

# *Mania for Freedom:*

## American Literatures of Enthusiasm, 1776-1865

- This project analyzes “political enthusiasm” as a literary and historical discourse in antebellum American culture. With studies on the American Revolution, Native American resistance, slave rebellion, and the Civil War, I tell a new story about the formation and development of the early national period that foregrounds “enthusiasm” as a structure of feeling—a fervor for freedom—linked to projects of democratic dissent.
- In my research, I discover that a distinct, but overlooked, literary genre flourished in this era that transformed acts of literature into a species or inciter of enthusiastic dissent—what I call “literatures of enthusiasm.” My archival findings promise to open up a new field of study on enthusiasm and literature.



At at high point in the sectional crisis over slavery, John H. Bufford's 1857 chromolithograph of the Boston Massacre foregrounds the event's first victim, Crispus Attucks, a runaway (or former) slave. Thus, he links the abolitionist politics of black freedom back to the colonial resistance to British tyranny that sparked the American Revolution.



In this Confederate cartoon of 1863, “Worship of the North,” the Union is sacrificed on an altar of fanatical causes, including “Negro Worship,” “Socialism,” and “Rationalism.” This is one of many images that show the Confederate South viewed the Civil War as a revolutionary convulsion of the United States led by political enthusiasts.

Thanks to the FYAP grant, I not only completed this project but also recently received an advance publishing contract from University of North Carolina Press.

John Mac Kilgore, Department of English,  
jmkilgore@fsu.edu