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## IN SEARCH OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER: FRENCH TRAVELLERS IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PENNSYLVANIA

**A**lthough he never visited William Penn's "Holy Experiment," the French philosopher Voltaire played a major role in spreading its eighteenth century reputation. Driven from France in 1726 by aristocrats incensed at his insults, the 32-year old thinker took up residence in London where he remained for thirteen years. In 1734, he published his famous *Philosophical Letters* which advertised to his oppressed countrymen the religious freedom, political liberty, and commercial prosperity enjoyed across the Channel. He thereby established English institutions as a model for the French Enlightenment.

But great as was Voltaire's admiration for his nation's perennial enemy, he reserved his highest praise for a land he never visited—Pennsylvania. Beginning his short book with four letters on the Quakers, he quickly probed behind their superficially absurd customs to the sublimity of their pacifism and egalitarianism. Where they had free rein, Voltaire discovered

A really novel spectacle: a ruler whom everyone addressed as thou, to whom they spoke wearing their hats, a government without priests, a people without weapons, citizens all equal, except the judiciary, and neighbors without jealousy. William Penn could congratulate himself on having established on earth the golden age so often talked about, and which has probably only ever existed in Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup>

If Pennsylvania represented for Voltaire the pinnacle of English liberty and prosperity, it became the cynosure of the French travellers

who began to visit America in the late eighteenth century. Pennsylvania became a prime source of data for officers, diplomats, revolutionaries, and exiles seeking insight into the world's first great modern republic, and whether its principles and institutions could be transferred to Europe.

Except for Hector St.-John de Crevecoeur, an army officer who immigrated to New York after the French and Indian War, French soldiers in the Revolution were their nation's first friendly observers of a land at war with Canada for most of the previous century. But unlike loyalist sympathizer Crevecoeur, even those officers who admired the new nation had few kind words for the pacifist Quakers, whom they suspected of closet Toryism. In contrast to the aristocratic officers, future revolutionaries Barbe-Marbois and Brissot de Warville echoed Voltaire's enthusiasm for the world the Quakers made. By the 1790s, however, the counter-revolution had begun in thought as well as deed. The famous author Chateaubriand, future King Louis Philippe, and jurist Moreau de St.-Mery viewed their temporary home through eyes embittered by the Reign of Terror. They mentioned Pennsylvania either cursorily or critically, and advanced the critique of a materialistic, uncultured, and uninteresting mass society fully developed three decades later in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

One of the few Frenchmen able to observe the English colonies before the Revolution, Crevecoeur (1725–1813) was a man of disguises. In writing the *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (unpublished until 1925), he changed his name to Hector St.-John from Michel Guillaume and his place of residence from upstate New York to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Crevecoeur's literary sleight-of-hand provides the key to understanding his works. Hector was the most valiant and humane of all the Trojan warriors who fell in defence of their homeland. St. John predicted the apocalypse and the New Jerusalem, and in fact Crevecoeur explicitly refers to John's Revelation as an analog to comprehend the disastrous effects of the Revolution on morality and civic virtue.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, he centers so much of his narrative on Pennsylvania to drive home most effectively the contrast between the peace and prosperity achieved under the Quakers and the horrors of guerrilla warfare on the Pennsylvania frontier.

The structure of *Letters from an American Farmer*, the most famous and optimistic of Crevecoeur's works, reflects the author's message. After a brief dialogue in which James (the author), his wife, and a minister established that America is indeed worthy of Europe's careful

attention, Crèvecoeur uses Pennsylvania's melting pot as the model of this "new man," the American. He then presents us with a similar tolerant, peaceful, and prosperous society in Nantucket, demonstrating that hard work could achieve on New England's rocky soil what nature had so generously aided in Pennsylvania. Crèvecoeur then turns to a terrible contrast—slave society in South Carolina epitomized by a Negro slowly tortured to death, eaten alive by birds in a cage—before returning to John Bartram's suburban Philadelphia garden, the very image of the final tranquility achieved in Voltaire's *Candide* after the character finally settle down to "cultivate their garden." The final section, "Distresses of a Frontiersman," depicts the havoc wrought by the Revolution and forms an effective transition to the bleak essays unpublished during Crèvecoeur's lifetime.

Crèvecoeur's theme is that the Pennsylvania established by the Quakers, and by extension America, is indeed a fit subject for literature. As if answering in advance later writers' lament that America has no great literature because it lacked a sense of the past, Crèvecoeur insists that the New World is far more interesting than the old: "I cannot be called a partial American when I say that the spectacle afforded by these pleasing scenes must be more entertaining and more philosophical than that which arises from beholding the musty ruins of Rome." Europe is the scrapheap of humanity, America its future: "misguided religion, tyranny, and absurd laws everywhere depress and afflict mankind. Here we have in some measure regained the ancient dignity of our species; our laws are simple and just; we are a race of cultivators; our cultivation is unrestrained; and therefore everything is prosperous and flourishing."<sup>3</sup>

What was true of America was especially true of Pennsylvania: Crèvecoeur traces the opportunities available to a poor, hard-working Pennsylvania immigrant through the story of "Andrew the Hebridean." He prospers both through his own labors and the wonderful cooperation of a society so neighborly that even Indians are allowed to enter a merchant's house, deposit their furs, and take a fair measure of goods. Crèvecoeur views the peaceful coexistence of self-improvement and voluntary association for the public good as the essence of "the American . . . a new man, who acts upon new principles. . . . From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence."<sup>4</sup> "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the new pilgrims who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts and sciences, vigor, and industry."

Ethnically diverse, pacifist Pennsylvania, in short, encapsulates the best of the New World. Crevecoeur waxed rhapsodic over "Penn, thou best of legislators, who by the wisdom of thy laws hast endowed human nature, within the bounds of the province, with every dignity it can possibly enjoy in a civilized state, and showed by this singular establishment what all men might be if they would follow thy example." Philadelphia, "that blessed city of bread and provisions . . . finer than Greenock and Glasgow, which are ten times as old" was the collective product of many transplanted Hebridean Andrews.<sup>5</sup>

Crevecoeur is most anxious to show that simple husbandry did not degrade its practitioners' intellectual or cultural life. Unlike the "Russian boor" or "Hungarian peasant . . . condemned to a slavery worse than that of our Negroes," he found the American farmer "ploughing with his child, to feed his family, inferior only to the emperor of China ploughing as an example to his kingdom." He possessed "freedom of thought" and "freedom of action." As a benevolent ruler, he governed his cattle; as a political scientist, he could observe "a curious republic of industrious hornets"; as a connoisseur of music, he admired "the most universal vocal choir" of the birds and listened to "the street love tales of our robins"; as a household economist, he wondered at the "astonishing art which all birds display in the construction of their nests . . . their neatness, their conveniences, always makes me ashamed of the slovenliness of our houses." Although during his childhood, Crevecoeur confessed that he thought farm life "afforded but a dull repetition of the same labors and pleasures," when he reached adulthood "my farm, my house, my barn presented to my imagination objects from which I adduced new ideas."

Hence it is that after excursions to Nantucket and South Carolina, Crevecoeur returns to the famous botanical gardens of "Mr. John Bartram" as a demonstration of an American who fully realized his nation's potential. Crevecoeur puts his description of Bartram's beautiful fusion of horticulture and botany, art and science, reason and nature into the mouth of "Iwan," a Russian traveller, to demonstrate the most extreme contrast between free and tyrannical rule: "we should be too numerous, too happy, too powerful a people if it were possible for the whole Russian empire to be cultivated like the province of Pennsylvania."<sup>7</sup>

But it is not primarily Bartram's science which interests Crevecoeur: it is his rise to prosperity and renown, his management of this household, and his Quaker religion which cap his achievements and those of Pennsylvania and America. An uneducated man, left a small

farm encumbered with debts by his father, Bartram became a botanist after idly plucking a daisy: "What a shame," he observed, "that thee shouldst have employed so many years in tilling the earth and destroying so many flowers and plants without being acquainted with their structures and their uses." He then learned Latin to read Linnaeus, and ultimately became almost as famous in Europe as that other self-made epitome of American science and personal achievement, Benjamin Franklin.<sup>8</sup>

Crevecoeur also dwells on Bartram's personal relationships. He regards visits from "friends and foreigners" as his "greatest advantage." He freed his slaves and was active in the anti-slavery movement: the Negroes who sat at his table were his "companions." Bartram's humanity stemmed from his belonging to the Quakers, "good people [who] flatter themselves with following the doctrines of Jesus Christ in that simplicity with which they were delivered; a happier system could not have been devised for the use of mankind."<sup>9</sup>

After his description of Bartram's Garden of Eden, Crevecoeur plunges us immediately into the "Distresses of a Frontier Man" who has lost all sense of certainty through the devastation of civil war: "Oh, could I remove my plantation to the shores of the Obi, willingly would I dwell in the hut of a Samoyed; with cheerfulness would I go and bury myself in the cavern of a Laplander." With Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson's works, Crevecoeur's later essays are the first important writings of the counter-revolution, calling attention to the evil effects of war, hatred, and politicization on an ignorant populace misled by unscrupulous leaders. But whereas Hutchinson temperately analyzes the new democracy from the relatively civilized perspective of Boston, Crevecoeur takes us to the wilderness where patriots, loyalists, and Indians battled each other with little respect for the rules of war.<sup>10</sup>

If Bartram's garden symbolized the promise of America, the Wyoming Valley Massacre becomes its Paradise lost:

The people of Susquehanna . . . rapidly launched forth into all the intricate mazes of this grand quarrel as their inclinations, prepossessions, and prejudices led them. It was a fatal era, which has since disseminated among them the most horrid poison; which has torn them with interesting divisions; and has brought on that languor, that internal weakness, that suspension of industry, and the total destruction of their noble beginning."

Just as he had earlier rejected the elite history which dwelled on ancient ruins and examples rather than the farmers' rise to liberty,

Crevecoeur spurns in advance the "journals, memoirs [and] elaborate essays [which] shall not fail hereafter to commemorate the heroes who have made their appearance on the new American stage" in favor of "scenes of sorrow and affliction." He descends from "the destruction of an extensive government or nation to that of several individuals, to that of a once opulent, happy, virtuous family. There we pause, for it is more analogous to our own situation." "Tired of the company of generals, rulers, imperial delegates, and modern governors," Crevecoeur stresses instead the "more humble but perhaps not less interesting" "Landscapes"—so he termed them—showing the appalling effects of revolution on decent people who wished only to live in peace.<sup>12</sup>

One of Crevecoeur's most biting satires concerns the abuse of the Quakers for their refusal to fight. To a revolutionary colonel who justifies the conflict as the harbinger of a new millennium, three imprisoned Quakers respond: "Which of the two dost thee imagine will be recorded by future historians in the most conspicuous manner: our great founder William Penn . . . who reared on justice and mercy so beautiful a fabric, who introduced into Pennsylvania every distressed European and constituted him his brother, or those who have impiously defaced this noble monument?" The colonel refuses to, or cannot, argue. He merely mocks the "broad brims":

Quakers in the midst of a civil war, and yet they pretend to their rights of peace! A most laughable thing, indeed! You may go to the moon and be Quakers there with all my heart, provided God placed none else there, and call it New Pennsylvania if you please.<sup>13</sup>

For Crevecoeur, the Revolution irrevocably destroyed the uniqueness and promise of Pennsylvania. The moon is the only place of refuge remaining. The Russian Iwan returns for a final appearance to bemoan tyranny and immorality worse than those under the czar. But the twenty year old Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834) thought the American Revolution "the final struggle of liberty, and its defeat would have left it neither asylum nor hope." Dreams of glory and national honor merged with the young man's idealistic devotion to the rights of man. "The humiliation of insolent England, the advantage to my country, [and] the welfare of humanity, for which it is important that there be a people in the world who are totally free," compelled his clandestine voyage to America. He also noted more pragmatically that had the colonies reunited with England "that would have been the end of our Antilles and our possessions in Africa and Asia, of our maritime commerce, and consequently of our navy, and ultimately of our political existence."<sup>14</sup>

Lafayette fell in love with America and the Americans, and they reciprocated. His pre-eminence among the French who fought for independence was by no means assured at the outset. He had to earn respect and commands on the field of battle and by his conduct in camp. But unlike other Europeans, "in his dress, his food, and his habits he adopted American customs, but he was even more simple, frugal, and austere than anyone else." Lafayette came to condemn "European prejudices" where "birth is a thing much thought of" and wished that "equality and harmony . . . so precious in a republican state, continue in this one forever."<sup>15</sup>

However, Philadelphia and its Quakers were about the only Americans whom Lafayette despised. He argued with American officers that the "dismal city" which he termed a "tiresome prison" was not worth defending as

It is full of a wretched sort of people, the ridiculous Quakers, who are fit only to gather in a hall with large hats on their heads whatever the weather. They wait there in silence for the Holy Spirit until one of them, wearied from not seeing it appear, gets up and utters a great deal of tearful nonsense. There you have the people of Philadelphia who, moreover, never fight.<sup>16</sup>

The Quakers' pacifism outraged the ardent young Marquis. As the Pennsylvania radicals, he thought their principles but a convenient cloak for loyalism and profiting from both sides": "The Quakers, plebeian Jesuits, hated the carnage but served as guides to the royal troops." Somewhat paradoxically, Lafayette spoke of his "unbounded admiration" for the equally pacific Bethlehem Moravians, among whom he recuperated from a wound, as "truly touching and very interesting."<sup>17</sup>

At least a few of Lafayette's fellow French aristocrats went beyond sharing his enthusiasm for republicanism to finding Philadelphia and Pennsylvania most pleasing as well. Jean Baptiste Verger (1762-1851), an eighteen year old sub-lieutenant when he arrived in America in 1780 and subsequently a diplomat in the service of Napoleon, expressed admiration for the "large and beautiful city," with all its "streets perfectly straight, the houses tall and built of brick." He commented favorably on the "extremely well cultivated land" around Lancaster and attributed this to the presence of "nothing but Germans" in the region. The easy access to farms also helped: "Land was distributed to all who wished to cultivate it at a very modest sum," whereby "those who behaved well had no trouble becoming established."<sup>18</sup>

Verger's admiration for the Americans was fueled in part by his

detestation of British atrocities. The most graphic of those he described concerned Colonel Banastre Tarleton's dragoons, who apparently raped a pregnant woman before slitting open her belly and murdering her and the infant. But the British did not limit their barbarity to human beings. Verger regretted their needless vandalism in Philadelphia's suburbs, which "used to be charming and had several avenues lined with trees, all of which were cut down by the English." Fortunately, he found the "very war-wise and quite well-disciplined" Continentals full of "courage and enthusiasm." Even the militia, although not always reliable, "performed feats that veteran units would have gloried in accomplishing."<sup>19</sup>

The Baron Cromot du Borg, an aide to General Rochambeau, was also won over by both America and Pennsylvania. He was "delighted with what I had seen in a country still barbarous in its manners and its slight cultivation." He found the City of Brotherly Love "large, and quite well built," taking special note of the gridiron layout and "sidewalks on each side [of streets] for travellers on foot." The city housed "several very handsome churches" and "numerous shops richly supplied." "It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful view than Philadelphia presented from the water," he exclaimed. The "wide and very fine highway" to Germantown and the "many little villages and "pleasant country houses in the neighborhood" also charmed him.<sup>20</sup>

Although he drew no moral judgment on the issue, Cromot noted the Americans' simplicity and egalitarianism. "Our innkeeper was a captain, the several military grades being granted here to every rank of people. There are also shoemakers who are colonels; it often happens that the Americans ask French officers what their trade is." Cromot was surprised that the President of Congress even balked at saluting the French troops as pretentious, but did so when Rochambeau informed him the King of France himself did so."<sup>21</sup>

The Prince de Broglie, who began to tour the states in 1782, disagreed with Cromot's appreciation of Philadelphia's appearance from a distance. He termed it "not very striking . . . as the houses have but little elevation." But upon arrival, he found the city "commodious and magnificent" and confessed to having "enjoyed myself greatly there." The city's rural environs moved him to romantic rapture:

The beauty of the woods, the charms of the country through which I passed, the solemn majesty of the forests which I crossed, the appearance of plenty exhibited everywhere, the hospitality of the inhabitants, the pretty complexions and the good breeding of



almost all of the women, all contributed to repay me by delicious sensations for the fatigues which I encountered.<sup>22</sup>

The Prince also offered some interesting quick sketches of prominent Philadelphians. Superintendent of Finance Robert Morris was “thoroughly honest and possessed of great intelligence. . . . He has the best of credit and has used it skillfully, as well as his own private means, for the service of the republic.” Gouverneur Morris, on the other hand, although “well educated” and a fine French linguist, was “very sarcastic.” The Prince predicted that “his superiority, which he has taken no pains to conceal, will prevent his ever occupying an important place.”<sup>23</sup>

Broglie’s general opinion of Philadelphia’s people, however, was mixed, although not nearly as negative as the observation of many of his compatriots. He found something to admire in the women’s “natural wit,” lack of frivolity, and fidelity to their husbands and children. But he also noted that they wore their “magnificent garments” in bad taste, were generally unattractive, and lacked social grace. The men he found “naturally phlegmatic and very fond of money.” Wealthy citizens of old families had begun to establish “class distinctions” out of “vanity and self-love.” Such behavior contradicted the republican spirit which he thought “ought to obtain among the inhabitants, the most perfect equality.” The pursuit of private gain had already led to the decline of public life later noted by de Tocqueville, for Broglie thought Congress “composed of very ordinary people” as “the clever people had discovered the secret of obtaining for themselves the most important offices and positions.” Run-of-the mill citizens were already jealous of “those most distinguished for their talents” as well, and denied Congressional seats to the most “eloquent and energetic men” who had previously “carried their propositions by the superiority of their intelligence, and thus seemed to have exercised interference with the liberty of voting in Congress.”<sup>24</sup>

Broglie’s mild criticisms of the new republic pale, however, beside those of other French aristocrats. Two officers who accompanied Lafayette and failed to receive the courtesies granted to their leader were especially scathing. The Vicomte du Mauroy, an infantry captain for fifteen years before he was discharged in 1772, only went to America because “I was in no position to be choosy.” He hoped thereby to obtain “a position the moment I returned to France.” Even before they arrived in the United States, Mauroy was playing devil’s advocate to the enthusiastic young Marquis’ claim that the Americans were “united by

the love of virtue and liberty” and were “simple, good, hospitable people who prefer beneficence to all our vain pleasures and death to slavery.” Mauroy replied that

Fanaticism, the insatiable desire to get rich, and misery—these are, unfortunately, the three sources from which flow that nearly uninterrupted stream of immigrants who, sword in hand, go to cut down, under an alien sky, forests more ancient than the world, watering a still virgin land with the blood of its savage inhabitants, and fertilizing with thousands of cadavers of the fields they conquered through crime.<sup>25</sup>

Expecting Lafayette would single out the pacifist Quakers as an exception to the new nation’s criminal fanaticism, Mauroy proceeded to denounce them as well: “These supposedly good people yield with regret to the projects of their neighbors, that they piously desire only peace and abundance, and that finally all powers are the same to them because, under their truly monkish constitution, no power can bind them.” For Mauroy, Pennsylvania represented the unearned fruit of others’ patriotic defense of a greedy, self-centered “monkish” people. Lafayette would ultimately accept such a view of the Quakers, although he retained his dedication to the Revolution.<sup>26</sup>

The Chevalier Dubuysson, aide-de-camp to the Baron de Kalb and another member of Lafayette’s party, also complained that “the French are very poorly received here for their sacrifices on behalf of an ungrateful and undeserving people.” The Americans cheated him, he thought, when he bought supplies or stayed at inns. In return, he mocked an army that he claimed had one basic maneuver: “to deliver a very accurate volley from behind some bushes and wait, well hidden, for the enemy.” The people were only verbally courageous: “They have believed themselves in earnest, a nation of heroes, so long as they saw no danger.” Americans were generally “cowards” who preferred lucrative government jobs to service in the trenches. Far from being the honest yeomen the Marquis admired, Dubuysson observed that the inhabitants, “having few pleasures, are very attached to the few luxuries that they are able to enjoy, with the result that the privation of tea, Madeira wine, some spices, etc., is much more painful to them than it would be to a European, and makes them long for peace.” The Revolution was “a civil war, rather than the revolt of a people.”<sup>27</sup>

Pennsylvania and the Quakers, whom Dubuysson inaccurately described as constituting a majority of the province, epitomized the cowardice and selfishness found everywhere. They were nearly “all

royalists, and hasten the arrival of [General William] Howe at Philadelphia as much as they can. They have been driven to that by the vexation that Congress had made them suffer, while excluding them from all government offices under the pretext that they refuse to fight. They secretly furnish provisions to the enemy." Unlike Lafayette, Dubuysson could at least sympathize with the Quakers because he detested the Americans for whom he was fighting."<sup>28</sup>

Dubuysson admitted that the Americans had at least some cause for their initial hostility to the French because worthless officers, primarily from the French West Indies, had abused the revolutionaries' hospitality before Lafayette's arrival. But even after the Marquis' sterling behavior smoothed his countrymen's paths, other French officers retained their contempt. The Comte d'Estaing (1728–1793), the first and unsuccessful commander of a major French expedition in the war and an aristocrat subsequently executed during the Terror, regarded his comrades-in-arms with disdain. "One must fawn, to the height of insipidity, over every little republican who regards flattery as his sovereign right . . . and have some colonels who are innkeepers." He found American table manners symbolically repulsive of American society, including "using a knife as a spoon, doing without napkins, drinking to the health of ten persons with each drop one swallows, quenching one's thirst with grog, . . . keeping the most somber table in the world, . . . and drinking from the same enormous goblet from which many have just wet their uninviting lips."<sup>29</sup>

The equally high-toned Count Axel de Fersen (1750–1810), a Swede who probably became Marie Antoinette's lover and masterminded the royal family's ill-fated flight to Varennes during the French Revolution, agreed with d'Estaing. Americans were basically lazy and greedy. "With two such aimable vices, how can any warlike material be made of them?" he asked. Aside from a few leading men who made "great sacrifices"—especially Washington, whom Fersen called the "most illustrious man of our century"—the people "only look out for their own interests." "Money is the prime motor of all their actions; their only thought is how to make it." Fersen, like many of his compatriots, found in Pennsylvania the outstanding example of the general case. He capped his sad tale with the mutiny of the Pennsylvania Line in January 1781. He did not know whether to condemn more their lack of patriotism or that of the inefficient commissary which provoked it: "they were, it is true, thoroughly demoralized, being destitute of clothes and shoes, then starved for nearly four days."<sup>30</sup>

Jean Louis, the Comte de Clermont-Crevecœur (1752–1824), a

future emigre, agreed with his fellow counter-revolutionaries that the selfish, absurd American cause only triumphed through French assistance. Although he preferred the as yet uncorrupted countryside to the "suspicion, fraud, and insincerity" of the American cities, he still found the Americans lazy and uncivilized. For example, "they provide nothing pleasant or convenient out-of-doors such as groves or trees or ponds." "How could one expect such men to be good soldiers?" he asked rhetorically:

Living with their families in peace and quiet for a hundred years, the Americans became accustomed to a soft life in the midst of plenty. . . . How could these people be soldiers, especially now that the war seems to have no end they have grown thoroughly tired of it.<sup>31</sup>

Only the arrival of the French army, Clermont believed, "raised the Americans' spirits to some degree."

If Clermont reserved his severest criticisms for the Bostonians—"the coldest people in America," "so engrossed in their business affairs that they seem to have time for little else"—Philadelphia was a close second. If the streets and brick houses were "superb," the people "seem to take very little interest in the war." Some merchants, though, stated baldly "that peace would only hurt their trade; thus, for business reasons, they did not want it." Even Philadelphia's much-heralded arts and sciences he found the concern of but "a few individuals." And the Quakers were either "terribly dreary" or frivolous apostates from their "detested" religion.<sup>32</sup>

Clermont argued that Pennsylvanians perverted their egalitarian principles much as the Quakers' behavior denied their faith. In a meritocracy without class distinctions "there is a scramble for lucrative posts," which the "alleged talents" of the rich obtained "in the light of their gold, which they know how to pour forth in order to satisfy their vanity." He found the Americans' pride and ostentation remarkable: "very poor families . . . would rather dress well and look rich than eat better food." In short, equality did not promote civic virtue, but stimulated the vain desires of essentially indistinguishable plebeians to sort themselves out through political officeholding and conspicuous consumption.<sup>33</sup>

Neither the Comte de Rochambeau (1725-1804) nor his third-in-command, the Marquis de Chastellux (1734-1788) shared this contempt. Feted and honored throughout the states, these two very dissimilar generals admired the Americans. Unlike the urbane Chastel-

lux, who was charmed by the Americans' hospitality and culture, Rochambeau was a monomaniac for order, cleanliness, and discipline, a point remarked upon by many of his officers.<sup>34</sup> The first 105 pages of his brief 113 page journal deal with purely military matters. He only takes time out to praise "the discipline of the [French] army which far exceeded the idea they [the Americans] had formed of it and that, moreover, contributed in no small degree to correct the unfavorable impression which they had been prejudiced against the French." Even the Indians, who were no longer awed by guns and cannons, could not contain their astonishment when they beheld apple trees loaded with fruit hanging over the tents which our soldiers had occupied for the three months past."<sup>35</sup>

Rochambeau introduces the Philadelphia Quakers to show that even they admired his army. They presented an address praising him as "the friend of mankind" as "thy army liveth in perfect order and discipline." Rochambeau went so far as to boast somewhat untruthfully of "inconceivable discipline" which prevented even "a single duel or quarrel." He was a bit forgetful: Cromot du Borg commented in July 1781 of "many depredations" committed by the French soldiers, which Rochambeau punished "with several hundred blows of the stick."<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, almost as an afterthought, Rochambeau made a few shrewd observations on the "manners and political and religious opinions" of his allies. He found a lack of enthusiasm for the Revolution among both merchants dependent on British trade and agriculturalists. But four factors overcame the loyalism, pacifism, and differences between the democratic North and aristocratic South he noted. First, "the zealous efforts" of the Bostonians spurred on the colonies. What their energy could not accomplish "the violent doings of the English and the Hessians" did. The new states' quick adoption of religious toleration and the prevention of religion "from taking a part in political deliberation" contributed to victory. So did the "zeal, courage, and emulation, in which they were never backward," of the American soldiers by the time Rochambeau arrived in 1780.<sup>37</sup>

Rochambeau commented favorably on an orderly America which mirrored his own obsession with discipline. He praised the women for their fidelity and for children who were "kept extremely clean." "Unblemished cleanliness" also characterized the inhabitants' dwellings. Rochambeau also remarked without judgment on the "simplicity . . . without any of the exterior appendages of luxury" in the rural areas where the settler was "neither a lord of the manor nor a farmer," but

"luxury has made more progress," notably through the use of English furniture and French fashions.<sup>38</sup>

Nothing could be further from Rochambeau's austere narrative than that of his subordinate, Francois-Jean, Marquis de Chastellux's *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782*. Elected the youngest member of the French Academy in 1775 for his work *On the Public Happiness*, Chastellux (1734-1788) was a favorite of the Parisian philosophers and especially of the aged Voltaire. Chastellux discovered in America the apogee of nearly all the virtues he admired. At one Providence, Rhode Island residence where he stayed, for example, he found that "comfort and simplicity reign. [which] give an idea of that sweet and serene state of happiness, which appears to have taken refuge in the New World, while leaving mere pleasure to the Old." A typical hostess possessed "such an amiable and polite bearing as to present a picture of decency itself in any country in the world." Save for an occasional unpleasant incident, which more amused than annoyed him, Chastellux had nothing but praise for the manners, morals, and civility of his hosts.<sup>39</sup>

Chastellux used European analogies to place the Americans at the apex of a grand historical tradition. The New England towns were like the "curiae" of the Romans. George Washington outshone Caesar, Alexander, and Trajan and more modern generals such as Turenne, the Prince de Conde, and Eugene of Savoy: "he has left on my mind, the idea of a perfect whole . . . all speak of him only in terms of affection and veneration." And Washington's "very military" troops were worthy of their leader: "one is tempted to apply to the Americans what Pyrrhus said of the Romans: Truly these people have nothing barbarous in their discipline!"<sup>40</sup>

Chastellux spent much time in the higher circles of Philadelphia society, doing the rounds of entertainments and meeting "literary men" whom he praised effusively. James Wilson represented his compatriots with "a house and library in the best order." He "gave an excellent dinner." and "received us with a plain and easy politeness" "It is impossible to be more gay in forming a republic," Chastellux exulted, and predicted that "if music and the fine arts prosper in Philadelphia, if society there becomes easy and gay, and they learn to accept pleasure when it presents itself . . . they will be able to enjoy all the advantages peculiar to their manners and government, without having to envy Europe for anything."<sup>41</sup>

Only Philadelphia's Quakers lacked the gracious civility Chastellux

found elsewhere. Like his friend Lafayette and unlike his mentor Voltaire, the Marquis found little to admire in their "smooth wheedling tone which is altogether Jesuitical." He granted that in former times, the Friends had indeed resembled the sterling Anthony Benezet in being "wholly occupied with the welfare" of humanity, "when the virtues alone sufficed to render a citizen illustrious." But Chastellux thought that "nothing can be worse than religious enthusiasm in its decline, for what can be its substitute but hypocrisy?" He found plenty among the Philadelphia Friends.<sup>42</sup>

Condemning the "dreary and rustic" Quaker meeting as a symbol of what he hoped the city would put behind it, Chastellux joyously turned to the city's Anglican service as a sign of Philadelphia's potential:

It appears to me a sort of opera, both because of the music and the scenery: a handsome pulpit placed before a handsome organ; a handsome minister in that pulpit, reading, speaking, and singing with truly theatrical grace; a number of young women responding melodiously from the pit and the boxes (for the two side galleries are much like boxes); soft and agreeable singing, alternating with excellent sonatas played on the organ; all this compared to the Quakers, the Anabaptists, the Presbyterians, etc. appeared to me more like a little paradise in itself than as the road to it.<sup>43</sup>

Civilization was winning in America: Quakerism was yielding to Anglicanism. Chastellux noted that:

Philadelphia lacks none of the most useful establishments . . . but it is so deficient in what might serve for the enjoyment of life that there is not a single public walk. The reason for this is that hitherto everything concerning the police and particular government of the city has been in the hands of the Quakers, and these sectarians consider every species of private or public amusement as a transgression of their law and as a "pomp of Satan." Fortunately, the little zeal they have displayed in the present crisis has made them lose their credit. This revolution comes very opportunely, at a time when the public has derived every benefit from them they could expect; the walls of the house are finished—it is time to call in the cabinetmakers and upholsterers.<sup>44</sup>

As with religion, so with politics. The "purely democratic" government Benjamin Franklin had to institute in 1776 "as a sort of seduction to lead to independence a timid and avaricious people" was changing to the more reliable "mixed" form. "Under these circumstances Franklin

acted like Solon," Chastellux commented. "Time will produce perfection."<sup>45</sup>

In America, therefore, Chastellux happily observed the embryo of a civilized, more Europeanized, more hierarchical society. The increase of hierarchy and sharper drawing of class lines seemed to him not the denial of the United States' promise, but its fulfillment. "The dignity of man," he argued, "is a comparative matter." "Dignity increases as a man considers his relationship to the classes beneath him. It is the plebeian who makes the dignity of the noble, the slave that of the free man, and the Negro that of the white." Chastellux presented the starkest contrast between savagery and civilization in his disgust at the "hideous" and "stupid" Indians. He mocked those philosophers who praised the State of Nature, which was a "little artifice as often and so successfully employed, of extolling ignorance and poverty, in order to win acclaim in the Palaces and Academies."<sup>46</sup>

Chastellux probably wrote to refute Crèvecoeur, whose image of the Revolution's disastrous effects on the Americans' simplicity and virtue were well known in France by the mid-1780s. In turn, Jean Pierre Brissot de Warville (1754-1793), underground pamphleteer and future Girondist leader executed during the French Revolution, took up the defence of his friend Crèvecoeur's "simplicity . . . contempt for academic vanity, and his hatred of vice." Even before he visited the United States in 1788, Brissot countered the Marquis with a *Critical Examination* of his work, published in London in 1786, and *Principally Intended as a Refutation of His Opinions Concerning the Quakers, the Negroes, the People, and Mankind*, as its title proclaimed. Impressed by Crèvecoeur's description of Pennsylvania, and "weary of the despotism under which the French suffered"—especially a writer who had to "grovel at the feet of the idols of the day"—Brissot visited the United States to decide whether he ought to emigrate. But the onset of the Revolution caused him to return for a brief hour of glory and a premature death.<sup>47</sup>

Brissot's work, like his title (*New Travels* as opposed to Chastellux's *Travels*) addressed those French aristocrats who had praised what they ought to have condemned to America, and vice versa. The activities of French merchants who moved to Philadelphia, failed to sell their vanities, and blamed the Americans' dishonesty for their own short-sightedness exemplified the mentality Brissot set out to destroy. "Judging Philadelphia by Parisian standards, they foolishly imagined that well-informed and reasonable men could, like the subjects of an enslaved nation, be duped by vain show." Even Voltaire, who "sometimes would cross the sea in his imagination and long to spend the rest of his life in



the 'City of Brotherly Love' . . . would soon have been homesick for the glitter and witicisms of his polite Parisians." But Brissot saved his most furious diatribes for Chastellux's "errors, lies, and calumnies," the product of a "clever Marquis and some academicians seeking to tyrannize public opinion and inflate their own reputations."<sup>48</sup>

Wherever possible, Brissot stands Chastellux on his head. Instead of praising the Americans for increasingly approximating European standards of civility, he lauds them when they retain their simple, egalitarian habits. Where New and Old World practices are juxtaposed, it is only to the benefit of the former. Visiting Philadelphia's Bettering House, where unwanted children and homeless people dwelled in peace and dignity, Brissot commented that even its kitchens "do not give forth the fetid and nauseating smells which emanate from the very best French kitchens." Under the Quakers' benign aegis, "illegitimate children bore no stigma." "Thank God there is at least one country where bastardy is no obstacle to happiness and the rights of citizenship." Judging men by their faces—one of his trademarks—Brissot remarked that even among the poor "I did not see many with those hideous faces which are common in similar institutions in Paris, faces on which you see the imprint of crime, poverty, and insolence." He also commented favorably on the treatment of the mentally ill in Philadelphia's gentle asylum: "What a difference between their humane methods and the atrocious treatment to which we condemn the insane in France." Philanthropy, not frippery, was true civility. Even Philadelphia's markets shared in its quiet, superior dignity:

Multitudes of men and women, mingling about and going in every direction, but without bumping into each other and without any tumult or abuse of one another. One would think it a market of brothers, the meeting place of a nation of philosophers. . . . These people are composed and orderly in everything they do, even in the way the produce wagons are lined up in the neighborhood in order of their arrival. You hear no drivers and porters swearing at one another. . . . To maintain order in a market of this size in France you would need three or four police officers and a dozen soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

Brissot devotes over a third of his book to Philadelphia, mostly to extol the Quakers at the expense of their detractors. Looking into men's hearts through their faces, he writes that among the Friends "you will find a far greater number of those happy, angelic, faces on which you can read serenity, the sign of peace of soul and, therefore, of virtue." The

Quaker "Inner Light" he compares to the Lights of Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, and other sages. Men can also be known by their labors. "Visit Quaker farms, you will find in their houses more orderliness, cleanliness, and well-being than anywhere else." Pennsylvania demonstrated that "a people without [a coercive] government [can] be happy . . . [for] more than a century." Besides its prison, almshouse, markets, tranquility, and asylum, Philadelphia was "the metropolis of the United States . . . the most beautiful and best-built city . . . and also the wealthiest, though not the most ostentatious. [That honor was New York's.] Here you will find more well-educated men, more knowledge of politics and literature, and more political and learned societies than anywhere else in the United States." To cap their achievement, the Quakers put themselves at the forefront of humanity by leading a world-wide crusade against slavery.<sup>50</sup>

Brissot's discussion of Pennsylvania forms the centerpiece of his *Travels*. The Quakers stand high above the discussions of Newport and New York which precede and the slave states which follow. Impoverished by the war, Newport was filled with idle men, "hideous women [and] emaciated children." Brissot laid most of this disaster at the feet of paper money, but also blamed the people's ignorance and immorality—"there were no public schools, no dissemination of public information through newspapers, and almost no public worship." New York, on the contrary, rebounded after the war as well as Philadelphia, but with less happy results: "If there is one city on the American continent which above all other displays European luxury, it is New York." One sign of this corruption was the presence of "a most dangerous class of men—bachelors. They are afraid to marry because it is so expensive to keep a wife." Even so, by French standards, "the citizens are rather temperate" as "the well-to-do are not rich enough to indulge in the luxury and debauchery which in Europe kills off so many." The presence of Congress in New York helped tone down the residents' corruption as well—the President was "not surrounded by monarchical ceremony," and "he never forgets that he has been a simple citizen and he will become so once again."<sup>51</sup>

However harsh Brissot's criticisms of the North, his anger at the South and its slave-owning aristocracy was even greater:

Cross over into Maryland and Virginia, and . . . you think you are in a different world. . . . Everything in Maryland and Virginia bears the stamp of slavery: the parched soil, the badly managed

farming, the ramshackle houses, and the few scrawny cattle that look like walking skeletons. In short, you find real poverty existing alongside a false appearance of wealth.

Realizing the economic complicity in slavery of those who bought tobacco, coffee, and sugar even if they owned no slaves, Brissot took a leaf from Philadelphia Quakers who boycotted the businesses of merchants connected with slavery. He suggested the free states use maple sugar instead of sugar cane:

In consuming these products, do they not, in effect, join hands with the blind or perverse men who take a more active part in the iniquities without which these products would not be produced? . . . Thus, we should obtain a large quantity of sugar, which would reduce by that much the lashings the Negroes have to endure . . . to satisfy our gluttony.<sup>52</sup>

Yet for all his glorification of the Pennsylvania Quakers, they still take second place in Brissot's Pantheon of republican virtue. Despite their good points, the apolitical Friends could not be counted upon to free mankind from its fetters. Hence, before leaving America, Brissot journeyed to Mount Vernon to visit George Washington. But before discussing their meeting, he added a postscript in 1790 to his book, in which the achievements of the French Revolution become the equivalent of Pennsylvania's. Both "renounced the policy of conquest . . . practiced universal toleration . . . required simplicity of worship, [and] practiced virtue." Pacifism, which for the first time Brissot terms an "error . . . results from their humanity," and therefore is "almost as beautiful as the truth." In short, France had begun to universalize Pennsylvania's mission: "We are all moving toward the same goal of universal brotherhood; the Quakers follow the road of meekness and we follow that of resistance. They travel as a society, we as a great nation."

Brissot thus has one model in the United States superior even to the Friends. He transfigures Washington into the sum of nearly all conceivable virtues. He bettered the material lot of mankind through his agricultural improvements; "he provides a good table but not a sumptuous one"; his wife exemplified "that courtesy which is the flower of hospitality." Washington was "unpretentious," "modest," a "philosopher" possessed of "all the qualities and virtues of the perfect republican." Looking as usual at a face, Brissot saw how Washington's "kindness of heart shone in his eyes."<sup>54</sup>

For Brissot, the United States was a "book" in which the French

could discover how "high a level of prosperity liberty can raise human industry, how much it can improve men and dispose them to universal brotherhood." But America was in danger of inundation with the very foreign luxuries and ideas which Chastellux welcomed. Brissot feared the growth of manufacturing and the rise of lawyers, who "worm their way into the house of the legislature and into the administration, which they infiltrate with their vexing disputations." Urging Americans not to let their cities or their importations grow too large, he thought that "luxury will have to be banished," and "indolence and the love of pleasure will have to be rooted out" for the new nation to retain its unique character. "What has restored despotism almost everywhere?" he asked rhetorically at the end of his 400 page tome: "The men of power or genius who use the ignorant populace as a weapon with which to destroy the enlightened but aristocratic middle order. Here in America there are no great men of power, no men of genius, no aristocratic middle order, no populace." He hoped republican simplicity would prevail. If Chastellux looked at America through the eyes of Voltaire, Brissot took Rousseau's vantage point.<sup>55</sup>

At least one aristocrat shared Brissot's vision and hopes for America, although his genteel account lacked Brissot's humorless zeal. Francois, Marquis de Barbe-Marbois (1746-1833), Secretary of the French Legation at Philadelphia from 1779 to 1785, subsequently served as Intendent of Sant Domingue, Mayor of Metz (where he quietly sat out the Revolution), and a Napoleonic councillor, in which capacity he played a key role in negotiating the Louisiana Purchase.

Marbois, like Brissot, admired the equality, dignity, and freedom of the Americans from the first. Arriving in Boston, he remarked on the absence of begging, religious toleration, and the "charming," "cheerful," "enchanted" countryside. He was especially intrigued by state senators "returning from the market carrying greenstuffs or fish." Unlike Venetian nobles who would try to hide such humble items under their cloaks, the "Bostonian on the contrary holds up his head . . . his habits are too simple for him to make a mystery of so natural an affair." Marbois then warned his sophisticated readers not to be amused by the Americans:

The same men who open doors themselves, who go on foot to judge the people, who buy their own food, are those who have brought about this Revolution, and who, when it is necessary, raise a musket to their shoulders and march on the enemy. And between ourselves, I am not sure that people who have porters, stewards,

butlers, and covered carriages with springs would have offered the same resistance to despotism.<sup>56</sup>

Great as was his love for Boston and the many other places he visited, Marbois bestowed his highest affection on Philadelphia, his home for six years. He admired the prison, hospital, and poorhouse which had “nothing painful” about them and were “the work of enlightened and compassionate humanity.” “A lover of order and symmetry,” he also adored the square brick buildings and straight streets. “It has everything which could make it the most beautiful city in the world.” He did find the State House—whose tower Benjamin Franklin compared to “a microscope half out of its case”—“tasteless and inelegant,” but this was the exception. The young diplomat befriended the elderly Anthony Benezet, who inspired him to perform many charitable deeds, and “deserved as much respect as any man on the face of the earth.” He found Quaker austerity admirable: “Balls, hunting, theatrical performances, and concerts are very frivolous occupations, and very unworthy to occupy the thoughts of men.”<sup>57</sup>

Marbois found that life in Philadelphia immeasurably enriched him. He married a local woman, Elizabeth Moore, who was typical of a society where spouses were “sincerely and faithfully attached” and virtue “rested upon a foundation more substantial than fear and command.” Marbois came to imitate John Bartram and tended a beautiful garden which “took the place of . . . concerts, operas, comedies, hunting, [and] promenade.” Quaker principles rubbed off on him to the extent that he derived no pleasure when the Americans named a warship the *Marbois*: “It is in my name that they are going to destroy and despoil innocent and peaceful merchants, who, having become the prey of the *Marbois* will never hear that sinister name without recalling their misfortune or their ruin.” Marbois concluded that “I could not tire of admiring the progress of civilization, which has made more advance here in a hundred years than Europe has made in a thousand.”<sup>58</sup>

By the 1790s, however, the romance of France and America had ended. Aristocratic exiles began to emigrate to and visit the new nation. They discovered at work in embryo the same principles which were responsible for the deaths of their loved ones and confiscation of their estates in France.

Francois Rene de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), the royalist author, found so little to admire in the new republic that he passed quickly over Philadelphia—the only topic he discussed pertaining to North America except for the frontier and an interview with George Washington. He

wrote principally to demonstrate the superiority of the "savages" to the barbaric Americans. Even though placid Philadelphia was "beautiful" and the "inhabitants agreeable," it was also "cold and monotonous": "almost nothing . . . rises above the mass of walls and roofs. The eye is saddened by this level appearance." The uniformity of the nation's greatest city mirrored its undistinguished inhabitants. Furthermore, the town lacked republican simplicity and civility: "I could have thought myself in an English town: nothing proclaimed that I had passed from a monarchy to a republic"—"a Cato searching for the rigidity of early Roman manners is necessarily shocked to find everywhere the elegance of dress, the luxury of carriages, the frivolity of conversations, the disproportion of fortunes, the immorality of banks and gaming houses, the noise of dance halls and theaters." Such superficial trimmings did not constitute a people or a culture: "one has the feeling that the inhabitants do not yet have their roots in the ground. Society, so fine in the present, has no past." Aside from its grand scenery, all America possessed was liberty, and an abstract and spurious liberty compared to Europe, which has "learned what liberty is capable of for the happiness and dignity of man when it is not separated from religious ideas and when it is both intelligent and holy."<sup>59</sup>

Chateaubriand quickly takes leave of Philadelphia to interview Washington. He writes about the American statesman principally to condemn Bonaparte. "Both born of liberty, the first was faithful to her, the second betrayed her." Unlike the Corsican, "who wished only to create renown for himself [and] stifle liberty," Washington "has left the United States as his trophy" and "died beneath his paternal roof amidst the regrets of his compatriots and the veneration of all peoples."<sup>60</sup>

But Washington was the exception, the unrealized potential of the new republic. Chateaubriand spends 180 out of his 200 pages on the frontier. Immediately after leaving Washington, he shows us a scene of selfish and barbarous settlers who relegate an unfortunate squaw to poverty and isolation on the least productive part of her former tribal lands. They were "bursting with laughter" as they chased her poor cow away from their own sleek beasts, an action which symbolized American character and Indian policy for Chateaubriand. So did the "stupefying" custom of travellers sleeping in the same bed. Having "never felt greater horror in my life," the Frenchman preferred to sleep under the "agreeable, cool, and pure" moonlight to a "stinking hovel."<sup>61</sup>

Chateaubriand gets away from the depraved Americans to the Indians, whom he compares favorably to the Romans and Spartans in the nobility of their warriors, to the Dryads and Fauns in their mores.

Far from dwelling in a state of nature, the various tribes had “very complicated institutions,” including “all the types of government known to civilized people, from despotism to republicanism passing through monarchy.” Here were the true republicans! Only when “stupefied” by the English and Americans—unlike the “brilliant, disinterested, gay, and adventurous” French and Canadians, who respected them—did the Indians deteriorate to the level of their conquerors.<sup>62</sup>

At least Chateaubriand mentions Philadelphia in passing. Future King Louis Philippe (1773–1850), son of the executed revolutionary leader Philippe Egalite (a.k.a. the Duke of Orleans) hardly mentions the developed regions of America at all save to remark on the gridiron layout of the cities and the “pleasant” countryside nearby. Undertaking his voyage in 1797, the young man found little in America save an arduous journey. He complained of the heat, of the planned capitol, Washington, which was “nothing” because of “disagreements and dissensions, speculation and knavery.” He deplored the mistreatment of slaves, housed in “wretched shacks,” dressed in “rags that our beggars would scorn to wear.” He excused their laziness as “their labor . . . profits those they naturally hate.”<sup>63</sup>

The future monarch found even more to condemn as he journeyed west. The inns were “miserable” and “detestable,” with food that amounted to “nothing much.” In one establishment, in lieu of a chamber pot, he and his two young brothers were told to avail themselves of a broken window! Louis Philippe thought the inhabitants’ conversation “annoying . . . nothing is more boring than bored people who want to talk and have nothing to talk about.” The manners of the “yawning, scratching, belching” frontiersmen appalled him. After spending one night in a room with a family in which the young adults blissfully made love in the presence of their parents and several strangers, Louis Philippe exclaimed “And what do you think now of those novels by Crevecoeur, Brissot, etc.!!!” (Generally, he found the Indians and the Irish immigrants less detestable than the native whites, whom he termed “the most villanous breed of men I have ever come across,” “scum,” “crude, lazy, and inhospitable in the extreme.”<sup>64</sup>

Louis Philippe refrained from comment on the Philadelphia which apparently housed him comfortably during the mid-1790s. But Moreau de St.-Mery (1750–1819) went into the city’s vices in great detail. A relative of the future Empress Josephine, he was born in Martinique and had served on the Council of Saint Domingue and codified the colony’s laws. During the Revolution he was in Paris as a deputy for Haiti to the National Assembly, and even rose to be head of the Paris

Commune before Robespierre's hostility forced him to flee. He lived in Philadelphia from 1794 to 1798, where his bookstore at Front and Walnut Streets became the center of an emigre community which included Talleyrand and Louis Philippe. Moreau then returned to France and became Napoleon's Ambassador to Parma. But he fell into disgrace and passed the last decade of his life in retirement.

Forced to leave his beloved France, Moreau became disillusioned with his future home as soon as he set foot on an American ship. American shipowners had "the insane idea that they can effect a saving by refusing to equip their ships properly," he complained, and the sailors were "careless in navigation, leaving fires on the deck, and subjecting the passengers to "a thousand little annoyances." "Lack of foresight is the most conspicuous trait in the American character," he concluded.<sup>65</sup>

Moreau honestly confessed that he "lived in Paris when that city astounded all nations by its love of science and the arts, and by the urbanity of its inhabitants." He claimed that he had no "wish to deprecate the great people who have given to the world the magnificent spectacle of men who successfully fought for liberty." Nevertheless, his journal is a litany of anti-Americanism. The discussion of Philadelphia which comprises over half his *Memoirs* is full of complaints. The people were "listless," "indifferent to almost everything," afflicted with an "Oh-to-hell-with-it" attitude, symbolized by their barbaric table manners. The women were "extravagant" and "addicted to finery."<sup>66</sup>

Much as Brissot read the Americans' character in their faces, Moreau found it in their houses. All was show: "the decoration of houses is only to be found in the rooms which a visitor is likely to see . . . for everything that is normally out of sight is ill-cared for. Self-respect does not exist." Other rooms were full of "broken windowpanes, doors without locks, and leaks."<sup>67</sup>

Moreau also thought the Philadelphians narrow-minded and thick-headed. "It is impossible to persuade an American to undertake anything he has never done or never seen," he commented with respect to the lack of support for learning and industrial improvements. The people were "indolent and avaricious," and "selfish to an almost incredible degree." "During the winter many people are constantly falling down in the streets, but no one ever goes out to help those who have fallen—barring Frenchmen, whose interest surprises the victims and doesn't always elicit their thanks." Although "generous" and "sensitive" to the French refugees (whom Moreau admitted, with more than a little unconscious irony, were "contemptuous of all custom unlike



those of their own country”) the Philadelphians ignored requests to aid American sailors held in Algerian jails. A troupe of actors, “needy themselves and English for the most part,” did more than anyone in this respect through a benefit performance.<sup>68</sup>

Moreau concluded that the Americans were basically hypocrites. The morals of Philadelphia were “not pure, although they pretend to be virtuous.” Prostitution was common by the 1790s. “Badly brought up” children threw snowballs at passers-by and beat up little Negroes. The Quakers were immoral and lapsed. Moreau despised the “great deal of snobbery in Philadelphia,” and on at least one occasion was excluded from a fancy ball on the grounds he was a “storekeeper,” despite his previous achievements and membership in the American Philosophical Society. There were few “men of letters” even in this city. “Americans agree that Europeans must not only supply them with calico, mirrors, etc., but with arts and literature as well.” Nor were things improving, as “the arts in general are poorly supported and not at all encouraged.” Excessively paid lawyers had become the city’s “outstanding” men.<sup>69</sup>

By 1800, therefore, the criticisms of American civilization—selfishness, conformity, materialism, lack of culture and civility—made famous by Alexis de Tocqueville three decades later were already in place. The gloomy emigres of the 1790s supplanted the optimistic narratives of Brissot, Marbois, and Chastellux and seemed to confirm Crevecoeur’s worst predictions. Tocqueville himself, on visiting Philadelphia, found it a symbol of the democracy which rejected creativity in favor of the useful and material:

All the houses are brick . . . and the streets as straight as a string. The regularity is tiresome but very convenient. Philadelphia is, I believe, the only city in the world where it has occurred to people to distinguish the streets by numbers and not by names. . . . Don’t you find that only a people whose imagination is frozen could invent such a system? Europeans never fail to join an idea to each external object, be it a saint, a famous man, an event. Here they know only arithmetic.<sup>70</sup>

French observations of the American character mirrored the debate occurring in the new nation itself. Upper-class Americans worried whether they would be politically and culturally overwhelmed in a democratic republic; champions of the common man feared aristocratic pretensions would undermine popular rights.<sup>71</sup> French travellers arrayed themselves on either side of this debate, emphasizing as their experiences and prejudices dictated the perils of excessive democracy

(late Crèvecoeur, most military officers, the 1790s emigres), benefits of an egalitarian society (early Crèvecoeur, Lafayette, Brissot, Barbe-Marbois), or a stable order recreating a reasonable facsimile of European Society (Rochambeau, Chastellux).

When they focused on the Pennsylvania of 1770 to 1800, the French confronted a state marked by exceptional political turmoil and economic growth. They found traditional Quaker values—upheld in Europe for a century as an index of the New World's promise—weakened by war, revolution, and the lure of economic opportunity, yet reinvigorated in the anti-slavery and other public betterment crusades. Given the Quakers' neutrality in a cause the French espoused, however, it is hardly surprising only the extreme egalitarians Brissot and Barbe-Marbois stressed the Friends' positive contributions to revolutionary America.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, despite their disagreements, the French visitors achieved consensus on two key points. Apart from Crèvecoeur's depiction of wartime frontier chaos, none of them found any sign of the anarchy, violence, or political instability which had threatened the survival of republics in antiquity or Renaissance Italy. Even writers like Chateaubriand who despised frontier crudity or Moreau who found Philadelphia a den of materialistic iniquity did not share the Founding Fathers' fears that their experiment might be short-lived. Second, except for Chastellux and Rochambeau—who associated with the highest echelon of American society—the French found the Americans remarkably democratic and egalitarian whether they praised or condemned this fact. While the United States possessed a century-old elite which survived the Revolution intact if not unshaken, conservative and traditional American practices still seemed revolutionary to Europeans. In short, as DeTocqueville would later argue at great length, his French predecessors developed the notion that while the United States needed to guard against the perils of democracy, it need not fear for its long-term survival.

## NOTES

\*Dates of birth and death were provided for authors where possible. The article has considered major and representative authors without trying to cover all French narratives written at this time.

1. Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, translated as *Letters on England* by Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1980), 34.

2. Hector St.-John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 408.

3. *Ibid.*, 37.
4. *Ibid.*, 85, 93–94, 64.
5. *Ibid.*, 86, 89.
6. *Ibid.*, 45, 49, 51, 57, 55, 46.
7. *Ibid.*, 181, 187, 188.
8. *Ibid.*, 188.
9. *Ibid.*, 182, 193.
10. *Ibid.*, 194; for Hutchinson's thought, see William Pencak, *America's Burke: The Mind of Thomas Hutchinson* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982).
11. Crevecoeur, *Letters*, 353.
12. *Ibid.*, 381, 400, 438, 440.
13. *Ibid.*, 416–426.
14. Stanley J. Idzerda, ed., *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution* volumes 1 and 2 (1776–1780) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977–1979), 1: 224, 11.
15. *Ibid.*, 2: 120; 326, 216.
16. *Ibid.*, 2: 195; 1: 115.
17. *Ibid.*, 1: 96, 102, 115.
18. Howard C. Rice, Jr., and Anne S. K. Brown, trans., *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army*, 2 volumes, (Princeton, NJ and Providence, RI: Princeton and Brown University Presses), 1: 162–163, 100.
19. *Ibid.*, 1: 137, 162, 152.
20. "Journal of Baron Cromot du Borg," *Magazine of American History* 4 (May–June, 1880), 205–214; 293–309; 376–387; 441–451. Quotations: 211, 380–383.
21. *Ibid.*, 209, 383.
22. "Narrative of the Prince de Broglie," *Magazine of American History* 1 (March and June, 1877), 232, 230, 235, 186.
23. *Ibid.*, 233, 234.
24. *Ibid.*, 234.
25. Idzerda, ed. *Lafayette*. 1: 53.
26. *Ibid.*, 1: 53.
27. *Ibid.*, 1: 75, 81–82.
28. *Ibid.*, 1: 82.
29. *Ibid.*, 1: 74; 2: 203.
30. "Count de Fersen's Private Letters to His Father, 1780–1781," *Magazine of American History*, 15 (1891), 55–70. Quotations: 67, 62, 69.
31. Rice and Brown, eds., *American Campaigns*, 1: 83, 29, 71, 78.
32. *Ibid.*, 1: 82, 47, 22.
33. *Ibid.*, 1: 48.
34. *Ibid.*, 1: 61, 245; Fersen, "Letters," 171.
35. Jean Baptiste, Comte de Rochambeau, *Memoirs of the Marshall Count de Rochambeau*, M. W. E. Wright, trans. (Paris: Belin and Company, 1838), 22–23, 95–96.
36. *Ibid.*, 95–96; Cromot du Borg, "Journal," 302.
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38. *Ibid.*, 108–110.
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42. *Ibid.*, 1: 165–167.
43. *Ibid.*, 1: 167–168.
44. *Ibid.*, 1: 182.
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49. *Ibid.*, 175–176, 180, 199.
50. *Ibid.*, 305, 326, 14, 253, 217–231.
51. *Ibid.*, 130–131, 142, 150.
52. *Ibid.*, 237, 226, 249.
53. *Ibid.*, 335.
54. *Ibid.*, 343–345.
55. *Ibid.*, 93, 100, 112, 357, 424.
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60. *Ibid.*, 18–19.
61. *Ibid.*, 25–30.
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65. Mederic-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Mery, *American Journey*, Kenneth Roberts and Anna M. Roberts, trans. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1947), 4, 21.
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71. For a survey of similar thoughts held by conservative Americans in the 1820s, see Fred Somkin, *Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815–1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

72. See Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783*. (Philadelphia—University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984) and Jean R. Suderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) for modern discussions.

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