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John Dickinson: The Forgotten Patriot

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

James Franco

Candidate for Bachelor of Degree in History and Political Science
and Renee Crown University Honors
Spring 2018

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Abstract

This research project intends to illuminate the impact of little-known United States founder John Dickinson through the research question lens of whether his military service during the American Revolutionary War affected his policies and philosophies as a government official. This was done through examining letters, speeches, and other primary sources prior to the war to establish a baseline framework of ideology for which to compare to after the war. Primary sources were then also used to describe Dickinson's military experience and then also to check back upon the framework established prior to the war to see if anything had significantly changed post-war. The research uncovered that while some ideologies remained constant, Dickinson did appear to adjust his views on the role of the federal, state, and local governance leading to a shift in his mindset on local government right (also known as state rights). Due to the research on Dickinson's war experiences, it was concluded that Dickinson's military service certainly had a correlational impact on his ideological shift and could reasonably be argued that it was causal effect from his military involvement. This research exemplifies how military service can affect governing officials with influence in government affairs and in the process brought John Dickinson out of the shadows of United States history.

Executive Summary

This research project helps contribute to creating a more complete, and therefore truthful, origin story of the United States by examining the life of forgotten and misconstrued founder John Dickinson. While Dickinson's name does not carry the same weight and name recognition as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, his impact and influence upon the founding of the United States is just as significant. Dickinson is most remembered for his anti-Independence speeches in 1776 then permanently shaded his role in history despite his significant contributions to society through government pre-war and post-war. Additionally, Dickinson was one of the few continental congress delegates, and honestly one of the few men with such wealth and prestige, to serve in the military during the war. His unique situation and special positions of influence throughout his life highlighted the need for Dickinson's historical contributions to exit the shadows and begin to take its rightful place in the historical narrative of the United State's founding imbedded in the minds of all Americans since grade school. To do this, Dickinson's life was specifically investigated and researched through the specific research question of whether, and if so how, Dickinson's military service affected his governing and societal ideologies and philosophies. Examining this potential phenomenon raises the interesting and significant question of war experiences can affect a government official's fundamental beliefs and if so attempt to identify what those effects are so as to better inform voters when considering war issues/policies and candidates with military service. Through this research project on Dickinson, the origin story of the United States can become more complete and therefore allow history to be a better guide to modern day citizens. The project also helps

begin to uncover what sorts of phenomenons and effects derive from military service onto governing actions and policies.

To conduct this research, a basic project outline was established in which examination of primary sources prior to 1776 would provide milestone beliefs upon which could be compared and re-evaluated post-war. Therefore, dozens of Dickinson's speeches, letters, and more were analyzed to identify some of the core beliefs and ideologies of Dickinson before the war, after the war, and then also to build a narrative of his military service to see if it could potentially be linked to any changes.

In regards to the first section of establishing a baseline of beliefs to re-examine after his military service, a few core, fundamental ideologies became apparent. Dickinson stressed the importance of patience and taking a methodical approach in regards to government and its actions. It was evident through Dickinson's words that he thought government actions should be well thought out and carefully planned so as to limit risks as much as possible and maximize benefits. Perhaps the most famous example of this was Dickinson's passionate speeches against the Declaration of Independence. He delivered these not because he was not a patriot (made apparent by his military service) but rather by his honest belief that such an action taken then would be haste and lead to destruction of the colonial societies and economies. Another mile marker ideology, linked to the first one, was Dickinson's desire to always attain the people's opinion on an issue and then act according to those findings. This is a key example of Dickinson's attraction to a methodical approach and perhaps explains another reason why he did not support independence since there was no finding at the time that a majority of the colonies' people desired that. In other words, it also shows that Dickinson preferred the

delegate model system of representation where government representatives always act in the will of their constituents compared to the trustee model that encourages representatives to act in the way that they see is best fit. The next foundational belief established was Dickinson's idea that government had the special responsibility to preserve rights and freedoms of citizens, especially in regards to religious liberty. On the flip side, Dickinson also believed that citizens have a duty to protect these rights as well. These two separate mile marker ideologies are coalesced into one cohesive belief that government and citizens have a symbiotic relationship and mutual responsibility to protect society. The final significant core philosophy researched was Dickinson's preference for local governments to have a majority of the power to conduct the daily operations and institute the policies that will directly affect citizens. In 21st century terminology, pre-war Dickinson was a proponent of state's rights (or at the time colonial rights).

After arguing against the Declaration of Independence up until July 1776, Dickinson then was preparing to fight or already in camp within a month after its passing. This in and of itself demonstrates the kind of person Dickinson was. Further exploration into Dickinson's military service helps create a clearer picture and narrative of his experiences that can then be referred to when appropriate in case of adjustments in his philosophy post-war. To do this, Dickinson's letters throughout the war were read along with an examination of the unique source of a military manual that Dickinson wrote while president (governor) of Delaware. All of these sources together created the picture of someone who was directly involved in wartime activities instead of being aloof somewhere else. Additionally, Dickinson was most heavily involved in the logistical side of war time affairs. In sum, Dickinson clearly engaged with the war

and attempted to make himself as useful as possible through military service, logistical work, and the diffusion of knowledge through the creation of manuals.

After examining primary sources after the war, Dickinson's original core values and beliefs were re-evaluated. Many saw little to no adjustment, such as Dickinson's belief in soliciting people's opinion before acting and in the ideology that government and its citizens have a mutual relationship of complimentary duties and responsibilities. However, one pillar did shift significantly. Post-war Dickinson drifted away from a local government approach and instead more embraced the role of the federal government in everyday governance and actions. This was most clearly seen through his ardent support for the Constitution and more specifically into the particular diction used. No longer, did Dickinson want the central government to be a distant, absent body that only sets broad, big picture policy. Instead, Dickinson now preferred a stronger central or federal government that would take responsibility for some of the key duties of governing a nation. While it can likely never be known for sure whether Dickinson's war experiences caused his philosophical shift, there is no doubt that it has some correlation. Additionally, through Dickinson's specific military service experiences, it could reasonably be suggested that perhaps it was more than correlational and veered on the side of causal. Dickinson directly dealt with the logistical side of war and witnessed how difficult it was to conduct, especially if one colony had to do so as evident through his words while president (governor) of Delaware at the end of the war. Perhaps, Dickinson realized that there are some actions and responsibilities that should be given to the federal government instead of the states in order to be done effectively and efficiently.

Despite the limitations of this research due to lack of time to more deeply explore the documents and lack of access to examine all Dickinson related material, this project does help to begin to uncover Dickinson and elevate him into the same league as other founders. Furthermore, this project identifies what could be a possible phenomenon of what policies and ideological beliefs military service affects and how it does so. For future research, I would recommend that others attempt to identify and evaluate more of Dickinson's fundamental philosophies and also attempt to learn more about him through second hand mentions of him in primary sources from his contemporaries instead of his documents. Finally, I would strongly recommend that future research pick up where this left off to explore government officials over the entire history of the United States to see how military service affected their ideologies. It would be significant research for one to attempt to identify if Dickinson's change in stance on states' rights was isolated to him or perhaps a greater trend among any other possible findings that could be found from such a study.

Chapter 1: Who is John Dickinson? Don't you mean John Adams?

The era of the American Revolutionary often conjures up images of people such as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams sitting in the Continental Congresses signing the Declaration of Independence. Or rather, it triggers memories of history lessons learned in classes where George Washington led the Continental Army into battle in places such as Boston and Brooklyn. The common thread among these people and events that causes so many Americans, regardless of their interest in history, to have those events and people ingrained in their minds is because it is a part of the nation's founding story. A founding story is often incredibly powerful to a country's culture and society as many aspire to embody the fundamental characteristics that their founders displayed during the creation of their nation. People embrace the perceived traits of those from the past and attempt to apply those traits and lessons learned to contemporary issues and actions. This is why it is important that the history of country's founding be complete so that citizens today can draw upon it to create the identity and fundamental aspects of the people and communities that make up that country.

Many Americans assume their founding history is complete and thorough, as it has been repeated to them ever since they began schooling. However, what if it is actually incomplete, missing a key historical figure from the time period who helped steer the nation when it was forming? Well it would be the same effect as if a show production went on while missing a major cast member. How would one truly know what the show was about, what lessons it was trying to convey, and how a viewer should reflect on the show? These same questions and

issues would apply to a history if it too was incomplete and the solution just happens to be the same for both- reveal who that character was and illuminate their impact.

While many think they know the current slew of the cast's prominent figures, such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams, it actually is missing an integral member. These people in particular are remembered for their shared public services and sacrifices that occurred in either Independence Hall as Continental Congress representatives or on the battlefield as soldiers. The historical figure missing from the shared story of the United States' founding had the unique experience of serving in both arenas by being a member of the Continental Congress and as a soldier¹. John Dickinson has been unfortunately excluded from the historical narrative of the creation of the United States. His story and impact is sorely needed to help better complete American Revolutionary era history and then, in turn, add new lessons and traits for contemporary Americans to discover and embody.

As it currently stands, based upon his historiography, Dickinson is a forgotten American hero who, despite having been a major player in the era, is misunderstood and rarely examined, especially in regards to others from the period. The few times he is remembered and mentioned by historians, it often is to mention his passionate arguments against the Continental Congress adopting the Declaration of Independence. His elegant speeches and embodiment as the representative who drove the "no" vote argument, did not derive from a lack of a desire of freedom or independence, but rather of a love for the American colonies with the fear that the Declaration of Independence would lead to destruction and ruin at the

¹ William Murchison, *The Cost of Liberty: The Life of John Dickinson*, (Wilmington, ISI Books, 2013), 1 and 166

societal, governmental, and economic levels of the colonies². Furthering this framework and portrayal, it naturally leads to the historical highlight that Dickinson was one of only two Continental Congress delegates to put body and treasure on the line for freedom and independence through his military service³. Many Continental Congress members diligently supported a vote for independence but it was its most ardent detractor who actually put on a uniform to fight. After the war, Dickinson's service would continue through his commitment to shape the structure and future of the newly founded United States of America by being a delegate to the Constitutional Convention⁴. The story of Dickinson is integral to the story of the United States' founding, therefore the history of his patriotic honor and service should be added to the pool of stories that make up America's founding narrative.

The history of any person is often too daunting a task for one person and/or one work to tackle. With that in mind, I still intend to, in the words of John Dickinson himself, put "in my little oar" and exert "my small strength" towards building a more accurate and complete history of John Dickinson and the American Revolutionary era⁵. To do so, Dickinson's military service and its effects on his governing and societal philosophies and ideologies will be examined. Essentially, the path this work will choose to travel upon among the many that make up the impact and life of John Dickinson will be: How did John Dickinson's military service during the American Revolution affect his views and stances on how a government and society should look and operate, especially in regards to the American colonies that became states? From the

² Dickinson, John. "John Dickinson, A Speech Against Independence, 1776." web.csulb.edu. <http://web.csulb.edu/~jlawler/Course%20DW/JohnDickinson.htm> (accessed May 9th, 2018).

³ Murchison, *The Cost of Liberty*, inside cover flap

⁴ Ibid., 4-5

⁵ Ibid., 15

curious decision of fighting in the war to his actual service, it must be inspected to how this affected John Dickinson's stances and beliefs as he went from Continental Congress member from a colony before the war to a Constitutional Convention delegate from a state after the war helping shape the United States. By the end of this look back into history through the words of John Dickinson himself, it is likely to be seen how John Dickinson's name and actions deserves to arise out of obscurity and into the same league as the founders currently revered.

The life and impact of John Dickinson is not entirely unilluminated. As previously alluded to, there are a few works in the past and present that attempt to pull back the curtain on John Dickinson. The earliest known substantial biography on Dickinson is Charles Stille's *The Life and Times of John Dickinson* published in 1891. The book can hardly be considered a recent account and its age can be seen at times in its writing style. However, the book is the first major second hand account to begin the formation of the image of John Dickinson. Stille touches upon Dickinson's unwillingness to support the vote for independence by seeing it as "inopportune"⁶. Later historians will flesh out what exactly was inopportune but nevertheless Stille established the basics for Dickinson's actions and stances. Furthermore, Stille does spend a significant time addressing Dickinson's military services in chapter VI, a trend that apparently seems to have not been continued onward in other works⁷.

The previous major work on Dickinson before William Murchison's (later explored) was Milton Flower's *John Dickinson: Conservative Revolutionary*. From the outset of the title, Flower's book seems odd by having labeled Dickinson was a conservative with no real historical

⁶ Charles Stille, *The Life and Times of John Dickinson*, (Philadelphia, 1891), 18

⁷ *Ibid.*, 201-252

backing perhaps signifying that its less of history and more of an appeal to the conservatives of his time. To say that Dickinson's decision to be against independence seems dishonest, inaccurate, and basic when compared to other's interpretations and Dickinson's own words. Furthermore, throughout the book, despite the title, Flower refers to Dickinson as a "radical, "moderate", and "conservative" ensuring that the reader is not entirely sure who or what John Dickinson was by the end⁸. Furthermore, the credibility of the book is irreparably harmed when it states that John Dickinson was present when the vote for independence was administered⁹. This is thoroughly and wildly false with it being widely accepted that Dickinson was not present on that day. Murchison's book helps highlight Dickinson in the broad narrative of history, but does so confusingly and poorly that leads to an unclear take away from the book.

Other fairly recent works that includes Dickinson in its American Revolutionary history narrative was *John Adams* by David McCullough published in 2001 and its corresponding mini-series by the same name on HBO. The book, as its title implies, focuses on the life and impact of John Adams, inherently leading itself to include Dickinson as part of the story. Dickinson is mentioned at various times throughout the book but is most closely looked at in the third chapter on independence. In that chapter, McCullough deservedly brings light to Dickinson for acknowledging his presence and importance at the debate on the Declaration of Independence through chronicling the speech he gave against it that was then responded to by John Adams¹⁰. Additionally, McCullough accurately mentions Dickinson's commitment to the cause through

⁸ Milton Flower, *John Dickinson: Conservative Revolutionary*, (Charlottesville, 1983), 166

⁹ *Ibid.*, 166

¹⁰ David McCullough, *John Adams*, (New York Simon and Schuster, 2001) 239-245.

his military service and how John Adams greatly respected that action¹¹. Although McCullough's book only briefly mentions Dickinson where his path most vividly crossed with Adams, he tended to do so with accuracy.

As previously mentioned, another book is William Murchison's *The Cost of Liberty: The Life of John Dickinson* published in 2013. This was the first biography on Dickinson in exactly 30 years after Milton Flower's *John Dickinson: Conservative Revolutionary* and proved to be a rather accurate, albeit broad, general summary of Dickinson. Overall, Murchison tends to more accurately portray the general history of Dickinson where others had failed in the past. While it can be argued whether Murchison correctly examined the influence of Quakerism upon his ideology and philosophy, it can be clearly seen that the latest biography of Dickinson rarely focuses on military service as it is only primarily talked about in one chapter¹². Because of the brevity of the analysis, Murchison does not dive into how Dickinson's military service may have affected his ideology and thoughts post-war.

It becomes easily evident that in comparison to other founders, the literature on John Dickinson can be considered a desert emphasized even more so by no work truly diving deeper into Dickinson beyond the surface level. Fortunately, as of late Dr. Jane Calvert from the University of Kentucky has been leading a one-person effort to revive John Dickinson and provide more accurate literature on him so that his story can be properly conveyed. Dr. Calvert has published one book already on John Dickinson, titled *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson*. Furthermore, Dr. Calvert is the Director and Chief Editor of

¹¹ Ibid., 266

¹² Ibid., 158-169

The John Dickinson Writings Project which wishes to publishes Dickinson's writings online. As a part of this process, Calvert has also published a variety of other smaller articles and scholarly works on Dickinson that have further helped to highlight his impact and bring it to light in the 21st century.

Even with the recent efforts by Dr. Calvert, it is clear that John Dickinson is one of the "last frontiers" of American Revolutionary War era history. While other topics and events from the period have hundreds of works published about them (I think it can be safely said that there are more children's books on George Washington than on the whole of John Dickinson), Dickinson's life seems to be largely unexplored leading to a hole in American history. Even modern day efforts to dive deeper in Dickinson by Dr. Calvert are tending to focus on his Quaker roots and how it influenced him, leaving large areas unexamined. It is with this historiography in mind, that it became apparent that perhaps the military service of one of the only two Continental Congress delegates should be reviewed and parsed through. Through this examination, it is intended to see what led to the decision and how the service itself may have affected his thoughts on governing, as he became a major player in the creation of government after the war.

Upon learning the basic knowledge of Dickinson through the historiography, it is evident that he was a patriot who dedicated years of his life to public service as both a delegate and a soldier. Despite this, Dickinson is sorely under known and misunderstood unlike some of his contemporaries. Knowing this, the least we can do is "to brave the storm" of the historically unknown and misunderstood to bring some clarity to a portion of a life of a man who had the courage "to brave the storm" of standing by an unpopular stance and then defending the

opposing argument in battle¹³. Perhaps then, the first lesson of Dickinson history can be adopted by those today to adamantly and fiercely argue for what you think is right for your community while also willing to accept the will of the governing body and fight to defend it.

¹³ McCullough, *John Adams*, 240.

Chapter 2: Building a Pre-War Foundation

Dickinson's journey to political prestige and power begins in colonial America and will eventually rise to a crescendo in Independence Hall in 1776. Similar to any individual who acquires "real estate" among the pages of history books, Dickinson's rise was a culmination of talent/skill coupled with unique timing in the greater context of the world around him. In regards to skill, Dickinson developed his talents via schooling that concluded in the heartland of the Empire he would eventually rise to the occasion to fight against - London¹⁴. Once Dickinson garnered these skills, he passed the Pennsylvania State Bar and eventually took his talents to the Pennsylvania House¹⁵. Beginning there, Dickinson's talents would intertwine with a historically consequential timeline that produced the opportunity for Dickinson to become a founder.

In order to track the effect (if any) of the Revolutionary War on Dickinson's political values and societal beliefs during the formative years of the United States, it must be examined what at first pre-war Dickinson stood for in his earlier opportunities at governing. Through this process, the spotlight can finally be fully and properly shown on a character on the stage of American History who has been mostly unilluminated to this point. The theory of governance subscribed to by John Dickinson pre-Revolutionary War can perhaps best be discovered via his speeches on the record in the Pennsylvania House. Many of these speeches and other sources created clear links to the most famous self-articulation of Dickinson's philosophy when he

¹⁴ William Murchison, *The Cost of Liberty: The Life of John Dickinson*, (Wilmington, ISI Books, 2013), 13-14

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27

argued against the independence of the colonies in the Continental Congress¹⁶. But prior to examining that apex right before Dickinson's military service, it will be valuable to methodically reconstruct Dickinson's views source by source. By the end, a substantive definition of pre-war Dickinson will have emerged that gives his dynamic and thoughtful views within governance the proper justice.

To begin, in a speech in 1764, Dickinson outlined his governance idea that actors within government "should be free from all violent passions" and "should be bound to observe the utmost caution in our conduct"¹⁷. With this choice of words, Dickinson is choosing to craft the idea that the principles of patience and a methodical approach as being integral to governing bodies. Dickinson further explored that idea in this speech when he stated that actions must be done at "the most proper time, and the most proper method"¹⁸. In another reference to this principle, Dickinson cautioned that breaking from this principle by acting "with fatal speed" could "rush upon...destruction"¹⁹. Furthering along that train of thought, Dickinson warned that "we may introduce the innovation, but we shall not be able to stop its progress"²⁰.

Furthermore, in some articulate and beautifully written prose, Dickinson concretely articulates the dangers of impatience with this quote:

¹⁶ Dickinson, John. "John Dickinson, A Speech Against Independence, 1776." web.csulb.edu. <http://web.csulb.edu/~jlawler/Course%20DW/JohnDickinson.htm> (accessed May 9th, 2018).

¹⁷ John Dickinson, "Speech, Delivered in the House of Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania", May 24th, 1764, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College*(Carlisle, PA) 2

¹⁸ Ibid., 3

¹⁹ Ibid., 5

²⁰ Ibid., 29

“Let not us then, in expectation of smooth seas and an undisturbed course, too rashly venture our little vessel that hath safely sailed round our own well known shores, upon the midst of the untry’d deep, without first fully convinced that her make is strong enough to bear the weather she may meet with, and that she is well provided for so long and so dangerous a voyage.”²¹

Through the analogy of the seas and ships, Dickinson explicitly articulated his personal view that patience is important in governance.

These early quotes expose Dickinson’s guiding values become apparent and make his anti-Declaration of Independence speeches seem less radical and more grounded in thought. As will become apparent later, this thought process was incredibly similar to his arguments against independence giving this speech credibility for being one that helps show Dickinson’s formulation of his ideologies pre-war. The American Revolution, including the decision to become independent, are inherently radical actions (hence the word *revolution*) and likely triggered Dickinson to call upon his foundational value of patience for guidance. This not only serves as the first milestone upon which to compare post-war Dickinson too, but also begins to shake off the incorrect belief that Dickinson argued against the Declaration of Independence because he was not a patriot. Instead, as Dickinson himself stated over and over, he was one that tended to act conservatively in order to preserve a society and gently progress it forward inch by inch.

²¹ Ibid., 15

Before transitioning to a different section of Dickinson's ideological building blocks, it would be timely to mention more of Dickinson's beliefs in what represent his guiding principles of representatives within government. In his conclusion of the speech, Dickinson stated that it was his "inviolable duty I owe the public, by obeying the unbiassed dictates of my reason and conscience"²². Furthermore, he said that every government actions and decisions should simply "promote the happiness of Pennsylvania"²³.

These quotes from Dickinson give some insight to how he believes people should act, especially those in governing positions. They also give more indirect support to Dickinson operating as someone who approaches things methodically and simply. In Dickinson's mind, representatives need only to focus on what promotes the progress of their constituency and shy away from what might endanger it in any way whatsoever.

Another block in Dickinson's theory that is illuminated in that same speech is about the priorities and responsibilities of a governing body. In one part of the speech, Dickinson stated that it is the duty of government to protect "inestimable rights" and the "spirit of liberty that breathes in them" so that they may be "transmitted to future ages"²⁴. Dickinson later echoed those sentiments in the same speech when he said that the role of the Pennsylvania House was to be "the proper guardian of the public liberties"²⁵. Those liberties were then explored specifically in the speech when he said that the "best and greatest of all rights" is "a perfect religious freedom"²⁶. Related to that, Dickinson also stated that a good check on government

²² Ibid., 31

²³ Ibid., 31

²⁴ Ibid., 3

²⁵ Ibid., 10

²⁶ Ibid., 15

and its actors within are “the short duration of our power, which must be renewed by our constituents every year”²⁷. It is clear that pre-war Dickinson had a special focus on protecting religious freedom and on short terms for governance. This begins to create a framework of what a Dickinson-built government would be like.

This theme is further continued in a speech just four days later when Dickinson said that the government should be highly concerned with its actions since it creates a “great danger of our not retaining the privileges this province now enjoys”²⁸. Dickinson continued to hammer that point home of committing such an act being perhaps the cardinal sin of governance when he stated that an action that could “surrender...our current constitution” and endanger “civil and religious liberty” is too dangerous an action to take by a governing body and should not be done²⁹. This again provides support for the idea that Dickinson was patient and tended to act conservatively.

These words, especially those on religious liberty and short terms, provide another milestone to compare to post-war. Will a post-military service, nation-building Dickinson still hold religious liberty is such a high esteem or will some other priority take its place? Could the experience of war produce a different perspective on the world? While these are important questions for any person from the era who held similar views, it is especially more imperative

²⁷ Ibid., 16

²⁸ John Dickinson, Speech titled “A Protest against a Resolution of the Assembly of Pennsylvania for Petitioning the King to Change the Colony of Pennsylvania from a Proprietary to a Royal Government” May 28th, 1764, in *The Writings of John Dickinson: Political Writings, 1764-1774, Volume 1*, edited by Paul Leicester Ford (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1895), 91

²⁹ Ibid., 91

when it concerns a man who actually plays a large part in the governing processes of early America.

The next significant mile marker that establishes the foundation of governing style and theory of John Dickinson pre-war revolves around the idea of a delegate v trustee representative. A delegate representative votes only the way their constituency would while the trustee model allows the delegate to have individual decision making lead the way³⁰. Both are utilized and legitimate models of governance but it is clear that pre-military service John Dickinson subscribed to the delegate model.

The Dickinson of 1776 stressed this importance of obtaining the “people’s consent” before making a decision³¹. This emphasizing is clear through the fact that Dickinson mentions the same principle again four days later. Dickinson once again said that the “universal consent of the people” with clear evidence of it must be received before making a decision in government³². Furthermore both speeches state that perhaps the clearest way to receive this consent was through petitions signed in great numbers.

In fact, Dickinson was so committed to the people’s consent and the ability of petitions to deliver it, he created petitions to protest actions of the government which he believed violated that consent. This can be seen in Dickinson’s 1764 petition to the King which he and his allies circulated around the colony. Even within this epitome of a people’s consent source,

³⁰ Gilbert, Glenn. “Trustee or delegate? Congress’ role up for debate” [theoaklandpress.com](http://www.theoaklandpress.com). <http://www.theoaklandpress.com/article/OP/20100327/NEWS/303279985> (accessed May 9th, 2018)

³¹ John Dickinson, “Speech, Delivered in the House of Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania”, May 24th, 1764, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College*(Carlisle, PA) 27

³² *Ibid.*, 26

Dickinson explicitly stated that the previous action of the assembly had been done “without communicating its contents to their constituents, and obtaining their fullest and most explicit consent therein”³³. In other words, Dickinson was attempting to do the 21st century action of conducting a poll with the 18th century tool of a petition. The grandest and most articulate portrayal of Dickinson’s adherence to consent of the people is found nowhere in words in the document but is instead the very document itself.

This again leads to the question of whether a more seasoned and post-military service Dickinson would still abide by the delegate model of governing. Furthermore, pre-Revolutionary War Dickinson was only involved in governance as a representative in the legislative side of affairs. Could and would a Dickinson in the executive branch of the state or federal government after a war switch his philosophy to a trustee model?

While much of Dickinson’s speech relates to his governing philosophies, he also explains some of his theories regarding the duties of citizens. In one part of the speech, Dickinson said that “with unremitting vigilance, with undaunted virtue, should a free people watch against the encroachments of power, and remove every pretext for its extension”³⁴. Through this line, Dickinson was articulating the idea that the people themselves have the responsibility to be vigilant in protecting their freedoms. This line may seem semi-contradictory as it was previously mentioned how Dickinson so believed in the duty of government to protect people. However, these two ideas can be reconciled with the belief that they must coexist in order to fully protect

³³ John Dickinson, “A Petition to the King from the Inhabitants of Pennsylvania” July, 1764, in *The Writings of John Dickinson: Political Writings, 1764-1774, Volume 1*, edited by Paul Leicester Ford (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1895), 98

³⁴ John Dickinson, “Speech, Delivered in the House of Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania”, May 24th, 1764, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College*(Carlisle, PA) 29

a society and its people. It will have to be seen if post-war Dickinson attempted to install this philosophy into the founding governing documents of the states and the federal government.

These many examples of Dickinson actions and words while a representative in the Pennsylvania House set up a strong context and footing for the most famous examples of Dickinson prior to the war that help further establish the persona of Dickinson before the war. The first of which are Dickinson's "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania" which were written in response to the "Townshend Acts" and helped rally colonist support against the acts. The "Townshend Acts" were passed to raise revenue in the United States and implicitly emphasize the ability of Parliament to tax the colonies³⁵.

Famously, in response, Dickinson picked up his pen and crafted a written rebuttal that would influence many across the colonies. Essentially, throughout it, Dickinson stated that Britain could not tax the colonies for the purpose of raising revenue as the internal operations of the colonies are independent from Britain. In Letter I, Dickinson stated that the colonies "cannot be taxed but by their own representatives" in their colonial governments³⁶. Additionally, in Letter II, Dickinson further outlines his view of Great Britain's role by writing that "the parliament unquestionably possesses a legal authority to regulate the trade of Great Britain and all its colonies" and then going on to call this a necessary and classic relationship "between a mother country and its colonies"³⁷. In other words, Dickinson is describing that Great Britain and Parliament are responsible for big picture policy while the colonies

³⁵ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Townshend Acts". Britannica.com. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Townshend-Acts> (accessed May 9th, 2018)

³⁶ John Dickinson, "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania: To the Inhabitants of the British Colonies", 1774, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College*(Carlisle, PA) 29

³⁷ Ibid., 12

themselves have the autonomy to conduct their daily operations. In 21st century terms, Parliament is the Board of Directors of a company creating the goals and objectives while the colonies are the CEOs and other employees charged with fulfilling those goals however they see fit.

Dickinson's sentiments in "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer" indicate the beginning of someone formulating a state's rights first ideology that could become prevalent when Dickinson becomes involved with the forming of the Constitution after the war.

The final political acts of Dickinson prior to his military service was his role as a delegate to the Continental Congress in 1776. In this role, he would give his most infamous speech regarding the Declaration of Independence and provide the final look into his ideology prior to the war. This speech proves to be a culmination of many of the ideologies expressed by Dickinson pre-war. For example, Dickinson again preaches patience and against speed and the unknown when he says that independence could lead to "a licentious anarchy" or a "popular tyranny"³⁸. Dickinson points out all of the negative impacts that could arise from such a decision such as the lack of protection for ships for trade which will result in a "massacre" of sailors conducting trade³⁹. This exemplifies Dickinson's previous guiding principle of only to "promote the happiness" of those he represents of which he thinks Independence will endanger that too greatly⁴⁰. Furthermore, one significant myth surrounding Dickinson can be displaced that he opposed Independence because he was not a patriot and did not care for the

³⁸ Dickinson, John. "John Dickinson, A Speech Against Independence, 1776." web.csulb.edu. <http://web.csulb.edu/~jlawler/Course%20DW/JohnDickinson.htm> (accessed May 9th, 2018).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ John Dickinson, "Speech, Delivered in the House of Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania", May 24th, 1764, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College*(Carlisle, PA) 31

colonies and its people. On the contrary, Dickinson opposed it due to his belief that it was not the right time and that it would hurt the colonies' societies and economies. The true significance and memory of this speech shouldn't be its false anti-patriot aura but rather the final example of Dickinson's philosophy right before the war could potentially change it.

Prior to the Revolutionary War and the creation of the United States, it is easily seen that Dickinson was incredibly active in public service and governance. Through his actions and words, a framework of Dickinson as a public servant and his ideologies becomes apparent. Prior to 1776, Dickinson emphasized patience and a methodical approach. Additionally, Dickinson focused on the responsibility of government to protect the rights and liberties of its citizens, with a special emphasis on religious liberty. However, Dickinson acknowledges that the relationship between a government and its people is symbiotic and requires citizens to have their own duties and responsibilities. Finally, it is evident that pre-war Dickinson had sculpted a colonies (or later state) centric approach to everyday governance. All of these milestones coalesce together to loosely create a cohesive image of Dickinson before the war and his military service.

Chapter 3: War

Though the passing of the Declaration of Independence was incredibly significant, it was mostly symbolic at the time with a war still to fight to give it weight and tangible meaning. After Dickinson's infamous words leading up to the Declaration of Independence, he quickly made an integral decision to fight in the Revolution despite his well-known reservations. This again serves as a representation of Dickinson's beliefs that a citizen has duties to preserve their freedoms as well. In short, Dickinson is a living embodiment of the symbiotic relationship between people and the government as proven by Dickinson's actions as both a representative and a citizen in the army. Even then, in a letter expressing intent to fight and the analysis of military strategy to General Charles Lee, Dickinson was still expressing his Independence stance when he stated that "I cannot agree with you, that a Declaration of Independence at this time will promote the happiness of my country"⁴¹. Despite stating his negative stance upon the action taken to adopt the Declaration of Independence, Dickinson alludes to already committing to fight just weeks after the vote when he said in the same letter "I have been in this place with my battalion"⁴² and wishes to "have the pleasure of serving under you this summer"⁴³. Furthermore, in this letter again Dickinson displays that pacifism or anti-patriotism was not the reason for his anti-Declaration sentiments when he told General Lee to "crush the enemies of liberty"⁴⁴.

⁴¹ John Dickinson, "John Dickinson Correspondence 1776-1807: Letter to Gen. Charles Lee", July 25th, 1776, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College* (Carlisle, PA)

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.,

As had been illuminated previously, John Dickinson had often mentioned the importance of service and duty to the public but perhaps that can be best illustrated via a letter to James Wilson, a delegate to the Continental Congress. In the letter, Dickinson is advocating for a request for General Lee be approved⁴⁵. While that may seem mundane on the surface level, it becomes more meaningful when it is known that Dickinson sent that letter while having already begun his military service in some capacity. Essentially Dickinson was performing in two separate spheres of public service by being both active militarily (or preparing to be) and by still advocating in the Continental Congress. Furthermore, from a macro perspective, Dickinson's duty and commitment to the public can be found in the fact that he served at all. Unlike the majority of fellow representatives at the Congress, Dickinson chose to serve in the war effort despite being the biggest advocate against it. Dickinson arguably displayed the ultimate form of public servitude: passionately advocating for what one thinks is best for the people but then diligently carry out the decision of the Congress no matter the outcome.

Through Dickinson, and his unique closeness to the war effort for a former Continental Congress delegate, the logistical difficulties can be vividly identified. In a letter to General Nathaniel Greene, Dickinson acknowledges that Delaware, the state of which he is President of, is failing to provide adequate numbers of troops and supplies. Specifically, Dickinson stated "I am truly sorry, we fall so short of our quotas, which is owing to some particular circumstance"⁴⁶. This illustrated that Dickinson is not some rich delegate aloof of the troubles

⁴⁵ John Dickinson, "John Dickinson Correspondence 1776-1807: Letter to James Wilson", July 26th, 1776, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College* (Carlisle, PA)

⁴⁶ John Dickinson, "John Dickinson Correspondence 1776-1807: Letter to Gen. Nathaniel Greene", August 20th, 1779, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College* (Carlisle, PA)

of the war but instead was involved logistically and was personally concerned. Furthermore, Dickinson wanted to stress that this was “not to want of zeal in the common cause” but instead just the fact that it was hard for his state, and many others, to be able to provide the necessary troops and supplies⁴⁷. That quote can further push back against the perception, that may have been created from Dickinson’s anti-Declaration speeches, that he was against the effort or in some way not a patriot. Dickinson is clearly in favor of the war effort and exhibits that through actions and words. Additionally, this exhibits an example of Dickinson first-hand experiencing the difficulties of running large inter-colony (or soon to be state) operations such as waging war.

In the waning years of the war, John Dickinson transitioned back into his more recognizable and experienced role as a governing official. Even then, Dickinson was already displaying how the war affected him in terms of governance through his continued involvement in military preparedness. Dickinson, while President (governor) of Delaware, issued a military manual for troops to use during the war. The fact that a military manual written by Dickinson exists portrays two important facts. One is that it proves that Dickinson was very much involved with and interested in the actual grit of a war. He did not want to just sit idly by or debate in a hall, but rather got involved personally and then used his experience and knowledge to write his own manual. Dickinson may have been many things but it would be hard for anyone to accuse Dickinson of being aloof and unengaged. Secondly, this detailed literature shows that Dickinson did not shy away from combat and was willing to educate those on how to win a

⁴⁷ Ibid.

battle and a war. While Dickinson's arguments against the Declaration of Independence could be construed as being pacifist, this manual with quotes such as "if attacked on his post, he will defend it to the utmost of his power, nor retreat" concretely shows a man who understood that only effective violence could free the states from Britain⁴⁸.

The writing of the military manual marks a close to an experience unique and special to Dickinson, especially among those with prestige and power at the time. This era in Dickinson's life allowed him to exit a debate hall for a period of time and enter a camp tent and military life. He became intimate with war and gathered enough knowledge of it to become an expert himself with the ability to write a military manual. It's commonly understood that military service often changes a person but that is especially amplified and can be examined with Dickinson. Through Dickinson it can be specially studied how someone with immense influence and power in public affairs can or cannot have their views adjusted by military service.

⁴⁸ John Dickinson, "Abstract of the Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States", (Delaware, 1782).

Chapter 4: Building a Nation With a Changed Ideology

After years of combat, culminating in the dramatic capture of the British General Cornwallis in Virginia in 1781, the Revolutionary War officially came to a close with the Treaty of Paris in 1783⁴⁹. With that, the Declaration of Independence was more than a document and now signified the first document of a new sovereign nation. The colonies now had to transition to states and entered a new nation-building era in which the states could choose for themselves what kind of government and society they wanted. Once again, Dickinson was heavily involved in this process.

Post the Revolutionary War, and in the midst of the nation-building era of the United States, John Dickinson was further articulating his view of what an ideal American citizen should be. He explicitly stated, “individuals may injure a whole society by not declaring their sentiments” and “it is therefore not only their right but their duty to declare them”⁵⁰. With use of the word “duty”, Dickinson is expanding upon his framework of a citizen that he has building since his earliest public and political letters. This represents a part of Dickinson’s ideology that appears to have stayed consistent through his military service. In an effective society and government, the citizens have essential roles to play and have to take some ownership over their communities and country.

Furthering along the theme of expression, Dickinson also used the word “right” in reference to a person’s ability to speak. In addition, Dickinson also stated, in relation to the

⁴⁹ US History, “Timeline of the Revolutionary War”, [ushistory.org](http://www.ushistory.org).
<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/revwartimeline.html> (accessed May 9th, 2018).

⁵⁰ John Dickinson, “Letters of Fabius, in 1788, on the Federal Constitution; and in 1797 on the Present Situation of Public Affairs”, 1788, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College* (Carlisle, PA), 2

debate on the Constitution, “before this tribunal of THE PEOPLE, let everyone freely speak, what he really thinks”⁵¹. These thoughts on speech and public input by Dickinson continue along the same sentiments expressed by Dickinson prior to the war and during his service in the Pennsylvania legislature. Dickinson is still emphasizing the importance of receiving public input for actions and of the right and responsibility for citizens to provide input.

The support for the Constitution by Dickinson was clear and undisputed, especially in regards to many of the facets of the document that form the foundation of the governing structure of the United States. Dickinson overtly defends the election cycles of the members of Congress, especially in regards to the House of Representatives, when he wrote that the objection that the election cycles are too long cannot simply be true. Specifically, Dickinson stated “this objection sure applies not to the house of representatives, who are to be chosen every two years” and “they who desire the representatives to be chosen every year, should exceed Newton in calculations” and couldn’t truly believe “that the public business would...be better transacted”⁵². Additionally, giving insight to Dickinson’s views on what makes governance work, he stated “that frequent elections of the representatives of the people are the sovereign remedy of all grievances in a free government”⁵³. This is another milestone of Dickinson’s that stayed consistent through his military service. Dickinson’s advocacy and support for short terms mirrors his words a few decades earlier when he stated that representatives should have a “short duration of our power, which must be renewed by our constituents every year”⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2

⁵² Ibid., 10

⁵³ Ibid., 10

⁵⁴ John Dickinson, “Speech, Delivered in the House of Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania”, May 24th, 1764, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College*(Carlisle, PA) 16

The Post-Revolutionary War conditions in the United States provided Dickinson the opportunity and platform to clearly articulate and advocate for his particular philosophies regarding governance, society, and the duties of citizens. For example, Dickinson portrays many of his doctrines during the debate over the Constitution. In one letter talking about the reasons for a central government and its benefits, Dickinson says that “in forming a political society, each individual contributes some of his rights, in order that he may, from A COMMON STOCK of rights” so that all “derive greater benefits”⁵⁵. From this, it can be clearly seen how Dickinson views the role of society and how he is attempting to assuage those who might feel like they are giving up rights and liberty in the new proposed government. Furthermore, Dickinson begins to make the connections between natural and civil rights. During that time period, many famous philosophers (state secondary sources) were spreading their works and thoughts on society and specifically natural rights. Their influence can be seen throughout the political revolution in the former colonies and often through famous people and works such as Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence. While many focused on natural rights, Dickinson was articulating how natural rights are the source for civil rights and therefore the functionality of society. Specifically, Dickinson wrote that “we have now to consider the civil rights of man, and to show how, the originates out of the other” (in reference to natural rights)⁵⁶. Furthermore, even more explicitly and overt, Dickinson stated that “natural rights are

⁵⁵ John Dickinson, “Letters of Fabius, in 1788, on the Federal Constitution; and in 1797 on the Present Situation of Public Affairs”, 1788, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College* (Carlisle, PA), 16

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21

the foundation of all his civil rights”⁵⁷. Continuing on, Dickinson said that “man did not enter into society, to become worse than he was before, nor to have less rights than he had before, but to have those rights better secured”⁵⁸.

This illustrates perhaps one of the larger shifts for Dickinson pre and post military service. As highlighted previously, Dickinson seemed to have been an advocate and supporter of a model that favored a weak central government with only few, broad brush responsibilities while the rest of governance was left to more local institutions such as the state. Dickinson’s staunch support for a stronger federal government seems out of line with his pre-war thoughts but perhaps can be directly explained by his military service. An army and war is a textbook example of why central governments exist because they can do things as the sum of all parts (the states) than one of the parts individually. This may be best articulated by a fictional player in American politics and government when President Bartlett of the *West Wing* said “there are times when we’re fifty states and there are times when we’re one country, and have national needs” such as fighting “Germany in World War II”⁵⁹. Additionally, Dickinson directly addresses how a sum of parts can be more impactful than separate ones when he stated that a country in which each “individual contributes” to create a “common stock of rights” will be the best kind⁶⁰

Although it cannot be known for sure, perhaps Dickinson’s experience witnessing this first hand changed his thoughts on the value of a central government and was part of his shift

⁵⁷ Ibid., 21

⁵⁸ Ibid., 21

⁵⁹ Aaron Sorkin and Paul Redford, “The West Wing: ‘Game On’”, westwingtranscripts.com, <http://www.westwingtranscripts.com/search.php?flag=getTranscript&id=73> (accessed May 9th, 2018).

⁶⁰ John Dickinson, “Letters of Fabius, in 1788, on the Federal Constitution; and in 1797 on the Present Situation of Public Affairs”, 1788, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College* (Carlisle, PA), 16

in that ideology that culminated in him being a staunch supporter of the Constitution. Maybe Dickinson had an 18th century epiphany similar to Bartlett's quote of witnessing the fact that the United States could only have won the war against Great Britain as a union of states and not each colony individually waging war for independence. This may even be somewhat evident when Dickinson acknowledged the difficulties Delaware as an individual colony had with waging war when Dickins stated "I am truely sorry, we fall so abort of our quotas, which is owing to some particular circumstance⁶¹. This experience could have shown Dickinson how hard waging war could be individually but also how well it could be done when all of the states combine together under some central guide to operate. Again, this hypothesis is unproven but has a logical base than can point to perhaps how military service changed Dickinson's ideologies the most.

⁶¹ John Dickinson, "John Dickinson Correspondence 1776-1807: Letter to Gen. Nathanel Greene", August 20th, 1779, in *Archives and Special Collections; Dickinson College* (Carlisle, PA)

Conclusion

Shining light on the impacts of Dickinson and his beliefs helps to further find the true origins of the United States. While most Americans believe that they without a doubt know the founding history of the United States, it is hopefully evident through even only one singular character such as Dickinson that there is much to uncover in order to unveil the true history and take the lessons and understanding from the new finds into the present day. Additionally, Dickinson can serve as a text book example of how military service, especially for those who have the influence before and/or after to shape policy and govern, can affect a person's fundamental ideologies. It was uncovered that pre-war Dickinson was a man based upon patience and choosing the methodical approach. He also thought that a productive and effective government and society was based upon a mutual relationship between the government and the people in which the government protects people's rights (especially religious freedom) and citizens carried out their duties to preserve their country. Furthermore, Dickinson practiced the idea of being a delegate trustee when elected into an office in which he encouraged himself and others to seek out the will of the people before deciding on an issue. The final aspect of pre-war Dickinson's ideologies was his advocacy and belief in local governance over a central government (at that time it was colonial control over everyday operations instead of British Parliamentary control). These several key pillars constructed the framework upon which Dickinson used to govern and act pre-war. Post-war, it was learned that while many of Dickinson's pillars remained largely unchanged, such as actively soliciting public opinion and advocating for mutual relationship and duties between government and people, one meaningful pillar did shift. After his military service, Dickinson adjusted his viewpoint

towards more support of a strong central government based upon his promotion of the Constitution and his select words chosen to defend it. While this change can only be at best attributed as a correlational relationship to Dickinson's military service instead of a causal one, there is enough to potentially hypothesize that Dickinson's service played into that fundamental shift. Uncovering Dickinson's history is only one small step into further discovering the true origin story and also into identifying how military service can affect government official's philosophies actions. While it may be small, it is still a step toward truth and discovery.

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