



# **The Gardiners of Massachusetts: Provincial Ambition and the British-American Career (Revisiting New England: the New Regionalism)**

*T. A. Milford*

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The Gardiners of Massachusetts examines late eighteenth-century American political and cultural history through the lives and careers of three men from successive generations of a prominent New England family. Silvester Gardiner, who established the family's fortunes in Boston, was a colonial surgeon, a dedicated Anglican, and a Loyalist. He received his medical training in Britain before settling in Massachusetts, where he became a giant in the drugs trade. In the mid-eighteenth century, as a director of the Kennebeck Company, he acquired vast landholdings in what became the state of Maine.

At the end of the Revolution, when Silvester's estates were in jeopardy, his son John returned to his native New England after a long absence. Fully at ease within the British Atlantic Empire, John relied on his knowledge of imperial administration and on his connections at Whitehall and Westminster to enhance his career. He attended university in Glasgow during the Scottish Enlightenment and studied law at London's Inns of Court. His legal practice took him to Wales and the Caribbean island of St. Kitts. Returning to Boston in the 1780s, he emerged as a figure of considerable public controversy. John's son, J.S.J. Gardiner, was an Episcopal priest and a leader of Boston's Federalist literati.

As Milford describes the careers of these three men, he contends that the Gardiners exemplified the ambitions of the cosmopolitan middle class throughout the British Empire and English-speaking Atlantic world during the decades just before and after the American Revolution. He also uses this history to intervene in the long-running scholarly debate over the relative influence of liberalism and republicanism in the political culture of the early republic. The Gardiners' ambitions, Milford suggests, demonstrate a deep allegiance to the liberal vocabulary of private gains and public good--a vocabulary in which Americans had been schooled by their imperial engagements. Because of this attachment to liberalism, the disintegration of British authority in the colonies presented an acute dilemma for those New Englanders for whom the British Empire had offered an expanding array of professional opportunities.



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