cirrculations, and so contributes much to health (Butterfield, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 1, 63).

This passage supports the idea that Adams gladly engaged with Cicero because he felt it improved him body and soul. Good relationships are those in which both parties involved are made better by their participation in the friendship. While Cicero could, of course, never benefit from the life and work of John Adams in

the way that Adams was able to benefit from Cicero's, it seems safe to reason that Adams truly felt Cicero to be his friend.

John Adams chose Cicero as his friend. This was no mistake. Adams recognized a similar background with Cicero, identified with the ideas Cicero expressed in his writing, and physically benefited from "contact" with Cicero. By all means the relationship was real to Adams and lived in the back of his mind when he faced uncertain outcomes. Their relationship would change with time, but would always be a constant force to encourage John Adams to pursue his beliefs in uncertain or revolutionary times. This chapter has established why and how Adams and Cicero could achieve this seemingly impossible friendship: the next chapter will reveal how Adams began to relate to Cicero on more mature and professional terms. Soon Cicero, who had helped to encourage Adams to pursue fame and law, would be guiding him through the techniques of courtroom success. Indeed John Adams had uncertain trials ahead as he took on the job of defending British soldiers in the infamous Boston Massacre.

Chapter Two

Adams and Cicero: Partners at Law

As argued in the previous chapter John Adams used the writings of Cicero to help lead him through times of uncertainty. Not only did Cicero's fame motivate Adams to pursue a career in law, but many of the Roman orator's writings and court cases acted as a moral compass for the aspiring lawyer as well. As John Adams climbed his way up the rungs of society in colonial America, using his profession to maneuver his direction, Cicero again played an essential part in Adams's life. Now, however, Adams looked to Cicero as an equal who could provide perspective rather than as a superior or hero he aspired to emulate. John Adams's success as a lawyer in Boston, Massachusetts was very much connected with his continuing relationship with Cicero, as seen through his diaries, biography, autobiography, and especially the pivotal Boston Massacre trial.

After teaching Latin for a year in Worcester, Massachusetts John Adams turned to the project of building a successful career in the more cosmopolitan city of Boston. In order to build a number of clients and establish his name in a new and uncertain place he looked to establish connections with others involved in the legal field. Adams did this by joining a law club, but not just any law club; this club concentrated its efforts on "The Feudal Law and Cicero." In a diary entry written on Thursday January 24th 1765 Adams relates:

We accordingly met the next evening, Mr. Gridley, Fitch, and I, and spent the whole Evening. Proposals were to read a Reign and the statutes of that Reign, to read Hurds Dialogues and any new Pieces. But at last we

determined to read The Feudal Law and Cicero only, least we should loose sight of our main object, by attending too many (Butterfield, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 1 , 251).

Later in the same day he remarks that he expects “the greatest Pleasure from this sodality, that I ever had in my Life- and a pleasure too, that will not be painfull to my Reflection (Butterfield, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 1, 253).” This statement once again strengthens the case that Adams’s association with Cicero was one that brought him happiness and that he voluntarily sought out. He closes this diary entry with a witty exchange he had read between Milo and Cicero, which coincidentally relates to a case most illustrative in establishing the idea of “self-defense” for the Boston Massacre Trials. He recounts in his diary:

Milo was condemned and went into Banishment, at Marseilles. There he afterwards read the oration, which had been corrected and polished for his perusal and sent to him by Cicero, for a Present and Amusement. Reading it, he broke, “si sic ejecisses Marce Tulli barbato Pisces non comedissem” (“ Thus if you had thus given [a favorable speech], Marcus Tullius, I would not have consumed bearded fish”)- for he has been eating a sort of bearded fishes found at Marseilles (Butterfield, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 1, 253, translation by Ashley Hanson).

This is a notable inclusion in John Adams’s diary because it shows not only that John Adams had been reading texts by and about Cicero after his college education, but also that he was reading it for his own reasons. From this diary entry it seems that Adams continued to read Cicero because he found him entertaining.

One of the best examples of Cicero’s influence on John Adams’s career as a lawyer that illustrates the particular significance of Cicero, particularly, is

Cicero's defense of Milo during the Boston Massacre trial. From the difficult decision to defend the British soldiers to the need Adams felt to alleviate any sense of guilt a patriotic jury may have felt in acquitting the British soldiers, Cicero was a constant source of reason and guidance as Adams faced ethical dilemmas. In his article "*Pro Militibus Oratio: John Adams's Imitation of Cicero in the Boston Massacre Trial*," James Michael Farrell, elucidates connections between John Adams's defense during the Boston Massacre Trials and the works of Cicero. Adams's implementation of Cicero's *Pro Sexto Roscio*, *Pro Milone*, and *De Officiis* in forming his defense, beautifully illustrates that as Adams's role in his world had progressed, so too had his relationship with Cicero.

The Boston Massacre occurred on the evening of March 5, 1770 on the snowy King street of Boston, Massachusetts. Sometime after nine o'clock a lone British sentry, who had been posted at the Customs House began to be harassed by a small group of colonial men. At the toll of a church bell, groups of men began to gather and the harassment from what had been a small group of colonial men turned into utter torment with several hundred men shouting, cursing, and pelting the British soldier with objects. Eight other British soldiers with loaded muskets and bayonets soon joined the one British soldier. In the midst of this entire hubbub shots were fired by the British soldiers, which ultimately killed five colonial men (McCullough 66).

John Adams relates his memory of the night of the Boston Massacre in his autobiography:

The Year 1770 was memorable enough, in these little Annals of my Pilgrimage. The evening of the fifth of March, I spent at Mr. Henderson Inches's House at the South End of Boston, in company with a Clubb, with whom I had been associated for several Years. About nine O Clock We were alarmed with the ringing of bells, and supposing it to be the Signal of fire, We snatched out Hats and Cloaks aiding our friends who might be in danger. In the street we were informed that the British Soldiers had fired on the Inhabitants, killed some and wounded others near the Town house (Butterfield, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams vol. 3, 291).

The fact that John Adams recounts with such detail the night of the event of the Boston Massacre suggests just how influential this event was in shaping his career. The Boston Massacre acts as a turning point in Adams's career in many ways. For Adams, a leader in the patriotic cause, the decision to defend the British soldiers (with success) was a very risky career move. Adams, however, was able to take these risks to further his career by following the guidance of Cicero.

Cicero Convinces Adams to Take the Case

It is important to note how unpopular a case this was for John Adams to take on. Also, given Adams's self-conscious and self-critical tendencies, it is all the more surprising he would choose to pursue a path unpopular with the public. Adams was very aware of the risk he was taking when he agreed to defend the British soldiers, yet it seems that his understanding of Cicero was crucial in giving him the confidence to make his decision. He relates in his autobiography the situation in which no legal representative in Boston wished to defend the British soldiers except for himself:

The next morning I think it was, Mr. Forrest came in, who was then called the Irish Infant. I had some acquaintance with him. With tears streaming from his Eyes, he said I am come with a very solemn Message from a very unfortunate Man, Captain Preston in Prison. He wishes for council, and can get none. I have waited on Mr. Quincy, who says he will engage if you will give him your Assistance; without it positively he will not. Even Mr. Auchmuty declines unless you will engage... I had no hesitation in answering that Council ought to be the very last thing an accused Person should want in a free Country. That the bar ought in my opinion to be independent and impartial at all Times and in every Circumstance (Butterfield, Papers of John Adams, Vol.3, 293).

Who could Adams have looked to that could offer guidance in a similar situation-- namely the refusal to offer legal services to alleged murders with the fear of a public uproar? Obviously none of Adams's peers were willing to risk their public image by providing the defense in the context of such a politically charged case. Here, we can consider Cicero and the description of Sextus Roscius in *Pro Roscio*. Just as in the case of Captain Preston, no one during Cicero's time wanted to defend Sextus Roscius (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 236).

The trial of Sextus Roscius took place in 80 B.C. The defendant had been accused of murdering his father. Though most people in Roman society believed Roscius to be innocent, no one was willing to defend him (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 236). The hesitation in defending Roscius derived from the fact that he had been accused of murdering his father by men who worked for the dictator, Sulla. The evidence pointed to the fact that Roscius did not commit parricide, yet no one wanted this case for fear they would seem to be challenging the dictator. Many refused the case fearing that if they were seen as opposing Sulla, they

might themselves be wrongly accused of a crime. Cicero, however, took the case and defended Roscius with success (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 237).

The parallels between these two cases are striking. Adams, who was very concerned with his image, needed something or someone to validate his decision to take on such a risk. From his reading of Cicero's *De Officiis*, Adams was able to convince himself that the unpopular route is not necessarily the wrong choice—just the harder route on which to travel. He only had to approach this case by viewing Preston as Roscius (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 237). In his autobiography, Adams alludes to the fact that these were uncertain times and that British soldiers, though not popular, had not yet become outright enemies in the colonies. At this time the Revolutionary War was not inevitable. Thus there is no doubt that to many Bostonians, the British soldiers were an unwelcome presence. As Farrell notes, “The threat to their lives came as much from the politics of the time as from the criminal charges against them. The political power of the Sons of Liberty intimidated other Boston attorneys the way Sulla's power had frightened all the Roman advocates of Cicero's time (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 237).”

Cicero took on the case of defending Roscius as a public service, and as a way to move into the public spotlight. In many ways Adams felt the same way about his decision to defend Preston and the soldiers (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 238). This is reflected in a diary entry three years after the Boston Massacre dated “Friday” March 5th 1773:

The part I took in Defense of Captn. Preston and the Soldiers procured me Anxiety, and Obloquy enough. It was however, one of the most gallant, generous, manly and disinterested Actions of my whole Life, and one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered my Country (Butterfield, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 2, 79).

In remembering his decision to defend the British Soldiers he notably uses the terms “manly” and “disinterested actions” which were ideals and terms at the core of many of Cicero’s writings. Adams also feels that his defense of the British soldiers was a “generous” action. In his autobiography he writes of the small amount of money he received for the trial and the fact that given the critical nature of the trial he was literally risking his career for a small sum:

Before or after the Tryal, Preston sent me ten Guineas more, which were all the fees ever received or were offered to me, and I should not have said any thing on the subject to my Clients if they had never offered me any Thing. This was all the pecuniary Reward I ever had for fourteen or fifteen days labour, in the most exhausting and fatiguing Causes I ever tried: for hazarding a Popularity very general and very hardly earned, and for incurring a Clamour and popular Suspicions and prejudices, which are not yet worn out and never will be forgotten as long as History of this Period is Read. For the Experience of all my Life has proved to me, that the Memory of Malice is faithfull, and more, it continually adds to its Stock; while that of Kindness and Friendship is not only frail but treacherous (Butterfield, The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol. 3, 294).

This statement is very characteristic of John Adams, reflecting back on his life and career in his autobiography. At the same time it illuminates how Adams was using Cicero in his law career when Adams had been younger. Farrell quotes Conyers Middleton’s biography of Cicero and states that Cicero’s defense of Roscius was a “noble lesson to all advocates, to apply their talents to the

protection of innocence and injured virtue; and to make justice not profit, the rule end of their labours (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 238).” Additionally this excerpt from Adams’s autobiography regarding lack of payment in the Boston Massacre trial introduces a theme which I will develop later in this thesis: the insecurity of Adams at the end of his life and the way in which Cicero offered comfort in the face of this insecurity.

Cicero Instructs Adams on a Defense

Cicero not only convinced Adams to take on an unpopular defense in the Boston Massacre trial and to take very little payment for it, but he was also instrumental in the construction of Adams’s defense on behalf of Preston and the other soldiers. Adams knew that the soldiers had killed colonial civilians. But were these acts committed out of murderous inclination or in self-defense in the face of an angry, hateful, and threatening mob? Adams knew he had to convince the public of the latter. The fact that men died was indisputable, but there surely was a way to convince the court that if the soldiers had not taken the actions they had, they would have themselves been killed. In order to make the idea of “self-defense” palatable to an angry public, Adams drew upon the methods implemented by Cicero in his *Pro Milone* (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 238).

The situation in which Cicero defended Milo in *Pro Milone* in 52 B.C. was as politically charged and controversial as the situation Adams faced in defending Preston and the British soldiers. Publius Clodius was a mob leader who had Cicero exiled out of Rome. Titus Annius Milo, was another gang leader

in Rome and also the premier political opponent to Clodius. Milo had also supported Cicero's return to Rome from his previous exile. On January 18th 52 B.C., on the Appian Way, Milo and his followers killed Clodius (Petersson 336). Those men who followed Clodius were outraged by the actions of Milo and his men, making this a very heated situation. Cicero, naturally felt inclined to defend Milo, since Clodius had exiled Cicero out of Rome and Milo had fought for Cicero's return in his absence (Petersson 321). At the same time, it was merely a case of one angry mob vs. another angry mob. Here, Cicero knew he needed to convince the jury that Milo and his men were acting in self-defense against Clodius, just as Adams had to convince his jury that Preston and his men issued shots only in self-defense (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 239).

How could Adams build his case for self-defense? In the same way that Cicero does in *Pro Milone*. Cicero accomplishes his goal by showing that some types of murder are justifiable. Cicero's argument is based on the fact that the citizens who were killed were of the less savory types of society, i.e. murderers, robbers, criminals: and that these sort of murders were not uncommon throughout history. Thus Cicero had to illustrate that Clodius was indeed a "mob ruler" and his death resulted from another's act of "self-defense" (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 239). Adams, in his case, also had to show that there were already many examples in colonial and British history where murders could be considered justified based on circumstance. Adams argues before the jury in Preston's defense speech, "The fact, was the slaying of five unhappy persons that night; you are to consider, whether it was justifiable, excusable, or felonious;

and if felonious, whether it was murder or manslaughter (Butterfield, Papers of John Adams, Vol. 3, 244).” He then goes on to define self-defense as it had been considered “justifiable” in previous court cases. He uses these definitions in a way that fits the case of the Boston Massacre Trial. Preston and the soldiers, he argues, were merely defending themselves while fulfilling their duty. He tries to make his argument as accessible to the “common man” as possible:

If a robber meets me in the street, and commands me to surrender my purse, I have a right to kill without asking questions; if a person commits a bare assault on me, this will not justify killing, but if he assaults me in such a manner, as to discover an intention to kill me, I have a right to destroy him, that I may put it out of his power to kill me (Butterfield, Papers of John Adams, Vol. 3, 244).

This sort of rhetoric, in which the description becomes very personalized to the listener, is very similar to what Cicero implemented in *Pro Milone*. In both cases, the subject who does the killing is upholding the law against someone breaking the law (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 239). It was Cicero’s goal to make the case as clear as possible. Clodius was acting as a vicious tyrant, someone whom Milo had probable reason to fear. Similarly, Adams chose to take the same route in painting the mob of the Boston Massacre in the worst light possible, so it would be easier for the jury to sympathize with the actions taken.

In *Pro Milone* Cicero argues that Clodius’s behavior is consistent with that of someone who has the intention of carrying out an attack. Adams, likewise, worked to manipulate the situation of the Boston Massacre to make the colonial mob seem as vicious as Cicero’s Clodius. Cicero makes the point in *Pro Milone* that prior to his meeting with Milo on the Appian Way, Clodius had been

assembling men (his gang) for an attack, and that he had waited on the Appian road with the intent to attack Milo. Adams tried to characterize the mob on King Street in as threatening a light as possible, he highlighted their class and racial differences asserting that, the mob was “most probably a motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes, and mulattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tarrs- and why we should scruple to call such a set of people a mob, I can’t conceive unless the name is too respectable for them (Butterfield, Papers of John Adams, Vol. 3, 266).” Adams implies that the mob was indeed organized and threatening in appearance. In the context of self defense for Adams, Crispus Attucks became the most threatening figure in the mob (Farrell, Pro Militibus Oratio, 244). Adams uses Attucks’s race to convince the jury that the British soldiers had reason to be on the defensive. Moreover, Adams also portrays Attucks as a wily character, eager to attack, and he claims that Attucks serves as the best chief representation of the mob on the night of March 5th, 1770. Adams is very careful to establish the passivity of the soldiers and highlight the crazed intentions of Attucks, following the example of Cicero’s depiction of Clodius:

It is plain the soldiers did not leave their station, but cried to the people, stand off: now to have this reinforcement coming down under the command of a stout Molatto fellow, whose very looks, was enough to terrify an person, what had not the soldiers then to fear? He had hardiness enough to fall in upon them, and with one hand took hold of a bayonet, and with the other knocked the man down: This was the behaviors of Attucks;- to whose mad behaviour, in all probability, the dreadful carnage of that night is chiefly to be ascribed (Butterfield, Papers of John Adams Vol. 3, 269).

Clearly Adams had taken the advice of Cicero to heart. He did exactly as Cicero had done in presenting the situation as a case of good vs. evil and drawing the

contrasts in the starkest terms possible given the historical context. Adams was aware of the racial tensions of the time and knew that by playing up the fact that Attucks was mixed in race, he could actually convince the jury to find him “terrifying.” Attucks became the modern day Clodius to his Boston Jury and Adams successfully defended Preston despite a highly unfavorable political climate.

Cicero Teaches Adams how to Absolve the Jury’s Patriotic Guilt

As noted earlier, Cicero was the only lawyer to defend Sextus Roscius on the charge of parricide. This was because no one wanted to be viewed as challenging Sulla and risk banishment or even death. Therefore Cicero had the challenge of successfully defending Roscius in a manner that absolved himself from blaming Sulla directly. Cicero needed Roscius to be acquitted in a manner that did not make Sulla look guilty. Implicating Sulla would have put Cicero himself in danger (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 246). Adams faced a similar dilemma. He needed to convince the jury that Preston and the other British soldiers were innocent without offending the patriotic cause. In many ways the colonial public saw the mob in the Boston Massacre as expressing a general sentiment felt in Boston at the time, namely, that the British soldiers were not welcome and that the British were abusing their authority. How could Adams get an innocent verdict for the British soldiers and not be seen as harming the patriotic cause, of which he himself was a staunch supporter? Again he looked to Cicero for an example to follow (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 246).

Cicero's problem had been to find a way to avert blame from Sulla (and ultimately save himself from punishment), and his solution was to shift the origin of the accusation from Sulla to someone else: Titus Roscius and Chrysogonus. These men were known as cronies of Sulla. Cicero carefully constructed a case where these two were seen as bad seeds in Sulla's administration. That way if Roscius was found innocent, which he was, Sulla would not be made to look manipulative or vindictive, allowing the jury to find Roscius innocent without having to fear the repercussions. Adams implemented a very similar strategy. In order to create an environment where a patriotic jury would not feel guilty finding the British innocent, he worked to create a huge disparity between the general populace of Boston and those who participated in the mob activity on the evening of March 5th, 1770 (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 246). As shown earlier, Adams depicted the mob as monstrous, full of ruffians, and low-lives of the Boston populace. Clearly no member of Boston society would willingly group himself with this type of person, not even mentally. Thus by creating a gap in the Boston perception of "self" and "other," the jury could find the mob guilty, while still considering themselves supporters of liberty and independence (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 247).

Adams Catches Ciceronian Fever

One of the harder to believe, yet more interesting points James M. Farrell makes in his article is the idea that Cicero and Adams suffer the same physical effects from their trials. Just as Cicero was suffering physical exhaustion after defending Sextus Roscius, so too did Adams suffered physical exhaustion

following his defense of Preston and his men. Farrell points out that in his *Life of Cicero*, Plutarch mentions that Cicero was ill and that he, “went abroad to Greece, after giving it out that the journey was being made for the sake of his health... he was thin and under weight and had such a poor digestion that he could only manage to take a little light food late in the day (Farrell, *Pro Militibus Oratio*, 248, quoting Plutarch *Life of Cicero*).” Interestingly, following Adams’s trial, Adams journeyed back to Braintree, Massachusetts for a little rest and relaxation himself:

The complicated Cares of my legal and political Engagements, the slender Diet to which I was obliged to confine myself, the Air of the Town of Boston which was not favourable to me who had been born and passed almost all my life in the Country; but especially the constant Obligation to speak in public almost every day for many hours, had exhausted my health, brought on a pain in my Breast and a complaint in my Lungs, which seriously threatened my Life and compelled me, to throw off a great part of the Load of Business in both public and private, and return to my farm in the Country (Butterfield, *The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Vol . 3, 296).

The descriptions of their illnesses are oddly similar. Both suffered from exhaustion, had lost their appetites, and sought a remedy by traveling to different environments. Although it seems natural that one would suffer from mental and physical exhaustion following a stressful court case, perhaps, it is notable that Adams had so closely aligned his method of defense with Cicero’s that he also consciously or subconsciously aligned his approach to life with that of Cicero. Adams never gives any indication that he is inspired to take a vacation because it was what Cicero did at the end of his trial, but it does seem to fit into Adams’s

ever-so-subtle emulation of Cicero. While Farrel's comparison can be seen as merely a coincidence, it is a thought provoking coincidence.

Earlier in John Adams's life, Cicero had been someone from whom to draw inspiration. Now, however, John Adams saw himself on more equal terms with his Roman colleague in the profession of law. It is evident that Adams was well read in Cicero and that he cherished his writing on both a professional and personal level. Adams consistently turned to the works of Cicero because they offered him entertainment, advice, and more importantly, companionship.

As a young man, Adams had faced personal uncertainty: *What should I do with my life? How can I achieve eternal fame?* Now, Adams, as his own world became more uncertain with the threat of a Revolution on the horizon, he wondered: *Am I still a patriot if I defend the British? Will this case cost me positive public standing?* At both points in Adams's life, Cicero though silent and far removed from 1770, was able to answer these questions. As Adams aged, the influence Cicero had on his life did not wane, but took on its most important meaning. In the final chapter I consider the way in which Cicero offered a voice of reason, a source of solace, as John Adams reflected on his life accomplishments and worried about his public perception and legacy.

Chapter Three

Marcus Tullius Cicero: A Source of Solace

John Adams's relationship with Cicero developed over time. As Adams's personal goals changed and began to take shape, it is clear that his perception of Cicero also developed. But throughout his life Cicero was there, first as an inspiration, then a friend and advisor, and finally a confidant. Whether found in Adams's legal papers, diary entries, or correspondences, Cicero's guidance in some form was essential to Adams's thinking. As Adams aged, his thoughts became increasingly self-reflective. While it is no secret that John Adams was very conscious of his image and his role in society throughout his life, he seems to have become increasingly consumed with the legacy that he would leave behind. He was concerned at the end of his life not only with being a part of history but also with his ability to control his role in it. Evidence of his desire to control the public perception of his part in history is suggested in the fact that he wrote an autobiography. Writing an autobiography gave him a chance to give his own account of the more colorful moments of his life, which were numerous given the times of revolution in which he lived. Writing an autobiography gave him all of these advantages with the wisdom of hindsight.

John Adams's diary and autobiography support the idea that Adams's relationship with Cicero became more personal as he entered his later years. It was in these twilight years, beginning in 1804, when he began writing his unfinished autobiography, that Adams had time to reflect on the more monumental achievements of his life. Evidence points to the fact that at times he

felt he did not receive his due credit. A moment in Adams's life about which he himself seems unsure of his historical role is during the debate surrounding the signing and the actual writing of The Declaration of Independence. In his inner struggle, Cicero helped solidify in John Adams's mind the idea that he was a meaningful founding father, even if history has allowed more credit to fall on the shoulders of his contemporaries. This solidification of Adams's role was because in Adams's observation of Cicero, he recognized the theme of the "lone-wolf hero." Adams felt as though he made sacrifices in popularity for the sake of long-term fame (Richard 63). As Cicero's model helped affirm Adams's role in the Declaration of Independence, the elder statesman also became "part of the family," as seen in the education John Adams offered his son. This idea is seen in the numerous references Adams makes to his desire that John Quincy Adams be taught Cicero. These comments suggest that Adams wanted Cicero's guidance to remain an essential aspect of his family's thinking for generations.

Finally, in Adams's retirement he writes about his proclivity to read Cicero again and again. At this point we can ask, "*Why did Adams fill his final days rereading the ideas which filled the early days of his youth?*" I would argue it was not some haphazard decision to revisit Cicero in his retirement, but these re-readings act as a therapeutic conversation with a man whom Adams felt would have understood the intention of his life and career. It is clear at this point that Cicero was not just a source of inspiration, a source of legal counseling, or a source of escapism, but rather he was also a source of solace in contending with what Adams perceived to be his own *uncertain* legacy.

Thomas Jefferson will always be known as the man who penned *The Declaration of Independence*. This fact bothered John Adams very much. John Adams was one of the most vociferous men involved in discussing the ideas that are at the heart of The Declaration of Independence, yet he was not given the responsibility of writing the document. During the debates, Adams hotly contested Mr. Dickinson who fiercely opposed any movement toward independence. In his autobiography, Adams writes that after Dickinson spoke so eloquently no one had the nerve to stand up in defense of colonial independence except himself:

It has been said by some of our Historians, that I began by an Invocation to the God of Eloquence. This is Misrepresentation. Nothing so puerile as this fell from me. I began by saying that this was the first time of my Life that I had ever wished for the Talents and Eloquence of the ancient Orators of Greece and Rome, For I was very sure that none of them ever had before him a question of more Importance to his Country and to the World... Mr. Edward Rutledge came to me and said laughing, Nobody will speak but you, upon this Subject... (Butterfield, *The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Vol. 3, 397).

It is apparent from this excerpt that Adams was very much aware of the fact that he supported independence with greater energy. At a time when other representatives were afraid to push for a break from England, John Adams was not. This made him an important force at these debates. He wanted to be remembered for his words on independence. Yet the words of The Declaration of Independence are not attributed to John Adams, but rather Thomas Jefferson. It is not that the words of the Declaration of Independence do not belong to Jefferson, but rather that his document includes the ideas of many men. Indeed,

it seems Adams had reason to feel slighted and concerned over his legacy in history.

Additionally, the passage just quoted highlights John Adams's tendency to look towards the classics in daunting moments. No one wanted to follow Dickinson's well-argued points, which suggested the colonies remain British subjects. Adams, however, garnered personal strength by imagining himself to be one of the great Orators of Greece or Rome. Although, he did not explicitly say so here, there definitely seems to be reason to think that even at this moment John Adams thought of himself in a Ciceronian likeness.

Many sources give conflicting accounts of just how Adams felt about Jefferson being given the honor of writing *The Declaration of Independence*. For instance in a letter to Benjamin Rush on the 21st of June, 1811, he writes regarding not receiving the honor, "I always considered it as a Theatrical Show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that; *i.e.* all the Glory of it (Old Family Letters Pg. 287)." In his autobiography, though, he seems less bitter towards Jefferson. In fact, he makes it seem as though he gave the honor of writing *The Declaration of Independence* to Jefferson because it would be accepted more readily written by someone from Virginia and not the ever-problematic-Sons-of-Liberty-crying-Massachusetts, as the colony was known to the other colonies during the debates. Adams writes of Jefferson in his autobiography, "There were more reasons than one. Mr. Jefferson had the Reputation of a masterly Pen. He had been chosen as a delegate in Virginia, in consequence of a very handsome public Paper, which he had written for the

House of Burgesses, which had given him the Character of a fine writer (Butterfield, *The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, Vol. 3, 336).” As seen here, John Adams is not as bitter as he is in his letter to Rush: however, as noted earlier his autobiography may have been a tool to fashion the image he desired.

It would seem natural for John Adams to be upset about not having been chosen to author The Declaration of Independence. Despite the fact that his autobiography suggests that he was resigned to the decision, most historians agree that it was hard for John Adams to accept that he was not given the responsibility to write it. Adams takes a moment to interrupt the narrative of his autobiography to account for what he interprets as his unpopularity:

Here I will interrupt the narration for a moment to observe that all I have ever read from the history of Greece and Rome, England, and France and all I have observed at home, and abroad, the Eloquence in public Assemblies is not the surest road, to Fame and Preferment, at least unless it be used with great caution, very rarely and with great Reserve (Butterfield, *The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* Vol. 3, 336).

This is an interesting excerpt because John Adams hints at the fact that he considers himself to be a great orator, but this is not a determining force in all situations. It is notable that he uses his autobiography to promote his skills at oratory because this directly aligns him with Cicero, the most famous orator of Roman history. It seems that even in his subconscious thoughts Cicero is never far from Adams’s mind.

Carl Richard summarizes Adams’s view of himself in relationship to Cicero very well in his book *The Founders and the Classics*. He notes:

While no other founder yearned so much for popularity, none so continually sacrificed it to a strict code of ethics. It is not fanciful to suppose that, when making such painful decisions, Adams found

consolation in contemplating the Roman statesman's sacrifices and the eternal glory they had earned him (Richard 62).

Adams's relationship with Cicero did not end with the close of the Revolution. John Adams filled the months before he assumed the presidency in 1797 reading Cicero's essays (Richard 61). There are not many examples of Adams referencing Cicero during his presidency, but surely Cicero's ideas on mixed government and public service played a part in Adams's administration. Just two years after he left the presidency, in 1803, he used Cicero to help him express what it meant to be a public servant:

Such a man will devote himself entirely to the republic, nor will he covet power or riches... He will adhere closely to justice and equity, that, provided he can preserve these virtues, although he may give offence and create enemies by them, he will set death itself at defiance rather than abandon his principles (Richard 61).

Adams seems to have exemplified this description put forth by Cicero. Even if Adams's critics do not feel that Adams devoted himself "entirely" to his country, there is evidence which suggests that Adams felt he had given "offence and create[d] enemies" by always standing up for his convictions.

It seems clear that for enjoyment Adams read Cicero long after he stepped down from public service and was retired. In his biography of Adams, David McCullough writes that, "He had read Cicero's essays on growing old gracefully, *De Senectute*, for seventy years, to the point of nearly knowing it by heart... (McCullough 629)." The time to which McCullough is referring is sometime after Abigail Adams had died in 1818, and John Adams, retired and

living on his farm, was feeling most alone in his old age. It is interesting to note that at a younger age Adams had confided in his diary how reading Cicero had been beneficial to his physical health. Here, in his older age, Cicero is offering Adams comfort in the process of aging. It does indeed seem this was a lifelong friendship. Adams felt his knowledge of Cicero to be valuable, and he wanted to make sure his children were introduced to Cicero as well.

While Adams always seemed to consider Cicero as a source of solace in his trying times, he also wanted to make sure that his relationship with Cicero was passed on to his children and family for generations to come. When Adams was sent as a delegate to France his son John Quincy Adams accompanied him. Here the older Adams wasted no time in making sure that his boy attended to his studies. So what did John Adams teach his son? Cicero of course! On the voyage to France John Adams helped young Quincy in his translation of Cicero's first speech against Catiline (Richard 32). He wrote in his diary on April 25th, 1779 of the time he spent teaching the classics to his son:

Are these classical amusements becoming my situation? Are not courts, camps, politics, and war more proper for me? No; certainly, classical amusements are the best I can obtain on board ship, and here I cannot do any thing or contrive any thing for the public (Adams, Vol. 3, 197).

Cicero was the preeminent author in Latin Classical literature. Cicero was a key author in the colonial education curriculum (Richard 23). If it is true that parents want the best for their children, John Adams felt he was teaching John Quincy Adams the best he could offer when he taught him Cicero. In fact John Adams insisted upon Cicero being the focal point of his son's education.

In 1781 John Adams expressed a deep concern that his son was not receiving a proper classical education. Adams's main grievance was that Quincy was not learning enough Demosthenes and Cicero. How funny it is to think that Adams himself at a young age had preferred the "mathematics and sciences!" In a letter written to John Quincy Adams on May 29th, 1781 Adams wrote: "I absolutely insist upon it, that you begin upon Demosthenes and Cicero (Butterfield, Adams Family Correspondence, Vol. 4, 144)."

What does this mean to the relationship of Adams and Cicero? Adams knew that Cicero was a timeless orator and that his writing would always be available. Knowing this, he wanted to develop in his son the understanding that he could also find a companion, a voice of reason, with Cicero. Adams saw Cicero as a tool to navigating the hardships of life. He wanted young Quincy to have the same tool as he approached his own uncertainties. Adams's decision to ensure his son know Cicero's words clearly indicate the pedestal on which Adams had placed his "friendship" with Cicero.

In conclusion, Cicero acted as a source of encouragement to a man who was often too hard on himself. In company with Cicero, however, Adams seems to have been able to see himself in his best light. Adams wanted to be the great orator of his time and have the eternal fame that Cicero achieved in his life. Although he did not know it when he was alive, Adams was very successful in his emulation of Cicero in many ways. Yes, there were other classical figures that influenced Adams but no other figure could respond to his perceived failures in the way Cicero could. Adams thought he had made unappreciated sacrifices for

the future of his country, and he saw a similar situation with Cicero and the fall of the Republic. Both men were extremely passionate about their views, but were not always able to implement them in the manner they so longed for. Though there are many differences between these two men, it is difficult to imagine the figure of John Adams without his friend Cicero.

Conclusion

While living in a revolutionary time, the founding fathers, needed someone they could trust to give them a direction. They could no longer look to England, whose leading exponents had abused the trust of their relationship. Who was there to fill this void? Who professed the ideals that they wanted their new country to uphold? It should come as little surprise that the founders formed relationships with figures in the past who had become idealized over the centuries for their “humanity,” as Machiavelli expressed earlier. As I have argued, John Adams created in his mind a person to be there for him in his darkest hours. First friends, then partners in business, and finally confidants is a very basic summary of one way in which a historian can characterize the connection between John Adams and Cicero.

During the research for this project I found myself asking a lot of questions. One question in particular was most striking: Would John Adams have been John Adams had he not been “introduced” to the ideas and works of Cicero? While there is no way to know for certain, I find myself leaning toward the notion that he would definitely have been different.

Another interesting idea that the relationship of John Adams and Cicero brings to light is the idea of understanding the motives of our leaders. In today’s society, iconic figures have as instrumental a role in the minds of leaders as Cicero did on John Adams. Understanding and recognizing where ideas originate

can allow for a more informed views of current situations and possible directions current leaders may wish to pursue.

This brings me to Bernard Bailyn's assessment of classical receptions and the founders. I am quite certain that he would consider that this thesis gives too much credit to what was, in his opinion, actually "window dressing." Yet his reasoning does not remain unchallengable when compared with this thesis. Bailyn argues that the founders used the classics primarily to give their arguments weight, yet this does not agree entirely with my research. While Adams definitely used Cicero in establishing an argument in the Boston Massacre trial, he never uses his name, only his ideas, to formulate his own defense strategy. Moreover Adams's relationship with Cicero is mostly personal, not something he is publishing, but rather something that is acting as an impetus to become a lawyer and to accept his life's accomplishments. I understand Bailyn's point was that the common colonial man did not think of Cicero or Demosthenes when he fought for independence. While in many respects that is true, I am also aware of the influence the founding fathers held in their respective colonies. Knowing this it seems that their ties to antiquity would have infiltrated the minds of the majority of the colonial population. John Adams and Cicero make that case too well.

As I close I acknowledge that my image of Adams has changed. He is not the stodgy, grumpy, and stern man that he is so often characterized as. Rather the image is much more complex. While I have found those unfavorable characterizations to be true in some regards, I have also discovered a man who

deeply loved his country and felt alone in the fight for its independence. As I read the works of John Adams now, “I lose myself in them. I forget all my troubles; I am not afraid of poverty or death...”

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