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### Van Horn, Jennifer. 2017. *The Power of Objects in Eighteenth-Century British America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press

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illuminating the history from below, for those in the past who did not leave written records or were marginalized by society or education. The fields of social, cultural, and gender history all can be enhanced with historians widening their gaze to include objects.

Hannan and Longair offer some guidance in determining the “value” of objects, from financial to emotional, and how the “biography” of an object can be revealed with research, but more space could be devoted in the book to what happens to objects and artifacts as they move from generation to generation, with succeeding narratives infusing objects with new meaning. A different set of narratives is ascribed to objects when they enter the museum or other environments to become parts of permanent collections.

While the book’s “how-to” directions can be a little clunky at times, I recommend this slim guide for undergraduate and graduate students, and it would be a helpful primer for museum specialists grappling with the many meanings of their artifact collections. Unfortunately, while much is covered in the book, the authors do not speculate as to where material culture studies are going. Despite being published in 2017, there

is almost no discussion of technology like 3D printing. This technology represents a potential for disruption in the field if objects can simply be printed and act as replicas of the original. How does this problematize the value of objects? The authors might have drawn on archivists and museum professionals for some guidance. To take one example from that field, should an original analogue video format be preserved or the remastered, digital version? Some of these cross-disciplinary questions from the world of cultural conservation might have helped elucidate some of the questions that are emerging around 3D printing. Moreover, the opportunity for engaging in digital scanning, whereby objects can be visually manipulated and viewed from any angle in digital platforms is changing how researchers can access material culture objects from museum’s holdings.

Despite these omissions, Hannan and Longair offer much insight into the complex lives and afterlives of objects, and they deliver focused ways for how student historians might augment or even supplant the textual record with that of the object, and how such a study can help them better understand aspects of the past.

## MARTIN HUBLEY

Review of

Van Horn, Jennifer. 2017. *The Power of Objects in Eighteenth-Century British America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Pp. 456, 11 colour plates, 130 B&W illustrations, notes and index. ISBN 978-1-4696-2956-8, \$49.95.

*The Power of Objects* posits that assemblages of objects were a means by which regional and then national identities developed in the major ports of British America, particularly before and after the American Revolution. The consumption and production of material culture by elites, including the upwardly-mobile middling sort such as merchants, planters, politicians, and others with imperial interests, were central to this evolution. Objects were used to build status, create networks, and establish social position. These included artworks ranging from engravings and prints to formal portraits and sculpture; furniture;

ceramics, and more unusual “material things” such as artificial limbs and live-tooth transplants.

The book examines themes such as how shared imagery among artwork by the same artist found in different ports or regions projected and built not only mercantile connections, but concepts such as social status, civility, and at first at least, empire. Van Horn’s thinking about the active role objects played in early America and their effects on human behaviour is shaped by the network concepts of Bruno Latour, Daniel Miller, and various scholars of the Atlantic world and early empire. The argument is illustrated, literally

and figuratively, with a wide range of objects and case studies from the thirteen colonies. Initially fragile provincial networks of objects were shaped not only by the metropole, but also by African American and Native American cultures. The use by settler elites of material culture to reinforce status, civility, mercantilism, and empire also aided in differentiating polite, civilized society from the savage and wild Other, both African American and Indigenous.

The use of sources such as correspondence, poetry, humour, and fiction amply supports the argument on how material culture was being deployed, consciously or unconsciously. Each chapter highlights different thematic aspects of these networks in chronological fashion, from mid-century and a time of imperial unrest, through the Revolution, and into the era of the early republic. From analysing prints purchased by subscribers in various port cities, to an in-depth study of the uses of the work of the artist John Wollaston in Philadelphia, via analyses of tombstone portraits in Charleston to examining materiality, gender, marriage and social identity there and in New York, the book provides a tour de force of how material objects were utilised in this manner throughout the eighteenth century—sometimes in unexpected ways.

More than half the book focuses on gender, and how emerging independence for women at the upper end of society, and their sexuality, was represented in material culture. From portraits, to dressing furniture or participation in masquerades, Van Horn demonstrates how such use, often erotic, could threaten perceptions of gender roles and raise anxieties for social order around both women's sexuality and the various imperial crises.

A highlight of the book is the examination of how, via amputees and visible artificial limbs, concepts of the body framed emerging conceptions of the republic and its manhood. Just as American and British political prints sometimes viewed the separation of the former colonies from the British empire as a form of violent political dismemberment that required the detached limbs to be reassembled into a new republic, so amputees from the War of Independence saw prostheses as a means to reassert their manliness, virility, and worthiness to be an American citizen. Citizenship basically required one to be able-bodied, and the many amputees following the

American War of Independence were perceived as somehow defective, in the same manner as a broken tool would be (just as sick men in the militaries and navies of this period would be considered “unserviceable,” like a defective weapon). Artificial limbs provided a means for these men to reassert their virility, both as individuals and as a public body, such as when prominent amputees like Gouverneur Morris or others participated in forums such as the Continental Congress.

While the book has excellent extensive notes (even found in their proper place at the bottom of the page), there is no bibliography—likely a trade-off with the publisher for the former, given the length of the work and the number of wonderful visual depictions of material culture. Another minor quibble is that while the book proclaims in its title to discuss British America, the focus is almost entirely from the perspective of the thirteen colonies. Beyond an introductory case study involving the artist Joseph Blackburn and Bermuda, there is nary a mention of other parts of 18th century British America writ large, or an effort to identify similar (or different) object-driven identity formation or networks in say, Québec or Nova Scotia in the same period. Similarly, while Indigenous cultures are examined primarily in terms of how they were used as a means of reinforcing difference between settlers and Native Americans, an analysis of captivity narratives (such as Linda Colley's work) and other Indigenous culture influences in the opposite direction seem to be missing from the discussion to some extent. One also wonders what influence and similarities (if any) French or Spanish material culture had on this process in the thirteen colonies. But to be fair to the author, both of those subjects are worthy of separate treatment in their own right.

The book concludes with an intriguing thesis concerning George Washington's less-visible live-tooth transplants. Washington's body became a public means of expressing political civility via carefully selected clothing and background objects for his portraits. But kept hidden, Washington's need for dentures resulted in his purchase of teeth from his own slaves, for live transplant. This was done by one of the leading advocates of the procedure, Jean Pierre Le Mayeur, a French dentist who had immigrated to the United States. Van Horn contends that “...

in order to fix his 'deformity,' Washington was willing to compromise his bodily integrity and to risk bringing parts of uncouth African Americans within his body" (406). This early republic presidential persona was then communicated via a series of portraits and engravings of the new leader. These allowed subscribers, often women who were barred from participating in politics, to demonstrate their allegiance to the new American nation and its success via the "perfect civility"

(408) of Washington's presidential body—an assemblage of objects that was both "civil and savage" (406).

This beautifully illustrated and engaging work uses the material turn and excellent research to build upon earlier scholarship in thought-provoking, new ways. It is well worth a place on the bookshelf of anyone interested in the material culture of the 18th century Atlantic world and empire.

## SANDI STEWART

Review of

Bergey, Barry and Tom Pich. 2018. *Folk Masters: A Portrait of America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Pp. 264. ISBN: 978-0-253-03233-1 (hardcover), \$30.00

*Folk Masters: A Portrait of America* provides a genuine glimpse into the lives of traditional artists who have been awarded a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The main focus of the text is a diverse series of portraits of one hundred National Heritage Fellows captured by photographer Tom Pich over a 25-year period. During this time, "he has visited and taken portraits of more than 214 National Heritage Fellows located in forty-five states and territories" (6). Barry Bergey, former Director of Folk and Traditional Arts at the NEA contextualizes the photographs, providing insight into both the lives of the artists and the images captured. As Bergey notes, the "common threads" connecting the featured Fellows "are artistic excellence and a lifetime of contribution to our cultural heritage" (13).

Many of the subjects—the bearers of folk and traditional arts—practice their craft anonymously and perform best in their own space. Vernon Owens, a central leader in a regional pottery revival in North Carolina, said it best when asked how things were going during his demonstration

at the annual celebratory concert for the National Heritage Fellowship: "It'd be better at home" (90). Each photograph therefore highlights maker and craft in the environment in which traditional techniques and performance is cultivated, practiced, and performed. Pich captures each subject in their natural environment where they have practiced their traditions, giving life to the space. His photographs transport the audience into the subject's space, whether it be the home, workshop, or community where stories and moments are shared. Pich clearly immersed himself in this environment, foreign to him but so familiar to his subjects, establishing a strong bond, which is evident by the relaxed demeanor of the Fellows in each portrait.

Bergey and Pich offer a snapshot of folk and traditional arts both in motion and standing still. The connections they have made with the National Heritage Fellows is evident in their work. In particular, I appreciate Pich's passion for capturing genuine moments with his subjects and sharing their stories during his journey to photograph the Fellows. The authors also examine