



A New England Prison Diary: Slander, Religion, and Markets in Early America

Martin J. Hershock

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In 1812, New Hampshire shopkeeper Timothy M. Joy abandoned his young family, fleeing the creditors who threatened to imprison him. Within days, he found himself in a Massachusetts jailhouse, charged with defamation of a prominent politician. During the months of his incarceration, Joy kept a remarkable journal that recounts his personal, anguished path toward spiritual redemption. Martin J. Hershock situates Joy's account in the context of the pugnacious politics of the early republic, giving context to a common citizen's perspective on partisanship and the fate of an unfortunate shopkeeper swept along in the transition to market capitalism.

In addition to this close-up view of an ordinary person's experience of a transformative period, Hershock reflects on his own work as a historian. In the final chapter, he discusses the value of diaries as historical sources, the choices he made in telling Joy's story, alternative interpretations of the diary, and other contexts in which he might have placed Joy's experiences. The appendix reproduces Joy's original journal so that readers can develop their own skills using a primary source.

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