



*Copley gave a military skirmish great national import.*

lieutenant governor, advanced on the main town's central square, and routed the French. In the moment of triumph, however, young Peirson was fatally shot.

Copley sensed the appeal that Peirson's sacrifice and the modest military victory might have to Englishmen, dispirited by years of martial failure in the American colonies. In his rendition, Copley did want historical accuracy—but only up to a point, according to Saunders, director of the Christian A. Johnson Memorial Gallery at Middlebury College. Copley believed “that it was not the artist's duty to depict reality. On the contrary, it was the artist's responsibility to elevate reality to a level beyond that of simple reporting, to communicate values such as nobility and sacrifice to future generations.”

Other artists had taken a less elevated approach to the Jersey battle. In the center of the earliest picture, by Thomas Gram

Colley and E. Hedges, Scottish troops of the 78th Highland Regiment, led by officers in kilts and tam-o'shanter, advance in rows, firing on the retreating French. One Highlander, meanwhile, rushes to assist the wounded Peirson, who braces himself against a building near where his troops entered the square. In placing him at the edge of the scene, Saunders notes, the artists “chose reportage over drama.”

Copley, by contrast (and despite at least one battlefield account), put Peirson at center stage, falling dramatically “into the arms of his military subalterns.” He relegated the Scottish Highlanders to far less prominent positions. It was *English* noble sacrifice that the painting was to display, after all. He also added a splendidly attired black servant, who avenges Peirson's death—but who probably did not exist.

Copley drew inspiration for his masterpiece from the 1770 print of the Boston Massacre, which depicted a similar scene. Paul Revere, who received most of the credit for the print, had taken the idea from an almost identical one by Copley's half-brother, Henry Pelham. Effective as radical propaganda, the Revere-Pelham portrayal of the massacre had little to do with what actually happened: Boston toughs provoked British troops into firing on them. Just over a decade later, Copley transformed the “graphic image of colonial hatred” into a masterful portrayal of “the glory of British military prowess.”

## OTHER NATIONS

### *The 'Perfect Dictatorship'*

Long hidden by a veil of constitutional democracy, Mexico's system of presidential absolutism (*presidencialismo*) is increasingly being seen, by Mexicans and foreign-

“Mexico: The Crumbling of the 'Perfect Dictatorship'” by Andrew Reding, in *World Policy Journal* (Spring 1991), World Policy Inst., New School for Social Research, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017.

ers alike, as a de facto form of dictatorship, says Reding, a Senior Fellow at the World Policy Institute. Indeed, when Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa declared in

1990 that Mexico was a "perfect dictatorship," having all the characteristics of a dictatorship except the appearance of one, his phrase was widely repeated inside Mexico. Yet this very fact, Reding points out, "is itself a clear sign that the 'perfect dictatorship' is no longer so perfect."

A new political culture, stressing respect for democracy and human rights, has emerged in Mexico. The catalyst for it, Reding says, was the July 1988 presidential elections, in which there were allegations of massive vote fraud. When early returns on election night showed opposition leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the lead, the U.S.-style computerized vote tabulation system that was providing returns over national television suddenly went dead. The votes instead were counted "the old-fashioned way." After a week's delay, the official results were released, showing an old-fashioned result: Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was the winner.

Cárdenas, however, would not follow "the old rules, whereby he might have recognized a Salinas presidency in exchange for more favorable treatment of his coalition in the Senate and at the state and local levels." The next year, he founded a new party, whose very name—the Party of the

Democratic Revolution (PRD)—underscored his challenge. "The PRD's call for a revolutionary change in the way Mexico is governed," Reding observes, "has, in effect, transformed every election in which it participates into a referendum on authoritarian rule."

Today, Reding says, "the culture of *presidencialismo* appears more naked than at any time since the ill-fated reign of Porfirio Díaz [the dictator overthrown in 1911]. The emerging democratic culture rejects the absolutist presidency outright, insisting on a true separation of powers, independent electoral authorities, a genuine multi-party system, and strict enforcement of internationally recognized standards of human rights." While these ideas are not new, Reding points out, their incorporation into a political movement is.

Although the Salinas administration has overhauled the nation's electoral system, Reding says, the vaunted reforms still reflect "a pervasive distrust of democracy, a continuing obsession with the trauma of 1988, and a determination to reconstruct the damaged foundations of *presidencialismo*." Salinas may continue to hold power, Reding concludes, "but nothing short of genuine democracy can now restore respect for the presidency."

## Moxie In Moscow

"Are Russians Lazy?" by S. Frederick Starr, in *World Monitor* (June 1991), 1 Norway St., Boston, Mass. 02115.

Many Western observers, and not a few Russian ones, have expressed skepticism about the prospects for democratic change in the Soviet Union. Democracy and free enterprise, they say, require a capacity for independent initiative that, after centuries of czars and decades of commissars, most Russians don't have. Not so, says historian Starr, president of Oberlin College.

"There is much evidence that the stereotype of passive Russians who lack civic initiative is dead wrong," he declares. "Take the economy, for instance. If Russians are so lacking in initiative, how did a huge private (if illegal) sector arise even during the repressive Brezhnev years?" This "second

economy," according to U.S. researchers, produced half of all personal income. Private entrepreneurs, by Soviet estimates in 1986, accounted for 20 percent of all retail trade, 30 percent of the service sector, and 40 percent of businesses in areas from auto repairs to tailoring.

Although Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev "has stated repeatedly that the public is hostile to private enterprise," the All Union Center for the Study of Public Opinion in Moscow found that a third of Russians would open their own businesses if they could do so legally; a quarter of the rest are put off from doing so only by a lack of access to credit or by fear that the