

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Our Lives, Our Fortunes, and Our Sacred Honor: The Forging of American Independence, 1774–1776.* By RICHARD R. BEEMAN. (New York: Basic Books, 2013. 528 pp. Notes, index. \$29.99.)

The Continental Congress first met in September of 1774 in what John Adams described as “a gathering of strangers.” It would be almost two years before Thomas Jefferson wrote the last sentence of the Declaration of Independence. “And for the support of this declaration,” it reads, “we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” Here is the inspiration for the title of Richard R. Beeman’s new work, which explores how residents of the thirteen distinct colonies, all of whom looked more toward Britain than to one another and at first had no sense of themselves as Americans, became one. He traces the processes by which their chosen legislative body of representatives gained enough cohesion to declare independence. The actions of the Continental Congress, however, were only made possible by the people who composed it. Beeman brings to life this group of politically diverse characters, who fought fiercely among themselves until they agreed to fight together for a common cause.

Beeman first outlines how the relationship between Britain and the American colonies shifted as a result of the Seven Years’ War, as a decade of British attempts to tax the American colonies began. But these were not thirteen identical colonies; each had a unique relationship with its mother country, as well as a culture and economy that often reflected its place within the larger mercantile system of the British Empire. Each then reacted in its own way to the British attempts at taxation. Virginia and Massachusetts, for example, became more radical. As a result, these colonies sent such representatives as Patrick Henry, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, and the two cousins Samuel and John Adams, all of whom were more inclined to support independence, to the Continental Congress. By contrast, colonies such as New York and Pennsylvania sought reconciliation over revolution and sent representatives that were less inclined toward independence. Consequently, many of their names have been lost to history.

Some representatives from these colonies did become well known. John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, author of *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, challenged the right of Parliament to tax the colonies and had a reputation as a bold defender of American liberties. Nonetheless, he chose not to sign the Declaration of Independence. Beeman’s strength lies in helping readers see how such a seeming

contradiction was possible. His focus on Dickinson's moderate perspective reveals both the varied currents of thought in the debate that led to the Declaration of Independence and the risks involved in participating. The act of signing was both a measure of patriotic brotherhood and an act of treason punishable by death and confiscation of all property. In this context, the gravity of Jefferson's last sentence becomes clear: it contained the last words signers read before pledging to one another "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

*Jagiellonian University*

JIM BLACKBURN

*The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered.* By LAURA AURICCHIO. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015. 409 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.)

*The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered* is a fascinating biography about the prominent transatlantic military leader, the Marquis de Lafayette. Author Laura Auricchio's major purpose is to describe and assess Lafayette's contributions to the American and French Revolutions. She superbly accentuates significant themes of Lafayette's career: he became an ardent proponent of American republican tenets and later an active supporter of constitutional monarchy and liberal sociopolitical and economic reforms for France. Auricchio, who is an eighteenth-century specialist, investigates Lafayette's involvement in the Enlightenment's republic of letters and explains his transatlantic dialogues with other reformers and revolutionaries. Highly attuned to the pertinent issues of the day, the eminent general was also aggressive, shrewd, reasonable, and talkative. Chronologically and topically arranged, this biography contains four sections and eighteen interesting chapters that reveal penetrating insights into his thinking and his revolutionary activities.

Chapters in the book's first part illustrate both the frustrations and successes of his early life. The son of Julie and Gilbert du Motier, Lafayette was born on September 6, 1757, in the family's eighteen-room Chavaniac Castle. The child, who first assumed the name of Gilbert, experienced problems: his father fought in the Seven Years' War and was killed at the Battle of Minden (1759). Lafayette's mother exhibited minimal interest in him, and his grandmother reared him in Paris. After his mother's death in 1770, he became one of the wealthiest aristocrats in France. Lafayette was well educated, developing interests in history and the physical sciences. In 1772, he graduated from the Parisian College du Pléssis. Two years later, his arranged marriage to Adrienne de Noailles made him a member of one of the most influential families in France. He cultivated connections in leading French military, social, and cultural groups.

After Lafayette's marriage, other developments shaped his life. He fought in the Noailles Dragoons and spent time at the court of Versailles, where he cultivated friendships with ranking nobles. Auricchio also suggests that the