

Review: Review

Reviewed Work(s): Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism by Maurice Jackson

Review by: James J. Gigantino II

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*Northerners at War* is a valuable resource for Civil War historians and students, especially those with a particular interest in the war's influences on Pennsylvania, cities, women, African Americans, or the economy. Moreover, this book could be effectively utilized, in whole or in part, in Civil War courses at either the advanced undergraduate or graduate level. It is also a strong candidate for inclusion in a historiography course due to its plentiful commentaries on how and why these essays were written, as well as their context within Civil War historiography.

ERIC D. DUCHESS

*High Point University*

Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. Pp. xv, 374. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$45.00; Paper, \$24.95.)

Resurrecting the true impact that Anthony Benezet had on abolition both in Pennsylvania and throughout the Atlantic world, Maurice Jackson's biography of this important Quaker abolitionist focuses on an intellectual history of his subject's writings and influence. Jackson argues that not only did Benezet help nurture the American abolition movement but he also provides a "direct personal link between the great struggles in America, Britain, and France" (xiv). Jackson claims that Benezet's prolific writings circled the Atlantic and provided inspiration for European abolition leaders to attack both slavery and the slave trade.

Focusing first on Benezet's role in the United States, Jackson maintains that his subject's support for abolition came from his personal desire to educate the oppressed and defend against similar types of persecution, which his own family had been subjected to in its past. Jackson continually reminds his readers that, unlike most eighteenth-century abolitionists, Benezet believed not only in abolition but also in the fundamental equality of blacks and whites. Indeed, Jackson, in chapter 4, expertly details how Benezet studied Africa and "proposed that blacks were human beings, no different in soul and spirit from whites" (79).

Though his ideas placed Benezet apart from other colonists, even among Quakers, the Pennsylvanian hoped to free Philadelphia's blacks, as well as educate and provide for them financially. To fulfill his goal, he founded the

African Free School within the framework of Philadelphia's Quaker Meeting. Designed to offer both basic reading and writing as well as vocational education, Benezet's school sought to ensure that "black students could exhibit capability in learning" equal to their "white contemporaries" (23). Hoping to build upon what he felt was his greatest accomplishment in life, Benezet sought out friendships and alliances with leading non-Quakers, including Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin, in an effort to advance both the abolition of slavery and the education of African Americans.

Throughout his work, Jackson carefully argues that Benezet drew his ideas on slavery and freedom from the larger Atlantic world. As opposed to harnessing ideas only from his Quaker faith, Benezet appears in Jackson's study as a vociferous reader and intellectual, a true "man of the broad Atlantic" (70). Benezet's abolitionist designs came from his own empirical study of African customs and cultures as well as from Scottish Enlightenment thinkers and humanist scholars in Europe. Internalizing and reproducing their thoughts, Benezet used them to engage other Quakers in the colonies and, in effect, created a transnational exchange in the debate over slavery in North America.

The real contribution of Jackson's work comes in the book's second half (chapters 6–8) when he explains how Benezet helped create, as his subtitle states, an Atlantic abolition movement. In these chapters, Jackson persuasively argues that Benezet's writings influenced both contemporary and future British, French, and African abolition activists including William Wilberforce, Olaudah Equiano, and Ignatius Sancho. As he was always willing to share his work with others, Benezet wrote extensively to his contemporaries in Europe, especially Britain's Granville Sharp. The pair's dialogue helped create a network of exchange for abolitionist ideas between the United States and Great Britain that Sharp carried on with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society even after Benezet's death. Jackson makes clear that even those whom he did not have personal contact with, such as Olaudah Equiano, felt the Pennsylvanian's influence. Equiano, for instance, frequently paraphrased Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea* in his own *Interesting Narrative*, relying heavily on Benezet's research and ideas on West Africa. By examining this textual transmission, Jackson proves both the importance and pervasiveness of Benezet's ideas both in the United States and abroad.

Although this work is an excellent look at the intellectual history of Atlantic abolition, Jackson misses out on an opportunity to fully examine how Benezet's ideas impacted the actual progress of abolition on the ground in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. References to the heated debates in these states over

gradual abolition are not nearly as developed as some other sections of Jackson's work. Jackson shows that Benezet's ideas impacted the passage of certain pro-abolition laws in Pennsylvania, but he seems to equate the passage of gradual abolition acts in the Mid-Atlantic with those judicial and constitutional decisions in Massachusetts and Vermont that ended slavery faster than in the Mid-Atlantic (122–23, 123n85). Though he clarifies that the gradual end of slavery in Pennsylvania took decades to accomplish, Benezet would have found the freedom, or lack thereof, that gradual abolition laws actually produced appalling to his own sense of abolition (219). A more sustained discussion of the mechanics and engagement of Benezet in the issues involved in the move toward gradual abolition and the aftermath of that process, especially in Pennsylvania as Benezet's death preceded the passage of the New York and New Jersey laws, could have provided an excellent addition to an otherwise solid work.

In the end, Jackson's book provides scholars with both a needed and engaging look at a critical abolitionist figure in a transnational framework. *Let This Voice Be Heard* is another important step in solidifying the necessity of an Atlantic approach to the study of slavery and abolition.

JAMES J. GIGANTINO II

*University of Arkansas*

Francis Ryan. *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story: Municipal Workers and Urban Power in the Twentieth Century*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010. Pp. 320. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$40.00.)

In the early twentieth century Philadelphia had a strong reputation as being anti-labor. Irish, Italian, and black municipal laborers were at the mercy of city politics and ward bosses where they found it very difficult to advance into positions other than street cleaners, trash haulers, and other less desirable jobs. Jobs were awarded based on personal relationships and favoritism. Corruption was rampant.

It is against this historical backdrop that Fran Ryan details the trials of Philadelphia's public sector workers throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It is a remarkable story that here, for the first time, is told in a comprehensive and engaging manner. Indeed, Ryan's study is likely