Colonial American Writing
Second Edition
Edited by Roy Harvey Pearce
Introduction

The selections in this volume illustrate main aspects of American intellectual and imaginative origins and growth through the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Exhibiting not so much colonial social, institutional, and political forms, as ideas and attitudes which made for such forms, they embody the thought and imagination of those Colonial Americans who were to become Revolutionary Americans. These writings, in fact, point immediately toward the American mind of the Revolutionary period—a mind of the Enlightenment, one which was to center on the notion of the free, rational personality and which was to know that freedom and rationality were embodied in the very nature of things American.

There are represented in this volume some of the origins of that mind and of its drive toward freedom. The Pilgrim idea of freedom through private and separate devotion, the Puritan idea of freedom through work and facing one's fate as a sinless individual, the Virginian idea of freedom through the responsibilities of the ruling gentlemen, the Quaker idea of freedom through the inviolable sacredness of the individual, and the frontier idea of freedom through violent self-assertion—all these ultimately found their largest realization in the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of enlightened Americans of the Revolution and beyond. In the writings here selected, we can know these ideas as they came into being and began to be explored and tested and as they made for characteristic attitudes toward life and living.

There is perhaps not enough of what we may, properly speaking, call "literature" in this collection, as there was little of the sustained aesthetic attitude in colonial America. Colonial Americans were determined to make a new way of life in a new
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