

Joseph Warren: A True Patriot Lost

The journey to victory in revolution invariably starts with the burning embers of discontent. Those wise enough to recognize the inequities start the embers burning—others fan them—then, there are those who truly ignite them, creating the flames of revolt. Dr. Joseph Warren, a veritable patriotic dynamo, acted with purpose and passion in each step towards liberty before the American Revolution; ultimately, the very flames he was instrumental in creating consumed him.

A “remarkable man of the Enlightenment,” Dr. Joseph Warren was “a man of demonstrated physical and moral courage, an intellectual leader in medicine and political theory, a provocateur, propagandist, spymaster, governor, and...soldier.”ⁱ He was born on June 11, 1741 in Roxbury, Massachusetts.ⁱⁱ Coming to America as a sailor, his ancestor Peter Warren settled in Boston in March 1659.ⁱⁱⁱ Joseph Warren’s father was a farmer; their class was the “middling sort.”^{iv} Entrenched in Puritan values and strict Calvinist beliefs of hatred of injustice and oppression, combined with a deep American identity, Warren was ripe to take up the cause for independence.^v

Reflecting his social standing and his family’s connection to America, Warren attended Roxbury Latin School and studied medicine at Harvard.^{vi} He apprenticed in Boston with Dr. James Lloyd, becoming part of Lloyd’s extensive social network, which included the highest levels of Boston society.^{vii} This transformed Warren from “an educated farm boy into a...respected town physician.”^{viii} Warren practiced in Boston, caring for upper-class patriots like John and Abigail Adams, Paul Revere, and William Dawes, poor laborers, and unnamed slaves.^{ix} He also spearheaded smallpox inoculation clinics.^x Contact with radical colonial leaders, coupled with a growing devotion to a civic role, defined Warren's political future.^{xi}

Outraged at British trespasses on American liberties, Warren, as Forman described, railed against injustice in print. In 1765 in the *Boston Gazette*, he wrote a passionate editorial about the Stamp Act as BW. He wrote as “a hearty Friend to your Civil Liberties, intended to warm your Imagination, and excite your Activity.” Drawing from Puritan roots and Age of Reason ideas, Warren continued: “[B]y the grand Preogatives [*sic*] of Human Nature; the lovely image if the Infinite Deity; -and...by that Liberty wherewith Christ has made you free.” Writing editorials also as Paskalos (1766-1767), Philo Physic (1767), and A True Patriot (1768), Warren evolved into an outraged citizen supporting Whig politics. As A True Patriot, against the Townshend Duties and Governor Bernard, he wrote, “Surely you must suppose we have lost all Feeling, or you would not dare thus tauntingly to display the Trophies of your Slanders, . . .But it is certain that Men totally abandoned to Wickedness, can never merit our Regard, be their Stations ever so high...If such Men are by God appointed, The Devil may be the Lord’s anointed.” After his editorial, the British attempted to sue the *Boston Gazette* for libel. The House of Representatives struck this down and A True Patriot bade his readers farewell: “With Pleasure I hear the general Voice of this People in favor of freedom;...independent men,...to support their own Rights, and the Liberty of the Press.”^{xii}

After writing as A True Patriot, his political involvement escalated. Acting as “Grand Master of Masons” and allying with The Sons of Liberty, Warren delivered the 1772 oratory commemorating the Boston Massacre.^{xiii} He compelled people to “use every method in [their] power to secure [their] rights [and] with united zeal and fortitude oppose the torrent of oppression.”^{xiv} He continued, “May we ever be a people favoured of GOD. May our land be a land of liberty, the seat of virtue, the asylum of the oppressed, a name and a praise in the whole earth.”^{xv} Though his involvement in the Boston Tea Party remains unclear, Warren responded to

the Intolerable Acts, drafting the Suffolk Resolves (1774), which proclaimed the Acts unjust and suggested retaliation.^{xvi} A founding member of the Committee of Correspondence (1772), which created free dialogue between Massachusetts towns and unified intelligence from his extensive spy ring (including possibly Mrs. Margaret Gage), Warren was pivotal in dispatching Paul Revere and William Dawes in the Lexington Alarm in 1775 to save Samuel Adams and John Hancock.^{xvii} In addition, in 1775, Warren acted as Chairman of the Committee of Safety and of Donations, as well as President of the third Massachusetts Provincial Congress, an extralegal, shadow government.^{xviii} Along with delivering his second Boston Massacre oration in 1775 despite British soldiers who menaced the crowd, he wore a toga which signaled “republicanism was...fast approaching.”^{xix} Warren also concluded that “warfare, if not independence from Great Britain, was all but inevitable.”^{xx}

Warren only saw battle twice—once in Lexington and again on Breed’s Hill (commonly known as Bunker Hill).^{xxi} He demonstrated “cool collected bravery” in battle.^{xxii} Recalling his father’s words, “I would rather a son of mine dead than a coward,” Warren noted that their sentiment “incited him to action.”^{xxiii} His father may have laid the groundwork, but there is no doubt that both desire for liberty and drive for independence informed Warren’s behavior. His most important statements—one to Samuel Adams in 1774 (“The mistress we court is LIBERTY; and it is better to die than not to obtain her”) and another in 1775 (“Our Liberty must be preserved; it is far dearer than life”) speak volumes.^{xxiv} In Lexington, Warren fought valiantly and “A musket-ball came so close to him as to take off a lock of his hair which curled close to his head.”^{xxv} Addressing the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, after the battle, he exclaimed, “Hostilities are at length commenced... We determine to die or be free.”^{xxvi} Responding to his mother’s distress at his near-death experience, he valiantly proclaimed, “Where danger is,...there

must your son be. Now is no time for any of America's children to shrink from any hazard. I will set her free or die."^{xxvii}

Warren's last stand was at Breed's Hill. Despite holding the rank of major general (uncommissioned), he volunteered as a private, asking to be positioned "where the battle would be fiercest" and he could be "most useful."^{xxviii} As others retreated, Warren held his ground, covering his fellow soldiers.^{xxix} A British officer's servant recognized him; he snatched the officer's pistol, and, shooting Warren under the left eye, killed him instantly.^{xxx} He was a martyr for the cause; John Trumbull's painting "The Death of General Warren" and a Bunker Hill monument immortalized his death.^{xxxi} Even the British acknowledged his worth: "William Howe, the British general with field command that day, likened the impact of Warren's demise to that of five hundred dead provincial soldiers."^{xxxii} Warren's death marked the end of a short but meaningful life.^{xxxiii} In fact, "had Warren lived, said Loyalist Peter Oliver in 1782, George Washington would have been 'an obscurity.'^{xxxiv}

Bolstered by his Puritan and purely American background, Warren's every move was choreographed to achieve liberty as the British tightened their hold on America. Just as he fought debilitating disease in his patients, he instinctively knew he had to rid America of the British, who were slowly sucking their life and liberty away. If blood had to flow to achieve independence, Warren boldly volunteered to stand up with his countrymen. Becoming the "embodiment of a young nation's sacrifice," there never was a truer Patriot.^{xxxv}

ⁱ George C. Wildrick, "Dr. Joseph Warren: leader in medicine, politics, and revolution," US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, last modified January 2009, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2626357/>.

ⁱⁱ Ryan Holland, "Joseph Warren: a discussion of his life and analysis of his death," *Journal of Neurosurgery* 39, no. 1: 1, accessed January 29, 2022, https://thejns.org/focus/view/journals/neurosurg-focus/39/1/article-pE13.xml?tab_body=pdf-22208 and Wildrick, "Dr. Joseph," US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Samuel Forman, *Dr. Joseph Warren: The Boston Tea Party, Bunker Hill, and the Birth of American Liberty* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2012), 16, digital file.
- ^{iv} *Ibid.*, 13 and Christian Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr: The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, the American Revolution's Lost Hero* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2018), 23, digital file.
- ^v *Ibid.*, 29 and Wildrick, "Dr. Joseph," US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*, and "Dr. Joseph Warren - the Man who Organized the Midnight Ride," Paul Revere Heritage Project, accessed January 30, 2022, <http://www.paul-revere-heritage.com/joseph-warren.html>.
- ^{vii} Holland, "Joseph Warren," 2 and Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr*, 55.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*, 55.
- ^{ix} Holland, "Joseph Warren," 2 and Wildrick, "Dr. Joseph," US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.
- ^x *Ibid.*
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*
- ^{xii} Forman, *Dr. Joseph*, 149, 151, 154, 158, 160, 148, 160, 162.
- ^{xiii} *Ibid.*, 174, 193 and Wildrick, "Dr. Joseph," US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health.
- ^{xiv} Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr*, 115.
- ^{xv} Forman, *Dr. Joseph*, 193.
- ^{xvi} Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr*, 134 and Holland, "Joseph Warren," 2.
- ^{xvii} Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr*, 124; Holland, "Joseph Warren," 2-3; Derek W. Beck, "Dr. Joseph Warren's Informant," *Journal of the American Revolution*, April 3, 2014, accessed January 29, 2022, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2014/04/dr-joseph-warrens-informant/>; Forman, *Dr. Joseph*, 298 and "Joseph Warren," Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York, last modified March 28, 2018, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://nymasons.org/site/joseph-warren/>.
- ^{xviii} Holland, "Joseph Warren," 3; Forman, *Dr. Joseph*, 298 and "5 More Things You Should Know About Dr. Joseph Warren," video, 06:48, Youtube, posted by Boston NHP, September 4, 2020, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqLEelNQe9w>.
- ^{xix} "Joseph Warren, 'The Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770,'" Library of America, last modified March 5, 2020, accessed January 30, 2022, https://www.loa.org/news-and-views/1613-joseph-warren-the-bloody-tragedy-of-the-fifth-of-march-1770?gclid=Cj0KCQiAoY-PBhCNARIsABcz771WaXxb_N8puXsaQUUp3fqLCyrjBDxTR-B64iwTEVu9X8ovLJtFy-0waAv7QEALw_wcB and "The Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770," Library of America, last modified March 1, 2020, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://storyoftheweek.loa.org/2020/03/the-bloody-tragedy-of-fifth-of-march.html>.
- ^{xx} Forman, *Dr. Joseph*, 321.
- ^{xxi} "Joseph Warren," American Battlefield Trust, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/joseph-warren>.
- ^{xxii} Holland, "Joseph Warren," 3.
- ^{xxiii} Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr*, 30.
- ^{xxiv} Joseph Warren, Dr. to Samuel Adams, "The Mistress we Court is LIBERTY," June 15, 1774, accessed January 30, 2022, <http://www.drjosephwarren.com/2013/04/the-mistress-we-court-is-liberty/> and Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr*, 146.
- ^{xxv} *Ibid.*, 169.
- ^{xxvi} Joseph Warren, Dr., address presented at the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, April 26, 1775, National Archives Foundation, last modified April 26, 1775, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/address-joseph-warren>.
- ^{xxvii} "Joseph Warren Dies a Martyr in the Battle of Bunker Hill," New England Historical Society, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/death-gen-joseph-warren> and "Joseph Warren," Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York.
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- ^{xxix} *Ibid.* and Di Spigna, *Founding Martyr*, 186.
- ^{xxx} Wildrick, "Dr. Joseph," US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health; Forman, *Dr. Joseph*, 363 and Holland, "Joseph Warren," 4.
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- ^{xxxii} Forman, *Dr. Joseph*, 367.

^{xxxiii} **Ibid.**

^{xxxiv} *Ibid.*, 248, digital file and "Joseph Warren, The Patriot Who Might Have Made Us Forget George Washington," New England Historical Society, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/joseph-warren-patriot-made-forget-george-washington/#:~:text=Joseph%20Warren%20was%20gregarious%2C%20charming,of%20the%20Sons%20of%20Liberty.>

^{xxxv} "Dr Joseph," National Park Service.

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Biography

Matthew Breier is currently a senior at Hopkins School. He is a nationally rated fencer (B21) and is the first starter on the varsity fencing team. He has earned a varsity letter in each of the past six years. He was elected to the All-Academic Fencing Team in 2019, 2020 (2nd team), 2021(1st team) and the All-American Fencing Team in 2019 (2nd team), 2020 (1st team), 2021 (1st team) in addition to qualifying for the Fencing Junior Olympics and Fencing Nationals. He earned 3rd place in the North American Cup, Division 2 in December 2019 and 10th place in the Connecticut State High School Individual Championship. He earned 2nd place in the Connecticut State High School Individual Championship in 2020. He also qualified for 1st Team All State.

Matthew plays alto saxophone in his school jazz band. He has been selected for the Connecticut Southern Regionals- CT Honors Music Ensembles for the past six years.

In this year's National Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Matthew earned a Silver Key in Flash Fiction and an Honorable Mention in short story. In last year's National Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Matthew earned a National Silver Key and a regional Gold Key Award in the Flash Fiction category, as well as Honorable Mentions in Short Story, Personal Essay/Memoir, and Dramatic Script. Two years ago, he earned a Gold Key Award in the Poetry category, as well as two Honorable Mentions in Short Story and one in Poetry. He earned a Silver Key, Maxima Cum Laude in the National Latin Exam two years ago and Cum Laude last year.

Matthew is also the founder of the Hopkins Fencing History Club, the treasurer of the Random Acts of Kindness Club, and a member of the Make-A-Wish Club at school. He plans to study history in college. He has been accepted Early Decision to the University of Pennsylvania.