



The Declaration of Independence and Antebellum Philadelphia Gothic

By Katherine Henry

Pub Date: 01 September 2026
Binding: Paperback
Price: £20.99 / \$24.95
ISBN: 9781839999642

BISAC CATEGORY: LITERARY CRITICISM / American / Regional LITERARY CRITICISM / Subjects & Themes / Politics, HISTORY / United States / Revolutionary Period (1775-1800)
BISAC CODE: LIT023000

BIC CODE:

Extent: 100 pages
Size: 153 x 229 mm / 6 x 9 inches

RIGHTS
Exclusive: WORLD

Series: Anthem Studies in Gothic Literature

Reveals how antebellum Philadelphia gothic writers used “civic horror” to imagine dark alternative futures for the American republic, illuminating the contradictions inherent in the Declaration of Independence.

This book reconsiders the founding document of the United States at a crucial moment in its history. Focusing on gothic fiction published in Philadelphia roughly during the period 1830–1855, Henry argues that the newly developing American national mythology also gave rise to much darker accounts of the nation’s descent into mob violence, corruption, and the breakdown of the rule of law. In stories that reconceive history as gothic romance, Edgar Allan Poe, George Lippard, and Robert Montgomery Bird developed a literary mode Henry calls “civic horror,” a mode that frequently wandered into the speculative territory of “what if.” What if Independence Hall were razed to the ground, and in its place a royal palace was built? What if George Washington had accepted the King’s offer of a British peerage and turned traitor to the patriot cause? What if an unruly mob appropriated the Declaration of Independence as justification for its lawlessness or what if the lawlessness of the frontier came to characterize city life? Henry analyses such scenarios in Philadelphia’s antebellum gothic fiction and considers their relevance to U.S. politics at the Declaration’s 250th anniversary.

Key selling points

- Offers a fresh look at the Declaration of Independence on its 250th anniversary.
- Identifies an understudied regional American gothic tradition in antebellum Philadelphia, with “civic horror” as its characteristic mode.
- Explores the intersection of literature and political theories of citizenship.
- Considers the dark underside of the national mythology surrounding the American Revolution that was developing in the decades before the Civil War.

About the Author(s) / Editor(s)

Katherine Henry is Associate Professor Emeritus in the English Department at Temple University. She is the author of *Liberalism and the Culture of Security: The Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric of Reform* (2011).

Ordering in North America, Latin America and Caribbean	Ordering in the UK/Rest of the World	Ordering in Australia
Ingram Publishers Services (US) 1 Ingram Blvd. Mail stop #512 Lavergne, TN 37086, United States Tel: +1 866 400 5351 ips@ingramcontent.com	Ingram Publishers Services (UK) 1 Deltic Avenue, Rooksley Milton Keynes, MK13 8LD United Kingdom Tel: +44 (0) 1752 202300 Fax: 01752 202330 IPSUK.Orders@ingramcontent.com	NewSouth Books C/O Alliance Distribution Services (ADS) 9 Pioneer Avenue Tuggerah 2259 NSW, Australia Tel: +61 (02) 4390 1300 Fax: +1800-66-44-77 adscs@alliancedist.com.au

