that produced new societies known today as Lenape, Munsee, and Susquehannock. Richter draws from recent scholarship for his section on Penn's colonization and eighteenth-century hostilities, which is standard fare about the struggle between Europeans and natives over territory and resources. By the late eighteenth century, most Pennsylvania natives had been driven from their homes by racialized violence. The only disappointment comes with the hasty construction of the final chapters. Little has been written about eastern Indians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and one wants more about this “invisible minority,” which admittedly numbered few. Still, the presence of children at Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the participation of Quakers in native benevolent societies, and the prevalence of land claims that crossed state boundaries kept Pennsylvania Indians involved in issues common to all Native Americans. It was through this common cause that they eventually established a “pan-Indian rather than tribal identity” (p. 82).

Old Dominion University

JANE T. MERRITT


In this gracefully written study of Benjamin Franklin’s life, Philip Dray argues that Franklin’s most important contribution to the eighteenth century was the lightning rod. Dray builds his account of Franklin’s scientific and political career around Jacques Turgot’s declaration that Franklin the scientist/patriot had “snatched lightning from the sky and the sceptre from tyrants.” In Stealing God’s Thunder, Franklin’s lightning rod is ranked with Newton’s Principia and the U.S. Constitution of 1787 as one of the greatest triumphs of the Enlightenment. At the center of this achievement, Dray’s Franklin is a homespun and eminently reasonable hero who tactfully wrests lightning bolts from the hands of an angry God.

Like the Franklin he describes so well, Dray has the gift of making complicated things seem plain. Franklin’s electrical experiments are related afresh, placed against the wider backdrop of eighteenth-century natural philosophy. Elevating him from the ranks of knowledgeable dabblers—even proficient ones who managed, as did Franklin, to shock pigeons and ring lightning bells in the stair-hall without serious harm—Dray places Franklin in the company of those enlightened European experimenters who shared his passion for the study of electricity. Dray is at his best writing about Franklin’s role in this transatlantic network of scientific friendships and rivalries, and he follows Franklin’s scientific interests throughout his long political career.

In its treatment of the American Enlightenment, the book points out the powerful connections between enlightened science and the politics of the
American Revolution. To hear Franklin’s lightning rod most vigorously defended by Robespierre or by the guardians of the store of gunpowder at the Royal Arsenal in London (it was not always God’s thunder that was at stake) is to strain the notion that the lightning rod was a “model for human liberation” (p. xviii). Nonetheless, the book draws much-needed attention to the importance of natural science in the tolerant, reasonable, and plainly constructed version of the American Enlightenment that Franklin did so much to shape.

Less convincing is the book’s declaration that the lightning rod symbolized the Enlightenment triumph of reason over faith. For its interpretation of the intellectual and religious history of the period, Stealing God’s Thunder relies, to bizarre effect, on Andrew Dickson White’s pique-laden History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom, published in 1895. A Victorian caricature of eighteenth-century religion emerges, and there is no discussion of those who responded from the middle ground. Rev. John Wesley, for instance, was inspired rather than alarmed by Franklin’s Experiments and Observations on Electricity (1751) and had no theological scruples about “electrifying” patients with his own electrical apparatus in an effort to treat physical as well as spiritual affliction. Nonetheless, in its overstating the simplicity of the relationship between science and faith in the enlightened world of Franklin, Stealing God’s Thunder is in venerable company. Now it is up to those who want to tell a more nuanced story of science, faith, and the American Enlightenment to write with as much skill as Dray has done in this engaging portrait of Franklin and his enduring invention.

University of Windsor

NINA REID-MARONEY

Benjamin Franklin’s Humor. By PAUL M. ZALL. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005. ix, 186p. Notes, sources, index. $27.95.)

Benjamin Franklin is everywhere this year in Philadelphia, the three hundredth anniversary of his birth. In University City (the neighborhood surrounding the University of Pennsylvania, which he helped found), where I live, one cannot bung half a brick (to steal from P. G. Wodehouse, another very funny writer) without risking bruising something Franklinish. Van Pelt Library had an exhibit devoted to his education schemes, there appear to be more statues than usual on the campus, elsewhere in the city the National Constitution Center presented an excellent exhibit on Franklin’s life and work. Books over the past two years have presented him as a loyal subject of the empire, a statesman, a brilliant diplomat, a quintessential American, weak on slavery, and a founder second to none, except perhaps Washington. Yet before he was any (or all?) of these things, long before his adulthood, his early retirement, his spectacular rise, and his international