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French and Hessian Impressions: Foreign Soldiers' Views of America during the Revolution

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FRENCH AND HESSIAN IMPRESSIONS:
FOREIGN SOLDIERS’ VIEWS OF AMERICA DURING THE REVOLUTION

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the 40,000 French and German soldiers who participated in the American Revolution and the opinions that they developed of the American people and their fledgling country. The soldiers occupied a unique position as foreign observers of the birth of the United States. Although they had an immediate interest in the outcome of the battles themselves, the foreigners’ observations regarding American men and women, religious diversity, the institution of slavery, and the tenets of republican government lacked the bias of contemporary British and American witnesses. As a result, they help paint a more accurate picture of revolutionary America, while exposing the complexity of international relations within the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic world.

Chapter 1 examines the experiences of the German army. Hired by the British to fight the colonial rebels, the Germans, most of whom hailed from the principality of Hesse-Cassel, were fascinated by America, a place where any man could become wealthy without working hard. They looked upon the Indians as unreliable savages and the slaves as unfortunate souls, and to the Continental soldier they accorded a begrudging respect. Harsh weather, defeat, and imprisonment were not enough to dampen the Hessians’ affection for the American way of life, and thousands of men deserted during the war to start a home in the new country.

The second chapter focuses on the French, allies with the Americans against their common adversary. Because they carried with them Enlightenment ideas and New World experience, the French officers marveled not at the strangeness of America, but at the simplicity of its people and the righteousness of its democratic institutions. They found the American militia undisciplined, but heaped praise upon George Washington, who appealed to the French regard for noble simplicity. Despite their familiarity with the Atlantic colonies, the French officers were surprised by a great many things, including the degree of religious tolerance, the unassuming manners of local women, and the paucity of indigent colonists. Both the Germans and the French expressed a certain amount of contempt for the Americans they encountered, but they warmed to the locals as the fighting dragged on. Each foreign soldier had a unique experience in the colonies, but collectively these experiences shaped Germany and France’s national attitudes toward the young United States.
FRENCH AND HESSIAN IMPRESSIONS:
FOREIGN SOLDIERS' VIEWS OF AMERICA DURING THE REVOLUTION
INTRODUCTION

The real, central theme of history is not what happened, but what people felt about it when it was happening.

G.M. Young

Homesick, frequently ill, often underfed, surrounded by foreigners, engaged in a strange war, and longing only to earn some distinction and return home alive, German and French soldiers enjoyed a unique experience during the American Revolution. With constantly changing emotions as they tramped up and down the coast of America, the foreigners developed their impressions of the inhabitants, countryside, institutions, and struggle for independence. Perhaps the largest body of foreign visitors to come to America before the modern era of international tourism, they played an important role in the birth of the United States.

While later observers chose to cross the Atlantic to investigate the republican experiment, the French and the Hessians, (the latter so named because of the areas of Germany from which they came,) were professional soldiers. They neither asked for the assignment nor relished the arduous trip across the ocean. Once on American soil, they suffered through the rigors of battle, the extremes of heat and cold, and the want of proper provisions. They were, however, uniquely situated to examine the struggle for liberty and the current state of America. Stuck in the colonies for the duration of the war

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1 While modern historians use “Hessians” to refer to all of the German soldiers, the Germans themselves used the term to refer to the inhabitants of two specific regions in Germany: Hesse-Cassel and Hesse-Hanau.
and forced into personal and professional relationships with Americans of all classes and colors, the soldiers' opinions were more robust than the average foreign traveler’s, and were less likely to be clouded by one bad experience. Hardly impartial observers, their military allegiance, class background, intelligence, familiarity with America, and access to information all played a role in shaping their impressions of the young United States. Piercingly accurate at times and grossly misinformed at others, they provided a window into both the true nature of American liberty and the manner in which it was perceived in Europe. Generally impressed with America but cool to its inhabitants, the French and Germans warmed to the “rebels” as the war progressed.
CHAPTER 1
HESSIAN IMPRESSIONS

Auxiliary troops fought in almost every major European war in the eighteenth century, so it was not unusual for the British to use them in the struggle against the American colonies.\(^1\) Believing it was better to spend English money than English lives, and closely tied to northern Germany through the house of Hanover, Great Britain employed Hessian forces in many European conflicts. Their ready availability, geographic proximity, and military effectiveness made the Germans a valuable asset for British imperial designs.\(^2\) Because of the small size of the English force available for service in America, the Hessian auxiliaries were an important part of Britain's plan to end the rebellion quickly.\(^3\)

Military service was a common path for young Germans, since it was the most readily available source of revenue for both the commoners and rulers of the principalities. Although most of the soldiers were well trained but uneducated, the

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\(^{1}\) Although they have come to be called mercenaries in popular usage, the Hessians were technically auxiliaries. While mercenaries were individuals who voluntarily enlisted in a foreign army for a specific wage, auxiliaries were troops sent by one prince to another, to serve in times of war in return for a "subsidy," or sum of money.

\(^{2}\) Great Britain, ruled by a Hanoverian monarch since 1714, had close ties with the electorates of northern Germany. George II, who continued to serve as elector of Hanover, secured Hessian forces on a number of occasions to augment the Hanoverian army in conflicts with the French and Prussians. The war in America marked the first time that Britain used Hessian forces outside of central Europe. See Uriel Dann, *Hanover and Great Britain 1740-1760: Diplomacy and Survival* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 1-8, 22-32, 90-97; Adolphus William Ward, *Great Britain and Hanover: Some Aspects of the Personal Union* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1971 [1899]), 4, 32.

\(^{3}\) Britain also tried to secure Russian troops for use in America, but interference by Frederick of Prussia led to a breakdown in negotiations.
officers were more cultured, and their opinions of America reflected this sense of taste and sophistication. The ministry in London eagerly anticipated the arrival of the auxiliaries in America, because the redcoats, undisciplined and poorly led, were finding little success in the early stages of the war. A few British officials, however, had reservations about sending the Hessians. Some believed that their use would encourage the Americans to seek foreign aid, while others feared that German-Americans would welcome the mercenaries and persuade them to join the fight for independence.

Unfortunately for the British, both fears turned out to be well founded.

From 1776 to 1782, the British employed over 30,000 German soldiers; with approximately 20,000 troops on American soil at any one time, the Hessian forces almost equaled the redcoats in number. The Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel supplied over 20,000 of these men, while the regions of Hesse-Hanau, Brunswick, Waldeck, Anspach-Bayreuth, and Anhalt-Zerbst each provided a few thousand. Having sworn their allegiance to the king of Britain, the first force of 12,974 soldiers arrived at Staten Island in August 1776.4

They disembarked with mixed expectations. “Many of those men had never before been outside their own small village, few had ever been outside Germany, and possibly none of them had ever been in the American colonies prior to sailing to America as auxiliaries in the employ of the English crown.”5 Poorly informed, the troops had been told very little about the colonies, the aims of the expedition, or the rebellion’s


5 Waldeck, Eighteenth-Century America, v.
What they knew about America came mostly from rumor, and wild fantasies of wealth and savagery swirled in their heads. Speaking the minds of many of the soldiers, one officer explained that, “in the opinion of subordinate officials, the North Americans were cannibals.” Others believed that in America “the war could be carried into vast deserts. There, the wild men often invaded the lands of the colonists; and horrible stories were told about the love of the Indians for scalps. Malignant fevers, from time to time, thinned the European population who were themselves in a semi-civilized state.”

Despite these apprehensions, boredom and poverty caused most soldiers to be enthusiastic about the trip to America, where political issues did not matter nearly as much as its reputation as a land of opportunity. Friedericke von Wurmb, a Hessian noblewoman living in France, was pleased to hear of her brother Carl’s journey to America, for “he is a pretty fellow and perhaps will find a wealthy wife over there: that is hardly a rare thing in that country.” Between 1773 and 1776, some sixty songs concerning the war in America were written in Germany, most expressing hopes of fortune and military success:

Come with us to America,  
The land of plenty.  
Silver and gold, land and wealth,  
What you are looking for in the world,  
You will find in America.

Why do you cry, my beloved, with a sad face,  
We are all in search of a fortune,  
In the past we have had only small pay,  
But now honor and gold are awaiting us....

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6 German interest in America grew only after local soldiers were recruited to fight for the British. The rebellion became a hot topic among intellectuals, but the lack of information prevented them from fully comprehending the situation until the middle years of the war. Horst Dippel, Germany and the American Revolution 1770-1800: A Sociohistorical Investigation of Late Eighteenth-Century Political Thinking (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977) 8-10, 121-22.

7 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 13.


Good bye, my Hesse, good bye! .. .Good bye, Landgrave Friedrich, 
Now comes America, You pay for gin and beer!
And our fortune is growing — For the arms and legs we lose, 
Mountains of gold are there! England will pay you.
Further, in enemy country, You lousy rebels, you, 
The hand will take what we lack, Beware of us Hessians!
This is indeed a much better life. Hurrah! We go to America, 
Good night to you, Germania.10

The journey across the ocean was difficult, replete with spoiled food and water, rats, scurvy, swollen legs, the itch, fevers, light breezes, and high tensions. Johann Conrad Döhla, a private in the Bayreuth Regiment, decided that the electrical storm his ship passed through off the coast of New York “had been a signal that we should be allowed to be used to solve the mounting political storm that had arisen in America between the insurgents and their rightful ruler. Therefore, at the time of our arrival in America, we burned with a desire to demonstrate our bravery and to show that the Germans…did not lack courage and wished to demonstrate this also in another distant part of the world.”11

While the Hessians were taken with almost all of America, their first glimpses of New York and Staten Island filled them with a special sort of exhilaration. Quartermaster Carl Bauer of Koehler’s grenadiers argued that it was doubtful “if Columbus at the first glimpse of the New World had greater joy at his discovery than we did. To each man it seemed he had been given new life.”12 Hesse-Cassel and the other central German provinces were landlocked, densely populated, and over-farmed; almost

12 Atwood, The Hessians, 54-56.
everyone was impressed with the beauty of New York and the anticipation of what lay ahead. Captain Hinrichs told a well-known German scholar, Professor Schlözer, to "imagine the finest kind of a harbor with room for a thousand ships...all filled with men...in the most glorious region, with the finest weather, and all these men ready for a task upon which hung the whole welfare of England."13 Quartermaster Sartorius of the Regiment Prince Hereditary remarked: "This countryside is so pleasant; I do not remember having seen anything like it before."14 A Hessian who arrived a few months later confessed to his brother: "I must admit that in my whole life I never saw so beautiful a land, to judge by appearances, as we saw on both sides on entering the harbor."15 Little did these men know that within a week, over seven hundred of them would fall ill with fever, diarrhea, or scurvy.

Illness was not the only rude welcome for the Germans in America. Rumors of impending barbaric mercenaries had preceded their arrival, and in every new region the Hessians entered, the inhabitants reacted with fear and alarm. Valentin Asteroth, the chaplain's assistant in the Hessian von Huyne Regiment, described the scene that greeted them as they sailed into the harbor in Rhode Island in late 1776: "When [the rebels] saw us and saw our fleet enter, there was a great outcry and they fled to Providence with bag and baggage.... They ran about in the streets telling one another their opinion, because they had heard such tales about us, that we were not human, we plundered everyone, and

burned and killed everything and everyone in our path.”\textsuperscript{16} Many Americans had been told that Germans ate small children, while others believed that they were somehow inhuman. Hessian Lieutenant Wiederholt was amused by the story of a group of American soldiers, out on night patrol, who thought they were near Hessian advance posts: “Suddenly a bull frog croaked loudly. In dismay, they answered, ‘Friend.’ At this answer, the frog croaked a second time. They now believed that it was a Hessian picket, whereupon they stopped and cried ‘Yes, yes, gentlemen, we are your prisoners’…. They got off their horses and waited for somebody to advance and take them prisoners.”\textsuperscript{17}

Quickly, however, most Americans realized the folly of their fears, and those who had fled gradually “returned to their dwellings after forming another opinion of the Hessians.”\textsuperscript{18} In fact, many locals expressed disappointment upon realizing that their anxieties were unfounded. Quartermaster Heusser’s stay in a ferry house on the Susquehanna River attracted a large crowd, “but it could be seen in their faces that they regretted their journey. They had come to see monsters and realized that we looked like human beings. It is ridiculous, but it is true, that the people had such a terrible opinion of the Hessians that when they saw us they did not believe we were Hessians.”\textsuperscript{19}

If the Hessians frightened the Americans, the feeling certainly was not mutual. Rather than fearing the rebel forces, most Germans “despised them, and were eager to be at them.” Angered by local newspapers’ exaggerations of Hessian brutality and by the rebellion of an ungrateful people against their rightful king, German soldiers expected to

\textsuperscript{16} Henrich Kummel, \textit{Diaries of a Hessian Chaplain and the Chaplain's Assistant: Excerpts From Two Diaries Showing Religious Influences Among the Hessians During the American Revolution}, trans. Bruce E. Burgoyne (Dover, DE: Johannes Schwalm Historical Association, 1990), 25.

\textsuperscript{17} Kipping, \textit{Hessian View of America}, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{18} Kummel, \textit{Diaries of a Hessian Chaplain}, 7. See also Pettengill, \textit{Letters from America}, 28; Eelking, \textit{German Allied Troops}, 28, 58.

\textsuperscript{19} Kipping, \textit{Hessian View of America}, 29.
quickly defeat the rag-tag American army.\textsuperscript{20} The ease of their early success in battles on Long Island did nothing to change the Germans’ minds. “If [the Americans] are all as bad as they were today,” Colonel Johann August von Loos declared, “this will be more like a hunt than a war. But many brave boys can be killed by these rascals, and that would be a shame.”\textsuperscript{21} A Hessian chaplain, explained in a letter home that the rebels “defended themselves far worse than one would have expected of such enthusiasts for Freedom…. We captured many of them, most of whom would have taken service with us had they not been prevented by the English.”\textsuperscript{22}

The Germans also disdained the Americans’ guerilla tactics, a form of warfare with which the mercenaries were unaccustomed. Thinking such strategy cowardly, Major Robert Donkin felt that the rebels “delight more in murdering from woods, walls, and houses, than in shewing any genius or science in the art military.”\textsuperscript{23} Captain von der Malsburg became “more and more convinced of the disorder and lack of discipline among our enemies. They insult and berate us with the vilest words. As disciplined soldiers we disregard this undisciplined behavior with silence and contempt.”\textsuperscript{24} Because of this hatred for the rebels, the mercenaries treated their early prisoners of war poorly, often teasing and beating them for sport.\textsuperscript{25}

As career military men, the Hessian officers were amazed by the lack of experience in the American army. After capturing a few rebel officers, Colonel von Heeringen found that “many were tailors, shoemakers, barbers and base mechanics…. I

\textsuperscript{20} Atwood, \textit{The Hessians}, 60-61; Eelking, \textit{Memoirs of Major General Riedesel}, 1:45.
\textsuperscript{21} Kipping, \textit{Hessian View of America}, 22.
\textsuperscript{22} Pettengill, \textit{Letters from America}, 154.
\textsuperscript{23} Atwood, \textit{The Hessians}, 131.
\textsuperscript{24} Kipping, \textit{Hessian View of America}, 24.
have not found one of the captured officers who ever served abroad. They are mere rebels."  
Not only was there no professional officer class in America, there was no sovereign dispensing honors and promotions. The German troops slowly learned that birth, education, and courage counted for much less than merit and entrepreneurship.  
“In short,” explained Captain Wagner, “what we have seen so far brings us little honor to fight against these.”  
As the war progressed, however, many Hessians begrudgingly acknowledged American skill and bravery. By 1777, Colonel von Loos had certainly changed his tune; he admitted that “I am compelled to lay aside the Hessian prejudices that the rebels are not brave soldiers. Our losses prove that we were wrong…and if they had better officers…our job would much tougher…. " A soldier in Vermont had a more tempered opinion: “In the open field the rebels are not of much count, but in the woods they are redoubtable…. From a military point of view, the officers of the rebels do not cut much of a figure…. You will also find that many of the privates in the American army are superior in station, in private life, to these superior officers. Because most German officers were aristocrats, the troops were amazed to find commoners holding positions of authority in the American regiments.

26 Eelking, _German Allied Troops_, 33-34; German observers in Europe did not call the Americans “rebels.” The auxiliary troops did so only because that was the term the British used. As they gathered more information about the revolution and the British constitution, the German bourgeoisie came to believe that the Americans’ actions were legal, because they were opposing an assault on their fundamental rights and liberties. Dippel, _Germany and the American Revolution_, 84-90.  
27 Atwood, _The Hessians_, 162-64; German officers were almost always aristocrats. A commoner’s place was among the private soldiers. W. H. Bruford, _Germany in the Eighteenth Century: The Social Background of the Literary Revival_ (Cambridge: The University Press, 1939), 49.  
28 _Ibid._, 70; Kipping, _Hessian View of America_, 21.  
29 Kipping, _Hessian View of America_, 22.  
During the surrender ceremony after the battle of Saratoga in October 1777, the Hessians could not help but be impressed by the American victory and the way the rebels handled themselves afterwards. A German soldier reported to his friends back home that although the enemy was improperly uniformed, “they stood like soldiers, erect, with a military bearing which was subject to little criticism.... You recognize at first glance the earnestness which has led them to seize their guns and powder-horns, and that...it is no joke to oppose them.... Quite seriously, the whole nation has much natural talent for war and military life. I must still say in praise of the enemy regiments that there was not a man among them who showed the slightest sign of mockery, malicious delight, hate, or other insult; it seemed rather as if they wished to do us honor.”

Four years later, however, at least one German had changed his opinion of the rebels. Private Döhla reported that as the Hessian forces marched in the surrender ceremony at Yorktown, “the Americans, as victors, made sport of us.... Mostly the French behaved well toward us, but of the Americans, no one except the officers was permitted in the city or in our lines...for fear that the American militia...might also steal or plunder or otherwise abuse us as is their usual practice.” Ultimately, the German view of American soldiers was mixed. Their praise grew as the war progressed and their losses mounted, but professional pride prevented the Hessians from viewing the rebel soldiers as their equals.

Hessian officers reserved special praise for the character and ability of one particular American soldier, General George Washington. Waldeck simply called him “clever,” but Major General Riedesel, who corresponded with the general frequently

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32 Döhla, Hessian Diary of the American Revolution, 177-78.
regarding officer exchanges and the treatment of German prisoners, exclaimed: “General Washington saw all our divisions and treated our officers with great politeness. All that can possibly be said against this man is, pity is it, that a man of his character and talents should be a rebel against his king.”33 A Hessian officer who dined with Washington after the British defeat at Trenton observed that, “his countenance is not that of a great hero; his eyes have no fire, but a friendly smile when he speaks inspires love and affection. He is a courtly man of fine aspect, polished and somewhat restrained; says little, has a shrewd look, is of middle height and a good figure.”34 Reflecting on Washington’s popularity at the end of the war, Major Baurmeister decided that, “in view of the present misgovernment, General Washington could obtain anything he might want, even the crown of North America. The people are ready to offer it to him, but so far he has shown no desire for this gift of fortune, if, indeed, it is one.”35

While their opinion of the rebel soldiers shifted steadily from contempt to respect, contact with American civilians left the Hessians with a wide range of impressions. Soldiers who traveled extensively quickly realized that, much like any other country in the world, America contained its share of good and bad apples. This realization, however, did not stop the Germans from making a number of generalizations about the American people. Prosperity was evident almost everywhere the soldiers turned, but many Hessians felt that success had made the Americans soft and lazy. One soldier, having only recently arrived in New York, quickly decided that “it is too bad that this

34 Eelking, *German Allied Troops*, 79.
land, which is also very fertile, is inhabited by such people, who from luxury and sensuous pleasure didn’t know what to do and so owe their fall to naught but their pride. Everyone at home who takes their part and thinks they had good cause for rebellion ought in punishment to spend some time among them and learn how things are here (for the meanest man here can, if he will only do something, live like the richest among us): he would soon sing a different tune and agree with me that not necessity but wickedness and pleasure was the cause of the rebellion.”

Valentin Asteroth, the chaplain’s assistant, although his sentiments were not nearly as harsh, also thought that American prosperity had made the people vain and shiftless. Everyone in America dressed very nicely because “no one gives anything to another. He only looks out for himself and his own interest. He lives better than the nobleman in Hesse.” While slaves did all the actual work, the typical American drove about in his carriage waiting for tea-time, for “no matter how poor a person may be, he must have tea twice a day or he thinks he will surely die.”

Sergeant Major Martin Appell told his parents that “the inhabitants each have...black slaves who do the work for them, and have had a lordly manner of living, but without order, each one does what he likes, and in a heathenish manner carries on his life.”

With acres of land and a servile work force at his disposal, the common American farmer lived much like the lords in Germany. Whether they were jealous, resentful, or simply

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37 Kummel, *Diaries of a Hessian Chaplain*, 27-28; “Even by German standards Hesse-Cassel was poor. Agriculture was handicapped by a hilly, heavily wooded terrain, generally infertile soil, and an inhospitable climate. At the same time, the nearly four hundred thousand Hessians in 1781 saddled the country with a crushing population density of about one hundred and twenty people per square mile. While the peasants suffered the most from these conditions, even many nobles lived modestly and were generally no more wealthy (and frequently were poorer) than the average American freeholder.” Charles Ingrao, “‘Barbarous Strangers’: Hessian State and Society during the American Revolution.” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 87, No. 4. (Oct., 1982), 960.

surprised by this wealth, most Hessian observers felt that the colonists had been spoiled by the easy way of life in the New World.

Regarding American society, Philipp Waldeck decided that not only do “no people in the world love to sing more than the Americans, let it sound as it will,” but also that “no nation in the world loves music more than the American, but no nation loves it with less taste than this one.”39 Major General Friederich Adolphus Riedesel, commander of the Brunswick troops, also thought that the Americans lacked refinement, for he patronizingly described the New Englanders he met in Cambridge as “generally thickset, and middling tall; and it is difficult to distinguish one from another. Not one-tenth of them can read writing, and still fewer can write.... The New Englanders all want to be politicians, and love, therefore, the taverns and the grog bowl.... They are extremely inquisitive, credulous and zealous to madness for liberty.”40

Captain Hinrichs, unimpressed by the Pennsylvania countryside, was spooked by its inhabitants: “Nowhere have I found such a lot of madmen as here. Just yesterday I was eating with a gentleman, when a third person came into the room and whispered in my ear: Take care this gentleman is a madman. Often the people are cured again, but almost all have a quiet madness, an aberration of the mind.”41 Lieutenant Colonel von Dincklage, a disciplined and cultured military man, was equally critical of the citizens in the middle colonies, where “the tendency to self-indulgence and luxury, especially among women, is wholly unrestrained.”

Other Germans developed more favorable opinions; they may have fallen in with more sophisticated Americans. Captain von der Malsburg felt that “the inhabitants are

40 Eelking, Memoirs of Major General Riedesel, 1:226.
41 Pettengill, Letters from America, 182-83.
well-mannered. As a rule they are naturally clear-headed, and some have even an enlightened intellect.... They welcome all as well as they can, for hospitality is a conspicuous trait of the inhabitants of this continent.”

Malsburg was impressed by the open nature of American society, in which even the common man took an active interest in politics. Earlier than Europeans “they reach the maturity of body and soul. They have special intellectual powers and a better kind of knowledge in various fields.... I have even been assured that no Member of Parliament in London knows more about the momentary political situation of this country than, probably without exception, each inhabitant here. The form of government depends only on thinkers.”

Although they were often quartered with local families, and many officers became quite good friends with their hosts, the Hessians were frequently reminded that they were at war with the Americans. Some officers, such as Captain Johann Ewald, warned their troops against talking to the inhabitants of “enemy country, where everybody is against you and tells a lie to bring the enemy upon you.... You never get correct information about the enemy. Each step is betrayed at once and you are soon surrounded from all sides by armed civilians.... All inhabitants are spies or soldiers.” Lieutenant Carl Philipp von Feilitzsch also realized that this was a more personal war than the Hessians were used to fighting, for he decided that Americans “are the worst people one can

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43 Although conditions among peasants in Germany varied, few commoners were politically active. East of the Elbe, many peasants lived in quasi-serfdom. Legally tied to the land they farmed, they depended on their lord for their livelihood and identity. In the West, where most of the “Hessian” troops lived, commoners were free from the bonds of servitude, but they still struggled to eke out an existence through subsistence farming. Bruford, *Germany in the Eighteenth Century*, 108-12.
imagine, their malice and hatred towards us is written on their faces.... we must therefore beware the farmers in their homes even more than the enemy in the open.”

Although their commanding officers may have wished otherwise, many German soldiers found it difficult to avoid interacting with the locals, especially those of the fair sex. Homesick and lonely, the Hessians admired the beauty of American women, although local customs and senses of propriety were markedly different from those back home. While Captain Hinrichs noticed simply that American women “are not ugly and on the mainland are said to be very pretty,” a lieutenant in Philadelphia told folks back in Gottingen that “this country throughout is blessed with extremely handsome and charming women. An unconstrained, natural manner, a very free conduct that never transgresses the rules of propriety (but no slavish propriety), however, and still more their wide reading increases their worth.” A Brunswick officer, imprisoned in Cambridge in 1778, met a number of “pretty girls, who are here in great numbers and in respect to the war are entirely neutral, sticking solely to the jus naturae.” A soldier in Vermont admired the “white, well-formed and plump” nature of the local women, who gave “promise of a numerous and healthy progeny.”

While some Hessians were so taken with the local women that they married them, others were not as impressed. Quartermaster Carl Bauer, stationed in South Carolina,

45 Atwood, The Hessians, 167.
46 Pettengill, Letters from America, 180, 258; Contemporaries defined late eighteenth-century Germany as a sexual era. The nobility, of which most German officers were members, associated cultural refinement with sexual knowledge and leisure. It was a time of excess, as well as one of closer relations between the sexes and an elevation of women’s position in society. Despite these liberal ideals, most German men still valued an outward show of propriety from their female counterparts. Isabel V. Hull, Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 231-32.
47 Pettengill, Letters from America, 144.
48 Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, 89-90.
thought that there "is nothing to be praised about the beauty of the female sex, for they are pale and I have only met a few with a fresh complexion... Both sexes are indolent and not inclined to work." Lieutenant Henkelmann echoed this sentiment, noticing that "as blessed as this continent may be, as proud and lazy are its owners. A lady has nothing to do but dine and drink, adorn herself, drive about, and sleep," and "the women do nothing except wait for tea time, pretty up the rooms, and sit at the fireplace."49

Major General Riedesel also found American women rather lazy, but substantially more assertive than those with whom Lieutenant Henkelmann came into contact. The American ladies Riedesel observed "grow old very early and become homely.... They ride very well on horseback; love music and dancing, but hardly ever work. The man has to do the housework, and wait upon his lady. The women love to domineer, and the spirit of rebellion is more deeply rooted in their hearts, than in those of the men."50 Private Döhla, a common soldier who lacked the noble upbringing of an officer like Riedesel, nevertheless noticed that the women of New York "do little work, or none at all, but pass the time walking, riding, and driving, wearing curls and French styles daily just as the female nobility do by us. They worry very little about the household, hardly ever taking sewing materials into their hands or cooking meals, and for the most part this must be done by the black females. They do absolutely no field work."51 Accustomed to

50 Eelking, *Memoirs of Major General Riedesel* 2:54-55; French soldiers in America noticed the reverse. They were taken aback by the husband's dominant role in the household; Only at the end of the eighteenth century did marriage in Germany become a union based on mutual love and attraction, rather than on economics and good sense. During most of the century, happy marriages were the exception rather than the rule. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany*, 286-87; Bruford, *Germany in the Eighteenth Century*, 222-23.
51 Döhla, *Hessian Diary of the American Revolution*, 36; In Germany, women were subservient to their husbands, and they kept themselves busy with common household chores, including sewing, knitting, and cooking. Individualism may have been a doctrine for German men, but not yet for their wives. Bruford, *Germany in the Eighteenth Century*, 225-27
commoners eking a bare existence from the land back in Germany, the Hessians were constantly amazed by the easy lifestyle white American men and women enjoyed. Although they professed to be disgusted by this “laziness,” thousands of soldiers, enticed by American prosperity and American women, deserted their regiments during the war.

One German soldier, stationed in New England during the middle of the war, clearly did a lot of thinking about the opposite sex in America. Carried away with generalizations about little feet and gay faces, he fortunately remembered to heap special praise upon his “dear countrywomen,” who were not as domineering as their American counterparts:

The womenfolk in this whole extensive region way to Boston and New York are slender and straight, fleshy without being stout. They have pretty little feet, very solid hands and arms, a very white skin, and a healthy complexion, without having to paint.... Their teeth are very white, their lips pretty, and their eyes very animated and laughing. At the same time they have natural good manners, a very unconstrained manner, a frank, gay face, and a natural boldness. They think a great deal of cleanliness and of good footwear. They dress very decently, but then any material must become them.... But all the fair things I have just said about the fair sex here, I must confess, in honor of my dear countrywomen, that the gentle, languishing, delicate manner, which gives the latter such an amiable charm, is only rarely to be found among the beauties here, and that consequently the delights which result therefrom may well be very rare here.52

Understandably, German auxiliaries were much less effusive with their opinions of American men, since most of their interactions occurred on the battlefield. The same soldier who took the time to analyze every nuance of American womanhood remarked only that in spite of their funny wigs, “all the fellows...[were] so slender, so handsome, so sinewy, that it was a pleasure to look at them, and we were all surprised at the sight of such a finely built people.... Quite seriously, English America excels most of Europe in respect to the stature and beauty of its men.”53

52 Pettengill, Letters from America, 116-19
53 Ibid., 110-11.
While the Hessians were typically mum regarding American men, they entertained much stronger opinions of their fellow Germans who had come across the ocean as settlers. Much of the Hessian criticism of German-Americans came from the officers, whose economic status prevented them from understanding the poverty that drove many people to America. Upon learning that most of the 200,000 German-Americans supported the struggle for independence, many Hessians were flabbergasted and irate. One imprisoned Hessian officer was dismayed to find that the German-American chaplains “wretchedly insulted the King of England” and attempted to “convert” everybody. Lieutenant Wiederholt was similarly disgusted by what he saw as “the lowest class and...the dregs of that nation. They want to imitate the hospitality and candor of the others, but they remain raw and unrefined German peasants. They are steeped in the American idea of Liberty but know nothing of what liberty really is and are therefore worse than all others and almost unbearable.”54 Other soldiers were upset by the bastardization of the German language, which “is wholly anglicized here and will soon form a distinct language by itself, called the Pennsylvania language, and will then be unintelligible for Germans and English alike.”55

If the Hessians were frustrated by their expatriated countrymen, their opinions were much more favorable concerning another subset of American citizens: loyalists. Expressing sympathy for those men and women who stayed true to their rightful sovereign, the German soldiers took up quarters in royalist houses and aided them whenever possible. Major General Riedesel hoped to recruit large numbers of friendly Americans to fight for the British, but as the war progressed, willing loyalists became

54 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 24.
55 Pettengill, Letters from America, 191.
harder and harder to find. A soldier in Vermont in 1777 explained the situation to his family back in Germany that “on an average, you may estimate that at the utmost one sixth are royalists, one sixth are neutral, and four sixths are rebels.... In all truth we are kind to these unhappy [loyalists]. On the other hand, the rebels act in a harsh and barbarous manner toward those of their neighbors who manifest a friendly feeling toward us.”

Especially sensitive to the plight of loyalists who were forced to acquiesce to the rebel cause, many Germans were upset by their inability to help them. Riedesel told Duke Charles William Ferdinand of Brunswick that “the rebels are losing courage. They know that they are being led astray by some ambitious men, but they do not yet see how to get out of the fix. There are many, both in Albany and New York, who impatiently wait for the arrival of the northern [British] army, to unite with it; but at present, they dare not give expression to their feelings, for fear of losing their property and life.” A soldier on the outskirts of Boston came into contact with many “sturdy people in town, who in part formerly had positions commanding obedience, but now must bend the knee to the gentlemen of the [Congressional] Committee.... Heaven be merciful to any one whom they suspect of being a Tory. May families, therefore, live in a state of suppression.” A Brunswicker serving in General Burgoyne’s army in New York was ultimately confused by the actions of local royalists, who “not only had accepted the proclamation of General Burgoyne, but had...taken the oath of loyalty to the king. But

56 Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, 88-89.
57 Eelking, Memoirs of Major General Riedesel, 1:83-84. See also Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, 78.
58 Pettengill, Letters from America, 126.
these same disloyal people, who had just taken the oath of allegiance, soon afterward attacked the corps of Baum as the bitterest of foes.”

Indeed, the rebellion was a constant source of puzzlement to the Hessians, especially the officers, and most responded with disdain toward the rebels and their war. Disgusted by what they saw as American arrogance, foolishness, and ingratitude, the largely noble-born German officers did not doubt the virtue of the British cause. Having pledged allegiance to the king of England and forced to write periodic reports to his commanding officers, any officer who sympathized with the Americans certainly kept his opinion to himself. Disloyalty was an ideological concept that most Hessians had trouble understanding, and American propaganda, guerilla tactics, defiant attitudes, and increasingly frequent victories left the mercenaries with a bitter taste.

Captain Hinrichs blamed rebel haughtiness on the ease of living in America. He explained to his friend Professor Schlözer that “the more I regard this land, the fine grass, the luxuriant grain and hemp, and the beautiful orchards, the more I envy the formerly happy inhabitants of this excellent land, the sorrier I am for the unfortunates who must now suffer with the rest through the intrigues and personal envy of their fellow countrymen and others.” Pausing to place some responsibility for the war on British “intrigue”, he concluded: “One thing more. You know the Huguenot wars in France: what Religion was there, Liberty is here, simply fanaticism, and the effects are the

59 Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, 100-01.
60 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 21, 32-33.
same." An officer in New York in 1780 found the source of the war in American ingratitude and cunning:

Meanwhile the spirit of rebellion in Philadelphia and around us is not yet weary of forcing the inhabitants to [take up] arms by flattery, deception, threats, and open violence, and of continuing the war.... At first I was inclined to be favorable to the Americans. Prejudices and false conceptions of the oppression threatening them – with which our German papers always embellished their cause – brought me on their side. But since I have had a chance to get closer acquainted with their history, their motives for war, and their character as a whole, I have no further wishes for them. The most abominable trait in their make-up is ingratitude. It is true, when I tell you how happy, quiet, and unconcerned they lived in the lap of the most beneficent Nature before the outbreak of these unhappy disturbances; so one is almost inclined to recognize the British as tyrants who cannot bear to see their offspring happy: and so they picture it to you... But all the pretext of resistance to the imposition of illegal taxes was in the beginning nothing more than a mask, a trumped-up reason. The plan for that rebellion is laid older and deeper, and was conceived and hatched chiefly in the New England provinces.

Colonel Ludwig von Wurmb held similar sentiments. After traveling in America he decided that “there are bad people in this country, and the women must be blamed for inflaming the young men by bestowing upon them the pretty name of ‘sons of liberty.’ When I was in Europe, I had pity on them, but now no more.... This war has been caused by arrogance, pride, and foolishness on the side of the Americans and by negligence on the side of the English.” Hessian Lieutenant Colonel von Dincklage also felt that the Americans had squandered their happiness. He predicted misery and failure for the insatiable rebels, who might “have peace but not happiness when the war is over.... Presently this country is the scene of the most cruel events. Neighbors are on opposite sides, children are against their fathers. Anyone who differs with the opinions of Congress in thought or in speech is regarded as an enemy and turned over to the

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62 Ibid., 228-30; Observers in Germany, before they became fully informed about the situation in the British colonies, also believed that the Americans were ungrateful. Although they did not understand the nuances of taxation and the British constitution, many Germans “did feel, however, that because Britain had expended a lot of resources during the Seven Year’s War, America should burden some of the debt. It was only fair.” Dippel, *Germany and the American Revolution*, 84-90.
hangman, or else he must flee... What misery the people have plunged themselves into!63 Presented with fertile land and affluence everywhere they turned, many Hessians could not comprehend how paradise had birthed such a bitter war.

Most German soldiers simply did not understand the true motives or issues of the American Revolution. They had little awareness of the Anglo-American political tradition of the "rights of man," and their outlook toward life and government was predicated on honor and service to their sovereign. Although German intellectuals lauded the new republic as the realization of Enlightenment ideals, most Hessian soldiers assessed the material wealth of America and cited individual self-interest as the primary cause of the rebellion; cries of liberty and self-determination were certainly nothing more than a smokescreen.64 "The safe rule," explained Captain Hinrichs, "according to which one can always ascertain whether a man is a loyalist or a rebel, is to find whether he profits more in his private interests...when he is on our side or on that of the enemy."65

Coupled with philosophical confusion came pure misinformation. Hinrichs thought that there had been two rebellions: the first caused by hypocritical, ambitious Quakers in the 1720s, and the second triggered by power-hungry Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. Lieutenant Colonel von Dincklage, whose sole source seems to have been a Dutch farmer on Staten Island, blamed the rebellion on "the people in the cities...who had not enough to do and wanted to be great lords and get rich quickly, especially the

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64 Enlightenment notions of liberty and equality, as expressed by the British constitution and the writings of French thinkers, were understood and discussed by German intellectuals during the second half of the eighteenth century. Celebration of these ideals, however, did not necessitate a verbal assault on the German system of government. The French philosophes were not as concerned with advocating a specific form of government as they were with removing injustice and liberalizing society. Many German thinkers were employed by the state, and most were satisfied with its laws and system of government. Inggaro, "Barbarous Strangers," 955-58; Dippel, *Germany and the American Revolution*, 142-43, 155-56.
merchants, lawyers, and even the priesthood.” Private Döhla, on the other hand, blamed the French, the Spanish, and the tea.

Although Major General Riedesel constantly predicted a swift victory, no doubt to encourage his troops and the Duke of Brunswick, other Hessian officers quickly realized that the probability of success in America was low. Recognizing that the vast amounts of land and people favored the spirited rebel forces, many Germans agreed with Lieutenant General Friedrich Wilhelm von Lossberg, who in late 1777 declared that “personally I do not see when the rebellion will come to an end. We have to deal with a whole continent and as long as there is one person left, he will be a rebel with all his heart, even if he is not allowed to show it. There are clever men among them and they...are learning more and more how to fight.” Of course, the Hessians were fighting merely for pay, so their determination to win the war was understandably not as strong as the British officers’. Although he could “now see clearly that the conquering of this nation by force of arms is and will be a problem which cannot be solved,” Riedesel held out hope that the American rebels would realize “they were the dupes of the European powers, their eyes would open, and they would rather rest satisfied with an unfavorable result than be the foot-ball of ambitious powers who are only looking after their own interests.” Colonel Ludwig von Wurmb, though, understood that the Americans would not be easily subdued, for

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66 Ibid., 159-60.
67 Döhla, *Hessian Diary of the American Revolution*, 31-32; Before the revolution began, few Germans understood that the Americans were concerned about their freedom. Amid newspaper stories about the Tea Act and taxation in 1773, only the *Hamburgische Correspondent* wrote that the colonists were “extremely worried about their liberty.” A year later, the *Zurich Freytags-Zeitung* reported on the “spirit of liberty inspiring the Americans.” Finally, on April 28, 1775, the *Freytags-Zeitung* learned that the colonists were determined “to defend their liberty with their lives.” Dippel, *Germany and the American Revolution*, 75-80.
"when people who were shoemakers, tailors, and innkeepers become generals and members of Congress, they do not like to take up their old professions again."  

While they faulted American ingratitude and arrogance, many Germans also blamed the Continental Congress for escalating the conflict with Great Britain, and most mercenaries believed that the representatives in Philadelphia were out of touch with the desires of the common citizens. An officer stationed in New England in 1780 explained that the rebels "feel more and more the iron rod of the Congress: many sigh under it and wish for the old government, but they dare not venture to betray their sentiments...." The Hessians' opinions were naturally one-sided, for most of their information about the Continental Congress came from disgruntled loyalists. Major Baurmeister loathed the Americans' "indomitable ideas of liberty, the main springs of which are held and guided by every hand in Congress! Good for nothing and unimportant as most of these men may have been before these disturbances (because they were incompetent and without wealth) they now resort to every means for more than one reason, to weaken the rich and the Loyalists within and stubbornly resist the English without."  

Ensign Friederich von der Lith of the Leib-Regiment, on the other hand, greatly admired the egalitarian system of leadership and lawmaking he found in America. Coming upon several Congressmen at dinner, he found "plain, upright men, simply dressed, some of whom wore their hair tied up and unpowdered, some with wigs cut short.... Lucky! I thought to myself, lucky must be the country and state, which are ruled by persons whose greatest distinction is to be men and citizens, who do not hold this position from elevation of birth, upbringing, and rank, do not give themselves airs.

70 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 34.  
71 Pettengill, Letters from America, 231-32.  
72 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 33.
and fancy themselves great because they conduct public affairs, and do not believe
themselves exalted above their fellow men, because they hold prosperity and suffering in
their hands." Most Hessians, however, agreed with Colonel von Wurmb and Major
General Riedesel, who believed that the American Congressmen were power-hungry,
corrupt, and anything but "men of faith and truth."\textsuperscript{74}

Even peace did not fully satisfy the German officers, for although they escaped
with their lives, most carried a deeply wounded pride. Riedesel, recovering from a long
illness in 1783, felt that the Americans had become wiser over the course of the war, and
he told Duke Ferdinand that he would not "speak to you of the peace which has been
made, since it costs me considerable to confess the disadvantages connected with it....
The Americans are at present apparently haughty and drunk with joy; but they are candid,
they talk sensibly and know the real resources of their enemies." Although he was upset
by the "disgraceful peace," he was ultimately happy just to be done with "such an
expensive and bloody war."\textsuperscript{75} Captain Ewald also noted the gloom that pervaded the
Hessian soldiers as they prepared to sail home. Amidst the great celebration of the
colonists in New York, "there was deep silence on board the ships that were lying at
anchor with troops, as if everyone were in deep mourning because of the loss of the
thirteen beautiful provinces."\textsuperscript{76}

If the Germans were disgusted by the confusing motives behind the rebellion,
they were pleasantly surprised by the complexity of religious beliefs they found in the

\textsuperscript{73} Atwood, \textit{The Hessians}, 185.
\textsuperscript{74} Kipping, \textit{Hessian View of America}, 34, 36; Eelking, \textit{Memoirs of Major General Riedesel}, 2:190.
\textsuperscript{75} Eelking, \textit{Memoirs of Major General Riedesel}, 2:131, 212.
\textsuperscript{76} Kipping, \textit{Hessian View of America}, 32.
colonies. Stout Calvinists, the Hessians were unaccustomed to the peaceful coexistence of different religions, and many admired the Americans' freedom of thought. A Hessian in Rhode Island explained to his brother that “there are so many sects here you can scarce count them.”77 Quartermaster Kleinschmidt, of the Regiment von Huyne, was pleased to discover that “they tolerate all religions here, and the government even allows them to celebrate their services in public.”78 Valentin Asteroth found eight sects in Newport: “Reformed, Catholic, Lutheran, Anabaptist, Jews, Quaker, Herrnhuter, and a sect similar to the Anabaptist but with whom they differ on some points and they celebrate Saturday.”79 Private Döhla counted twelve: Quakers, “Herrnhuters, or Moravian Brethren; Anabaptists; Dunkers; Pietists; Free Masons; Methodists; Seceders; the Marion Brotherhood; Manchisters, and...the Newborn. Also, there are many Jews...” Surprised to find Jews so well integrated into mainstream society, Döhla noted that they enjoyed full rights of citizenship, “dress similarly to other citizens, are clean shaven, and eat pork, which is forbidden by their laws. Also, Jews and Christians marry together without giving it any consideration.”80

Some soldiers, however, attributed religious tolerance in America to the general lack of religious fervor. Lieutenant Colonel von Dincklage thought it “surprising that they hardly ever talk about religion, in spite of the variety of religions here. Most of them seem to be indifferent to religion, and many of them do not have more religion than their black slaves.”81 Philipp Waldeck was dismayed to find no church or clergy in

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77 Pettengill, Letters from America, 167-68
78 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 28.
79 Kummel, Diaries of a Hessian Chaplain, 27-28
80 Döhla, Hessian Diary of the American Revolution, 23, 28, 80.
81 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 29. Also Atwood, The Hessians, 169; The French soldiers, rather than noticing a lack of piety, were surprised by the degree of religious enthusiasm in New England. While
Pensacola, Florida, while other soldiers openly criticized the preachers they did find.82 “The clergymen,” Lieutenant Colonel du Puy believed, “are the dregs of the nation and they are the most active rebels. For example, one of them assured his flock a short time ago that...he would take care of everything as long as the flock would bravely fight the Tories. He assured them that God is so interested in this war that the angels are dressed like riflemen.”83 Some pastors used books of martyrdom, Asteroth learned, “to influence their congregations, by explaining and illustrating every tale of murder, to rise up and fight for their freedom and complete independence. Indeed, pastors have even raised troops and led those so influenced.”84 Lieutenant Henkelmann told his brother, a clergyman, that “it has been said that preachers have been abused. Not at all. They took their rifle and cartridge case with them to the pulpit and instructed their listeners clearly how to fight, and then left the church to go straight into battle.”85

Because their religion did not allow them to fight, Quakers especially fascinated the German soldiers. Although Döhla was captivated by tales of underground passages full of Quaker gold and silver, most Hessians were simply surprised by their strange, silent services and pacifist beliefs.86 Waldeck, who almost accepted a German Lutheran parish’s offer to stay in America and become its preacher, was moved by the principles and discipline of the Quakers and Herrnhuters, for he felt that they were the “useful members of society. Through you, Pennsylvania is beginning to bloom, and you will be

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82 Pettengill, Letters from America, 227. Pensacola, originally settled by the Spanish, naturally had a different religious flavor than the northeastern British colonies.
83 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 29.
84 Kummel, Diaries of a Hessian Chaplain, 7-8.
85 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 29.
86 Quakers also often cared for Hessian casualties. Döhla, Hessian Diary of the American Revolution, 66; Kipping, Hessian View of America, 28; Pettengill, Letters from America, 167-80; Eelking, Memoirs of Major General Riedesel, 2:60-61
the ones, who will bring it to ultimate maturity, by industry, by truth in dealing with others, by thrift and tolerance, and with the protection of God, whom also you love. God will not permit these peaceful, affable citizens to be disturbed in their homes by this war...”

The Hessians had extensive interactions with white Americans, both on the battlefield and through civilian life, so they had ample time to generate well-formed opinions about the rebels and their way of life. With other local inhabitants, however, their contact was much more sporadic. While some mercenaries fought alongside local Indian tribes, others observed these “savages” only from afar. Regardless of their proximity, most Germans looked upon the Indians with a sense of wonder, and although they admired the natives’ fine backcountry skills, the Hessians were often disgusted by their unreliability in battle. Even when they expressed admiration for the Indians, however, most soldiers did so with a patronizing sense of superiority, and few viewed them as anything other than “savages.” Philipp Waldeck praised their skills in the forest, noting that “you are supposed to find the very best marksmen among them; what they have wounded rarely escapes them, because they can run incredibly fast.... And if they do lose their way, which seldom happens, and cannot see the stars on a dark night, then

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88 In 1770, the German intellectual community was split on its understanding of American Indians. Typical was the image of America as a land of savages, in which Indians proliferated and European settlements were quite small. Many thinkers cited America as an example of Rousseau’s glorified “state of nature.” In contrast, other Germans subscribed to Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon and the Dutchman Corneille de Pauw’s theory that the unhealthy climate in America caused man to degenerate. Rather than the ideal of the noble savage, they felt that the uncivilized Indians demonstrated human decadence. Dippel, *Germany and the American Revolution*, 3-6.
they feel the bark on the trees and by that find the direction of their native place. Nor does any river hold them up, for they are unusually clever swimmers.”

Many Hessians believed that the native was very strong physically, but weak and undisciplined mentally. An officer in Canada likened the Indians he observed to animals, because they possessed “a fine instinct, born with him and not acquired by use, experience or long study; and when...you learn furthermore, that he can follow a trail through bushes and briers in the dark, simply guided by his sense of smell, the same as our hunting- and bird-dogs, you are apt to be astonished the qualities that God seems to have endowed these people with, and which you were wont to believe could only be possessed by animals.” Instead of bird-dogs, a soldier in Vermont compared the Indians in his regiment to hogs. But after wondering if rumors about Ottawa cannibalism were true, he decided that they made imposing and effective soldiers. The Indians were “uncivilized, large-framed, warlike, and enterprising, but as fierce as Satan. They are accused of being cannibals. This, however, I do not believe, notwithstanding that they are capable of tearing their enemies to pieces with their teeth when infuriated.... Their carriage bespeaks their loyalty, and their savage decorations and ornaments become them quite well; indeed their whole appearance is a soldierly one.”

Major General Riedesel had a large number of Indians under his command in Canada and northern New York, so most of his experiences with the “savages” were in formal, ritualized settings. He observed meetings between the Iroquois and British in which the “good looking and well-built men” pledged their loyalty to their “grandfather,”

90 Stone, *Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers*, 62-65, 91-92; The Marquis de Montcalm and his aide-de-camp Louis Antoine de Bougainville both reported incidents of Indian cannibalism during the Seven Year’s War. For further reading, see William R. Nester, *The First Global War: Britain, France, and the Fate of North America, 1756-1775* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 42, 52-54.
the king of England, presented scalps to the English generals, and agreed to help fight the American rebels. In return, the British gave the Indians a few silver dollars or other presents and made some promises regarding trade and roads. After the ceremonies, “the evening and night were spent by [the natives] in feasting and dancing, which had already lasted several days.” Riedesel himself, although he was unmoved by their strange clothing and body paint, was disgusted by the Indians’ actions in battle, “for whenever the rebels shall oppose them with any force they will all run away, and fall back on the regulars behind them. These wild men love this kind of warfare, for so long as their natural coarse tastes are satisfied they care little for anything else.”

Philipp Waldeck was equally dismayed by the unfamiliar tactics he witnessed. A group of Choctaw Indians, after promising to stop fighting for the Spanish cause in Florida, promptly murdered and scalped three Spanish soldiers. “They brought these scalps here in triumph in order to ingratiate themselves again, but received no reward, and for their cruelty, which no one desired of them, were treated with contempt. It was rather startling to see these savages, howling and screaming, approaching with the still fresh scalps.” A few days later, Waldeck observed another group of Choctaws, who had attacked some settlers in Alabama “and plundered everything they saw. They brought a family of prisoners with them. It is a frightening experience to fall into the hands of these savage people…. The members had been stripped nearly naked and even the children were not left with even a shirt.” At times, the natives’ actions seemed almost comical. Waldeck noted in his diary on May 1, 1780: “Our Indians commit all sorts of excesses.

They get drunk and then are unmanageable. Today they even attacked our own outpost."\(^9\)\(^2\)

Having heard rumors before arriving in America, Waldeck, Riedesel, and other Germans decided that many of their preconceptions about the "savages" in America were true. They were unreliable, "very brave, but undisciplined," strangely attired, strong and quick, attractive, and frequently inebriated.\(^9\)\(^3\) Waldeck noticed the Indians' love of alcohol and explained to a scholar in Arolsen that "no vice is more frequent and deeper rooted among them than drink. Their appetite for strong drinks, especially rum, is quite irresistible, and in their intoxication they return to the savagery of their still wild nation and become capable of practicing any cruelties for which opportunity offers."\(^9\)\(^4\)

More than anything else, the Hessians were puzzled by the Indians' actions, because often the natives were friendly and seemingly cultured. A Hessian chaplain in Brooklyn decided that "the savages, who come in here frequently, are not like those described by Rousseau and Iselin; but they are all very accommodating, friendly, hardened to the severest labors, swift as deer in the forest, and not without some conception of God. When I point to the sky with my right hand, they fold their hands over their hearts and bow low to the ground."\(^9\)\(^5\) Waldeck reported that "their conduct toward one another was friendly, and the relationship with their wives and children, according to their ways, was tender." He even found their exuberance quite physically taxing: "If one enters among them, he does not have enough hands to greet them all, and they shake hands so vigorously that after shaking hands with thirty of them, it can be felt

\(^9\)\(^5\) Ibid., 154.
in the arms.”96 Captain Hinrichs also discovered that “they were not as uncultured as commonly claimed, because they had their belief in honor, religion, friendship and revenge.”97 Ultimately, although some Germans, such as Hinrichs and Waldeck, discovered that the Indians were more cultured than previously thought, most still believed that the natives were unreliable, weak-minded savages.

Although the soldiers were confused by the behavior of the Indians, the situation of America’s black slaves was much easier for the Hessian auxiliaries to understand. While they gazed in wonder at the strangeness of the “Negroes,” most Germans reacted with great sympathy to the slaves’ plight. No doubt this only increased the soldiers’ hatred of the Americans and their idea of “freedom.” A German soldier in Jamaica thought “the many Negroes and mulattoes, part of them naked, likewise offer a wonderful sight to the eye of the German who comes here for the first time.” Although the black population smelled badly and dressed “crazily,” he decided that “among the mulattoes, who are sprung from white fathers and black mothers, there are excellent figures, only the faces are not very charming by daylight.”98

Philipp Waldeck, stationed in Jamaica in late 1778, was heartbroken by the treatment of the slaves. Having spent most of his time in America in the Northeast, where the plantation system of slave labor had not taken hold, he was shocked by what he

97 Kipping, *Hessian View of America*, 27.
98 Pettengill, *Letters from America*, 217-23; Although German soldiers had certainly seen a few blacks in Europe, Germany did not possess any New World colonies and had not adopted slavery as system of labor. The troops were therefore not as accustomed to racial differences and the realities of slavery as their French counterparts were.
saw in the island’s slave market, where “men and women are presented completely
naked, so they can be thoroughly checked for any shortcomings.” Once they were
purchased, they were subjected to “the hardest work, and a man within whom all
humanity has died is their supervisor, who beats them unmercifully for the least
shortcoming in their work. In the dear, blessed America, they would be treated better,
and better cared for. Wherever I went in that wonderful land, the slaves were treated no
worse than the domestic servants by us, and they were not aware of their slavery.”
Misguided though he may have been about slave conditions in America, Waldeck’s
compassion was genuine. “Those poor creatures,” he cried after witnessing a slave ship
sail into the harbor, “are human beings like we are and we have no advantage over them
except we are white and they are black. Have we privileges over them, and where do
d they stand in the general laws of nature that are spoken of so lightly concerning the
inherent rights of all God’s creatures? Who gives man the right to mistreat man?
Certainly not God nor nature.”
Waldeck was not the only Hessian who struggled to understand the hearts of slave
owners. Lieutenant Colonel von Dincklage, after preventing some Charleston citizens
from beating a slave, wondered “what kind of a stubborn creature can man be.... Those
who only talk and write about freedom and who try to prove by every kind of argument
that all human beings are born free, are the same ones who treat their fellow-men most
terribly and do not grant a shadow of freedom to those who are in their power.” Men
such as Lieutenant Wiederholt, who made their living amidst the violence of the
battlefield, did not have hearts of stone. He believed the slaves were “human beings of

99 Waldeck, Eighteenth-Century America, 104-06.
the same kind as...we all are, in spite of the fact that fate did not make them masters but
slaves when they were born.... The barbaric treatment they get from some is a disgrace to
all mankind, and being a witness to it horrifies me. The Americans have no such feelings
despite claiming to be sensitive and hospitable.”

A keen observer, Wiederholt felt that
if “the blacks were educated, they would excel in many ways, for they are not only eager
to learn, but also have native genius.” Dincklage echoed these progressive sentiments,
explaining that it “is a sad sight when one views these people, who in their capacities and
the quality of their intelligence yield nothing to the whites, sold like cattle in the market
to the highest bidder.”

Quartermaster Carl Bauer, stationed in South Carolina in 1780, despised the
Americans for their inhuman practices. White planters refused to do any labor, and their
treatment of slaves was “barbaric and contrary to human principles. For simple
disobedience [the slaves] are pulled up with their hands tied together and flogged most
cruelly on the naked back.... If the master kills a slave, nobody makes a great stir about it. When a Negro strikes a white person or only raises his hand against him, he must
die.”

While the officers almost unanimously registered their condemnation of slavery,
at least one common soldier did not entertain such strong notions. A regular in
Springfield, Massachusetts, compared the slaves to farm animals, and observed that “the
negroes here, like the other cattle, are very prolific. The children are well fed, especially
while they are still calves. Their slavery, moreover, is very bearable.”

100 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 26.
101 Atwood, The Hessians, 166.
102 Kipping, Hessian View of America, 26.
103 Pettengill, Letters from America, 119.
Not only did most Hessian officers abhor the institution of slavery, many regiments willingly accepted blacks into their ranks. Mirroring the British, who temporarily absorbed thousands of runaway slaves into their combat and support units, the Hesse-Cassel and Waldeck forces employed at least 130 blacks during the war. Attracted by the wages, uniforms, food, and escape from slavery, most black men served as drummers, although a few became privates, musketeers, military policemen, teamsters, grenadiers, servants, laborers, scouts, lookouts, pipers, and fusiliers. Often, when a black drummer joined a unit, a Hessian drummer was promoted to private or musketeer, and blacks served only as long as they wanted; deserters were not punished. At least thirty-one black men traveled to Germany with their units after the war was over. Christianized and given German names, they aroused great interest among people who had never seen a black person before. Although many died from consumption, some of the “black Hessians” may have served during the Napoleonic Wars.104

Not only disdainful of American institutions such as slavery, the Germans also looked down upon the wasteful and lazy practices of the local citizens. Recognizing the untapped bounty of the land around him, Waldeck lamented:

They do not know how to treasure the blessings their land has above all others, which are over-populated and where with little effort one reduces the nourishment of another. That the rich live well throughout the world is well-known. But the land is to be venerated where the poor, by hard work alone, can earn a rich reward, where there is no shortage of opportunity nor choice of means of supporting oneself, where he seldom, almost never, can be pressured or downtrodden by the rich, but can enjoy all the freedom and

advantages of a gentleman, this is America. America has no shortages, only an overabundance.\textsuperscript{105} Lieutenant Johann Henrich Henckelmann found that the "amount of wood which is consumed here within 24 hours in such a fire-place would last us a week at home. The fat which here drips into the fire would in our country be made into good soup. – What do you think now of the inhabitants here?"\textsuperscript{106} Coming from a country in which the nobility owned most of the available land, Colonel Ludwig von Wurmb recommended that the non-Hessians under his command stay in America after the war was over, because of the "good opportunities here in times of peace."\textsuperscript{107} Captain Hinrichs noticed the tendency to grow soft in a land where "one can support himself... comfortably, easily, and agreeably by farming. For if he works three hours a day in the field, he has twenty-one hours left to sleep, yawn, breakfast, take a walk, gossip, and gape at the moon."\textsuperscript{108}

Unchecked prosperity made America very attractive to many Hessian soldiers, in spite of the "arrogance" and "laziness" of its citizens. Fueled by congressional propaganda and promises of free land, between six and nine thousand soldiers remained in the United States after the war was over. Most of these men deserted their regiments, although some were either prisoners of war or officially discharged. Never fully convinced of the virtue of Britain's stance, many Germans, hailing from underprivileged backgrounds, became sympathetic toward the American cause. Available land, friendly

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\textsuperscript{105} Waldeck, \textit{Eighteenth-Century America}, 60-61;  
\textsuperscript{106} Atwood, \textit{The Hessians}, 161.  
\textsuperscript{108} Pettengill, \textit{Letters from America}, 189-90.
citizens, relationships with local women, and the inherent nature of mercenary armies all conspired to convince the Hessians to defect.109

Before the auxiliary troops had even set foot on American soil, Congress had begun to work on a plan to convince them to desert. German-Americans spread pamphlets, written in German and packed with tobacco, among the troops. Handbills promised fifty acres of land to any soldier who defected and settled in the United States.110 These tactics infuriated Riedesel, who had “believed that the people of America were better acquainted with the principles of the laws of nations, of military honor and public trust and faith; but alas! we learned differently!... they induced by...treacherous methods, our men to join them.... they would persuade them by false promises to embrace their side and thus cause our army to melt away gradually, by making part of it slaves to a detestable nation.”111

Some soldiers, especially those who arrived later as reinforcements, signed up with the army in order to receive free passage to America. Hessian Lieutenant General Wilhelm, Freiherr von Knyphausen reported that “the recruits, consisting of foreigners, for the most part conduct themselves badly and desert at the first opportunity.... The intention of most of them has been to profit from the opportunity to get over here in some manner, and never to see Europe again....” Indeed, Lieutenant Montluisant, a Frenchman in the Jägercorps, signed on in 1778 with the plan to desert and make his fortune in America. Arrested and deported to Europe, he returned in 1781.112

If the German soldiers were smitten with life in America, the officers reached mixed conclusions about their stay in the colonies. Extreme changes in temperature and weather, pineapple trees and buffalo, fever and illness, beautiful houses with nice furniture, rattlesnakes rumored to kill with their glance, swarming herds of mosquitoes, sand so warm that it could boil eggs or roast meat, earthquakes, and inhabitants of every color combined to render America a complex and exotic land in the minds of many Hessians. Philip Waldeck for one, hoped eventually “to return to America. I am set in my opinion and do not need to repeat myself, but if there is another land in which I would wish to live, it would be America.” An officer in New York, on the other hand, considered the wild weather and decided that “this is a bad country, this America, where you always have to drink, either to get warm, or to get cold, or for protection against the evil mists, - or because you get no letters.”

In the end, the Hessians, although they thought little of the cause, were unable to forestall American independence. Major General Riedesel registered his prediction of the country’s future to General Haldimand, claiming to “not at all be surprised if America herself should be engaged in war within two years, and the northern colonies separate from the southern ones.” Although his prophecy was off by about eighty years, Riedesel was remarkably prescient. For amidst the exaggeration of their stereotypes and hastily-formed impressions, the Hessian soldiers often hit upon a strong element of truth.

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113 Waldeck, *Eighteenth-Century America*, 105-06.
CHAPTER 2
FRENCH SENTIMENTS

The French experience in America was markedly different from the German. France had been active in North America for over two hundred years before the American Revolution, and French troops had traversed American soil as recently as 1763 during the Seven Years War. Although the soldiers’ journey across the Atlantic was as difficult as the Hessians’, their sojourn in America was not nearly as long or as trying. They wintered in comfortable towns such as Newport and Williamsburg, they were never taken prisoner, they remained in camp for longer intervals, and they were involved in fewer military engagements. They were also allied with the Americans; success did wonders for their attitudes and impressions of the new republic. While the Germans were outsiders and gathered information in bits and pieces, the French were intimate with American leaders and were treated much more kindly by the local inhabitants.

Although France had been aiding the American cause since early in the war, a formal military alliance was reached on February 6, 1778 after intensive lobbying by Benjamin Franklin, the Marquis de Lafayette, and other members of the American delegation.1 Seeking revenge for France’s defeat at the hands of the British in the Seven Year’s War, King Louis XVI had committed one million livres in secret aid to the

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Americans in 1776, before the final members of the delegation had even arrived in France. The Comte de Vergennes, French minister of foreign affairs, and other members of the nobility were strongly in favor of assisting the Americans, not because of a love for republican government, but rather because they sought to weaken Britain’s economy and cripple its power in Europe.3 The move toward an official military alliance received its final push after the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777. The Continentals’ victory demonstrated that the Americans could actually win the war, and it encouraged the French to join the struggle in an effort to prevent British overtures toward a peace compromise with its colonies.

Professional and disciplined, the French troops arrived in America in July 1780 as emissaries of the ancien régime sent to support a people’s revolution.4 Split fairly evenly between soldiers and sailors, the force of 12,000 served under General Washington. Led by Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, the Comte de Rochambeau, the four French regiments – the Bourbonnais, Saintonge, Soissonnais, and Royal Deux-Ponts – were

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2 Charles III of Spain also pledged one million livres. In August 1776, Caron de Beaumarchais formed a fictitious trading company, Rodrigue Hortalez et Cie, funded by Louis XVI and Charles III, that furnished the Americans with money, guns, and munitions. Hoffman and Albert, Diplomacy and Revolution, 2-4.

3 Indeed, popular sentiment convinced Louis XVI to support the Americans, for the king, a shining example of absolutist government, was unenthusiastic about the colonists’ struggle for political independence and religious liberty. Thomas Balch, The French in America During the War of Independence of the United States, 1777-1783 (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1891-95), 65; Hoffman and Albert, Diplomacy and Revolution, 115-18; Elizabeth S. Kite, Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail: Commandant of Engineers in The Continental Army 1777-1783 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press; Philadelphia: Dolphin Press, 1933), 11.

4 Actually, the first force sent was a fleet of 12 ships and 4,000 troops under Charles Hector, the Comte d'Estaing. Although he arrived in July 1778, weather and the British conspired to keep d'Estaing from landing in America, and he departed for the West Indies in November. His failure irritated the Americans, who felt that the French were not making a concerted effort under the alliance. Samuel F. Scott, From Yorktown to Valmy: The Transformation of the French Army in an Age of Revolution (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 4.
involved in only one major battle during the war.\(^5\) That one campaign in Yorktown, Virginia, however, turned out to be the key to American victory.

Although France and Britain were bitter rivals, the French officers did not share the disdain that the Americans held for the English. Indeed, the late eighteenth century was a period of Anglomania in France, in which English manners, institutions, and philosophy were greatly admired. Louis Philippe, the Comte de Ségur, whose father became the minister of war in 1780, explained that “Montesquieu had first opened our eyes to the advantages of British institutions.... the brilliant but frivolous life led by our nobility at court, and in the capital was no longer sufficient to satisfy our self-love, when we reflected upon the dignity, the independence, the comparatively useful and important life of an English peer, or of a member of the House of Commons; as well as upon the liberty at once calm and lofty enjoyed by the entire body of the citizens of Great Britain.”\(^6\)

Enlightenment notions of liberty, philanthropy, and natural rights proliferated among educated men and women, and public opinion, desirous of greater equality and simplicity at home, was squarely behind the struggle for liberty in America.\(^7\) Nine out of every ten French officers were noblemen, and their idealism and upper-class background strongly influenced their opinions of America and its citizens.\(^8\) Rather than using the German appellation “rebels,” most French officers accepted that the Americans were a

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\(^5\) Although soldiers from the Royal Deux-Pont were technically German, their lifestyle and mannerisms more closely resembled the French than the Hessians. There were, however, significant differences, including their Protestant faith.


\(^8\) Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy*, 8.
people wholly distinct and separate from Great Britain, and they admired and supported the cause of liberty.⁹

Indeed, America, populated with provincial, strictly religious farmers, seems an unlikely object of French admiration. The ideal of liberty, however, fit perfectly with the passions that were stirring the hearts of French intellectuals. They contrasted reports of American equality, tolerance, and simplicity with the artificial social conditions in France and discovered that their abstract philosophies were being implemented across the Atlantic. As early as 1763, J. Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman living in America, reported that “here the individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and prosperity will one day cause great changes in the world. . . . The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. . . . This is an American.”¹⁰

The Continental Congress seemed a mirror of the Roman Senate, and Ségur called the American delegation to France – Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee – “sages, contemporaries with Plato, or republicans of the age of Cato and of Fabius.”¹¹ “The American insurrection, “ he noted, “was every where applauded, and became, as it were, a fashion. . . . I was very far from being the only one whose heart then beat at the sound of liberty just waking from its slumbers, and struggling to throw off the yoke of arbitrary power.”¹²

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⁹ Lee B. Kennett, French Forces in America, 1780-1783 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 1-57, 80-85, 147, 169; Perkins, France in the American Revolution, 10.
¹² Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 75-76.
The Marquis de Chastellux, French general and philosophe, declared that every thinking man hoped that "the outcome of the present war may be such that America will continue to grow in population and in perfection; for reason, legislation, and the happiness that results from them, can never cover too much of this globe where all is interrelated and all is linked as by a chain, now apparent, now hidden."\textsuperscript{13} Captivated by Rousseau's "state of nature," many French officers believed they would find it in America.\textsuperscript{14}

French volunteers slipped across the Atlantic before the formal treaty was announced. Liberty-loving officers such as the Marquis de Lafayette took with them young adventurers, some fleeing a disgraced reputation and others seeking quick riches and glory. Gaston Marie Léonard Maussion de la Bastie was a typical volunteer during the early years of the revolution. Well-connected, but not nobility, de Maussion was the black sheep of his family. In 1776, because of a scandalous incident, he signed up under Lafayette and set sail for America.\textsuperscript{15} Louis de Recicourt de Ganot, a French artillery officer, explained in 1777 that "all those who were troubled by poverty and bachelorhood have dashed across the ocean in hopes of putting an end to their complaints. Not one of them, however, has realized his dream."\textsuperscript{16}

An anonymous French officer, possibly the Chevalier du Buysson, landed in Charleston in September 1777, and planned to join Lafayette. Most of the volunteers he

\textsuperscript{15} Ekaterina Rzewuska Radziwill, \textit{They Knew the Washingtons; Letters from a French Soldier with Lafayette and from His Family in Virginia} (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1926), 12-18.
met were “officers deeply in debt, several discharged from their corps. The governors [of French colonies] clear them as well as they can of all worthless fellows who arrive from France, by giving them letters of recommendation to the Anglo-American generals. The earlier ones were very well received, but their conduct having shewn what they were, people have no longer any faith in letters of recommendation, and in America very little is thought of those who bring them.”

In Philadelphia, de Maussion reported, “we found that instead of the warm welcome we had expected, we were looked upon with suspicion by the Congress.... The reason for this was that so many low adventurers...had preceded us in Philadelphia and by the conduct given such a deplorable impression of Frenchmen in general that no one wanted to have anything to do with us. We were made to feel, and indeed were told, that the best thing we could do would be to go back home.” Similarly, du Buysson noted that “when we said we were French officers, led solely by the desire for glory, and to defend their liberty, we were pointed to in scorn by the populace, and treated as adventurers....” Expecting adulation, the volunteers were shocked by the anti-French sentiment they encountered in America.

Certainly, not every French volunteer was a debtor or adventurer. Men such as Henry Ferdinand, the Baron von Steuben, who was told that “this growing Republick offered a brilliant Career to the Sons of Ambition,” were important contributors to the war effort before the formal alliance. Von Steuben, who sought glory and wealth but told the Continental Congress that “the honor of serving a respectable Nation, engaged in the

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18 Radziwill, They Knew the Washingtons, 39-41.
19 Jones, America and French Culture, 245.
noble enterprize of defending its rights and liberty, is the only motive that brought me over to this continent," instilled sorely needed order and discipline in the American troops.20

Young officers, influenced by the success of Lafayette and captivated by the cause of liberty, competed for positions in Rochambeau's expedition, where the chance for glory and distinction was high and the climate was more favorable than in the West Indies, France's other theater of war at the time.21 Ségur, who was not sent to America until 1782, explained that "the desire of celebrity...is the prevailing motive [among most of the French officers]. If I appear to imitate them, that appearance is only illusory, for I pursue an object quite different from theirs.... Arbitrary power is irksome to me, while liberty, for which I am preparing to combat, inspires me with a warm enthusiasm. I should rejoice to see my country enjoy as much of it as is compatible with our monarchy, our situation, and our manners."22 Although men such as von Steuben and Ségur maintained that a love of liberty was their sole motivation for fighting, the possibility of glory and distinction was certainly a secondary aim.

Higher-ranking officers, however, were wary about the alliance, for the Americans, accustomed to treating the French as their enemy, might receive them hostilely. Abbé Claude Robin, the chaplain in the Soissonnais regiment, explained that the Americans looked upon the French "as a people bowed beneath the yoke of despotism given up to superstition, slavery, and prejudice, mere idolators in their public worship,

21 Kennett, French Forces in America, 5, 22; Perkins, France in the American Revolution, xii; Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:14.
22 Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 274-75.
and, in short, a kind of light, nimble machine, deformed to the last degree, incapable of anything solid or consistent...."23

The military made contingency plans, in case the Americans refused to receive them or suddenly made peace with the British and turned on the French. Most importantly, they made certain to position their forces as subordinates, subject to General Washington’s command. Jean-Louis Favier, an advisor in the foreign ministry, opposed this act of diplomacy, for “if this people is proud by virtue of their ignorance and wildness, there was no need to give them a higher opinion of their own importance.” The Marquis de Jaucourt, chief of staff of the invasion force, admitted that whoever led the French soldiers “should expect to make great sacrifices in order to obtain little, and to conceal his grievances, his fears, and accept silently the incapacity of the people with whom he will have to combine operations.”24 Given to hauteur, some officers suffered from a wounded pride when they were forced to subordinate themselves to the simple Americans.

Even after the French fleet set sail, many soldiers were confused about the goals of the expedition. “Most of the naval officers,” Comte Mathieu Dumas explained, “thought that we were going to St. Domingo, and that the pretext of armaments for North America, had served to conceal the object of an expedition...intended to attack Jamaica.... I for my part was much alarmed at it, for I...had heartily espoused the cause of the independence of the Americans, and I should have felt extreme regret at losing the honour of combating for their liberty.”25

23 Kennett, French Forces in America, 37.
24 Ibid., 11-30.
Although they had been forewarned about American hostility, the French were still surprised by the cool welcome they received upon landing in Newport, Rhode Island. Comte Guillaume de Deux-Ponts, elated to find himself on firm soil, “did not meet with the reception on landing, which we expected and which we ought to have had. A coldness and a reserve appear to me to be characteristic of the American nation. They appear to have little of that enthusiasm which one supposes would belong to a people fighting for its liberties, and to be little suited to inspire it in others.”

Already upset by the lack of shops, markets, and gardens in Newport, Jean-François-Louis, the Comte de Clermont-Crèvecœur, believed that “the local people, little disposed in our favor, would have preferred at that moment, I think, to see their enemies arrive rather than their allies. We inspired the greatest terror in them....” Crèvecœur blamed the English for promoting the sentiment that “we were the meanest and most abominable people on earth. They had carried their insolence to the point of saying that we were dwarfs, pale, ugly specimens who lived exclusively on frogs and snails – and a hundred other such stupidities.”

More optimistic Frenchmen, however, interpreted the American reception differently. Baron Ludwig von Closen reported that as the soldiers disembarked in Newport, “there was continuous joyful cheering!!! both by those who were arriving and by the inhabitants, who had been expecting us for a long time.” Similarly, Dumas was elated to have finally “reached the country which we so ardently desired to see, where the

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bare appearance of the French flag would revive the hopes of the defenders of liberty....
Scarcely was the arrival of the French squadron known when the authorities and principal
inhabitants of the neighbouring country hastened to welcome us."\textsuperscript{29} Georg Daniel Flohr,
a twenty-three-year-old common soldier in the Royal Deux-Ponts, told his family that the
white inhabitants of Newport, fearing a British attack, "had all gone into hiding," and the
troops "thought that the whole city was inhabited by blacks." Once the locals emerged,
however, Flohr found them hospitable. He "got along very well with them," and many
soldiers tried to learn English in order to "caress" the "beautiful American maidens."\textsuperscript{30}

Although many Americans looked with suspicion upon the French,
Rochambeau's emphasis on military discipline soon changed their perceptions, and the
troops quickly developed a reputation for good conduct. Dumas noted that through
faithful subordination to Washington and the constant cultivation of good will among the
locals, Rochambeau "caused the French name to be respected, even when submitting to
the delays, to all the details of the democratic administration, and to the laws most
offensive to us...."\textsuperscript{31} Lafayette, in a letter to Washington in 1780, reported that "the
French discipline [in Newport] is such that chiken and pigs walk betwen the tents without
being disturb'd, and there is in the camp a corn field from which not one leaf has been
touch'd – the torys don't know what to say to it."\textsuperscript{32} Even the Indians were impressed by
the French troops; Rochambeau remembered that "different deputations of savages who
came to the camp...could not contain their astonishment when they beheld apple trees

\textsuperscript{29} Dumas, \textit{Memoirs of His Own Time}, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{31} Dumas, \textit{Memoirs of His Own Time}, 92-94.
\textsuperscript{32} Louis Reichenthal Gottschalk, \textit{Letters of Lafayette to Washington} (New York: Helen Fahnestock, 1944), 103-104.
loaded with fruit hanging over the tents which our soldiers had occupied for three months past.”

Actively attempting to shape public opinion, French officers frequently called on the leading men of the colonies, while others visited Congress and paid their respects to the representatives with good hard French currency. The best way to keep the peace, however, was to sequester most of the French forces. Although certain leaders interacted with the locals as they made their way across the colonies, Crévecoeur revealed that one “never saw a French officer with an American [officer]. Although we were on good enough terms, we did not live together. This was, I believe, most fortunate for us. Their character being so different from ours, we should inevitably have quarreled.”

When the French did come into contact with American troops, their impressions were mixed. Upon first reviewing the Continentals, most French officers were discouraged by their small numbers and ragged uniforms. Lafayette constantly pitied his soldiers’ lack of proper clothing and wages, and he was ultimately forced to outfit his men using his own money. De Maussion spent the winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. He reported to his mother that not only were the American troops ill-equipped and cold, but “the army is undisciplined and the men are not disposed to listen or to obey. No sooner is a division well-drilled than it disbands because it has been enlisted for only a short time.... it is a fact that the meanest and most mercenary spirit pervades the whole army. The soldiers think only of plundering whenever they find the

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34 Kennett, French Forces in America, 57, 85.
35 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army, 1:64.
opportunity...." Moré de Pontgibaud, who volunteered in the American army after escaping from prison in France, noted that upon reaching Valley Forge, “instead of the magnificent display I expected, I found militia men scattered or in groups, badly clad, most of them without shoes, a great number poorly armed, but all of them tolerably well fed.... some soldiers wore a hat and in addition a sort of night-cap; some were using as cloaks and overcoats woolen blankets similar to those worn by the patients in our French hospitals. I realized a little later that those were officers and generals....”

Rochambeau, who described the American war effort in 1780 as “a cord stretched to the limit,” admired the soldiers’ spirit but lamented the difficulty of recruitment and the condition of those who arrived “without tents, without munitions, poorly armed, and without provisions.” The Comte de Deux-Ponts was told that the army at Phillipsburg, New York, in July 1781 “had 10,000 men. It has however only 2,500 or 3,000 men, but this is not a very big lie for the Americans.”

The lack of uniforms, coupled with poor supplies and worthless paper wages, led Deux-Ponts to declare that “a European army would not put up for a month with the frightful misery the American one has been plunged in for more than a year.” Von Closen, after hearing of a mutiny in the Pennsylvania regiment, explained that “the lack of any pay, the bad food and dearth of clothing, together with the fact that Congress does not permit them to leave military service, even when their terms expired one or two years ago, are the reasons for their being driven to this extremity. In Europe, they would do the

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37 Radziwill, They Knew the Washingtons, 69-70.
39 Kennett, French Forces in America, 52, 61.
40 Deux-Ponts, My Campaigns in America, 117.
41 Kennett, French Forces in America, 65-66.
same for far less." As late as 1781, Von Steuben dubbed his men "more ragamuffins than soldiers." For their part, the Americans were sensitive about their uncouth appearance, and on at least once occasion French officers reprimanded their soldiers for poking fun at the Continentals' lack of finery.

Early in the war, the behavior of the colonial soldiers irritated the French as much as the lack of uniforms and provisions. Lafayette, after the Comte d'Estaing's fleet was unable to assist the troops in Newport, railed against American ingratitude: "Many leaders themselves finding they were disappointed abandon'd theyr minds to illiberality and ungratefulness. Frenchmen of the highest character have been expos'd to the most disagreeable circumstances, and me, yes, myself the friend of America, the friend of General Washington, I am more upon a warlike footing in the American lines, than when I come near the British lines at Newport." Even the French government grew dissatisfied with the Continentals' performance; Lafayette explained to Washington in 1780 that "the French Court have often complain'd to me of the inactivity of that American Army who before the Alliance had distinguish'd themselves by theyr spirit of enterprise. They often have told me, your friends leave us now to fight theyr battles and do no more risk theyr selves."

Accustomed to serving in a professional, standing army, French officers were constantly frustrated by the unreliability of the American militia. To observers in France,

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42 Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 54.
44 Kennett, French Forces in America, 117-19.
45 Gottschalk, Letters of Lafayette to Washington, 58-59, 118; Beginning in 1778, Vergennes, the French minister of foreign affairs, was frequently disappointed by the American army's performance. Saratoga may have raised his expectations to unreasonable levels, but he also had little confidence in the ability of Congress to provide adequate leadership and support for its troops. A conservative statesman, he was suspicious about the viability of republican government. Hoffman and Albert, Diplomacy and Revolution, 137-38.
the volunteer soldier, inspired by patriotism and hardened by the frontier, was clearly superior to the mercenary. To Frenchmen in America, however, patriotism seemed insignificant compared to leadership, discipline, experience, provisions, and dependability—qualities that were sorely lacking in the local militias. De Ganot explained that patriotism was too inconsistent a virtue on which to build an army. "In a land of liberty and equality it was impossible to use the methods of European despotism and force free men to fight against their will for any cause, even one which they believed in." After recruitment laws were established, it became "possible to raise a fair-sized army, but it was a poorly trained one and of an impermanent nature. The general never could know exactly how many enlistments were expiring or were about to expire...." Dumas agreed that a war could not be won by relying on volunteer troops: "When want, ambition, or habit do not assist in keeping the men under their standards, it is much to be feared that their enthusiasm will cease the moment that each individual reflects, that he sacrifices to the country more than it can give him in return." Brigadier-General Louis Le Bègue de Presle Duportail, the first chief engineer of the American army, explained the "Axiom among Military men, that Troops which are not what are called Regular Troops cannot make head agains: regular troops in level ground or in any Situation that does not offer them very considerable advantages. The American Army therefore cannot stand against the British who are composed with British or German troops all Regular."

Resigned to working with local militias and the Continental Regulars, French officers found their patience tried on more than one occasion. The amount of time it took

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47 Echeverria and Murphy, "The American Revolutionary Army," 153.
48 Dumas, _Memoirs of His Own Time_, 88-89.
49 Kite, _Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail_, 61-63.
to muster American volunteers was a constant source of frustration. Lafayette noted that they assembled with “a slowness which makes them always arrive too late.” The Comte d’Estaing reported that he was supposed to be aided in Rhode Island by what was “called an army, [but] all the soldiers were still at home.” The militia “assemble only when the danger is imminent,” Count Axel Fersen lamented, “and flee when it becomes great.”

Once the militia was mustered, keeping it together proved no easy task. During the Virginia campaign in May 1781, Lafayette complained that “there is more militia going off than here is militia coming in. What we have, is, however, called the Army, and that is expected from us which an Army could perform.” In fact, Lafayette thought so little of the militiamen, whom he called “only armed peasants who have sometimes fought,” that he never counted them among his casualties.

In part prejudiced against what they deemed to be inferior soldiers, the French were reluctant to use the militia in moments of crisis. “What dependence can one place on such troops...?” asked Fersen. Lafayette told d’Estaing that the Rhode Island militia would “be useful only to show, to make noise, and frighten” while “the French did the fighting.” He echoed these remarks to Washington: “For the defensive, [the militiamen] are useless to us, nay they were hurtfull....” The Duc de Lauzun, who employed citizen soldiers in an attack on Gloucester in 1781, reported that “at the first shot, the half of them threw down their hatchets and their guns in order to run faster.”

Indeed, Duportail explained to Washington as early as 1777 that “it is not the number of troops which is of importance in this case, but it is the quality, or rather, their nature and manner of fighting. The Troops wanted are such as are capable of attacking with the greatest vivacity, the

greatest firmness—Troops that are not astonished at suffering a considerable loss at the
first onset...."\textsuperscript{51}

To be sure, some Frenchmen praised the militia. Rochambeau admitted that the
Bostonians, while lacking in provisions, had "a lot of courage."\textsuperscript{52} Von Closen, residing
in Newport in late 1780, was astonished that the local citizens "fight with so much
bravery, can support a war, and have such trained and disciplined troops. Who would
believe that an American, who scarcely dares to go out of his house on a rainy day, the
moment he has a musket on his shoulder, braves every danger and the most difficult
weather? You cannot find a man of 30 who has not borne arms."\textsuperscript{53}

De Maussion hit upon the principal sources of French bewilderment during their
interactions with the American troops: "The two great troubles," he told his mother, "are
the short periods of enlistment and the fact that officers are generally of the lowest
classes and lead their men into mischief instead of setting them a good example."\textsuperscript{54} Like
the Hessians, the French were surprised by the lack of a professional officer class in
America, and many had trouble convincing the locals that European soldiers did not ply
some other trade when they were not actively engaged in battle. The Abbé Claude Robin
noted that "these people, still in the Happy century where distinctions of birth and of rank
are unknown, see no difference between the soldier and the officer, and they often ask the
latter what was his trade in his country, not realizing that that of warrior could be a fixed
and permanent one."\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} Kite, \textit{Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail}, 42.
\textsuperscript{52} Murphy, "The French Professional Soldier's Opinion," 196.
\textsuperscript{53} Von Closen, \textit{Revolutionary Journal}, 49.
\textsuperscript{54} Radziwill, \textit{They Knew the Washingtons}, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{55} Murphy, "The French Professional Soldier's Opinion," 194.
Ségur likewise observed that in America, “military ranks and offices prevent no one from following some profession. All there are either merchants, agriculturist or artisans.... far from resembling men of the inferior classes in Europe, these fully deserve the regard that is shewn to them.... At first, I was rather surprised, on entering an inn, to find that it belonged to a captain, a major, or a colonel.... I was still more astonished, when upon replying to some questions put to me respecting my family, and informing them that my father was a general and a minister, my interrogators inquired what was his profession or trade?”

Baron Cromot du Bourg, an aide-de-camp of Rochambeau, was also astonished to find that his “innkeeper was a captain. The different grades here are still granted to all callings; or rather, the military profession not being a calling, there are some shoemakers who are colonels, and the Americans often ask the French officers what is their business in France.”

De Ganot had mixed feelings about American military officers. Because leaders were chosen based on merit, “it is not surprising to see officers who come from what appears to French eyes to be the lower social classes — merchants, artisans, and farmers — but who are so well-deserving and worthy that their fellow citizens have thought they were only doing them justice in raising them to a rank above that of the average man.” This egalitarian system, however, seemed to de Ganot to encourage insubordination. “The fact that the soldiers do not show a sense of discipline and respect for their officers when they are not on guard duty or in ranks,” he elaborated, “can be explained by the national character and by the spirit of liberty, independence, and equality which these people possess.... This same lack of discipline and subordination is to be seen in the

56 Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 334-35.
57 Balch, The French in America, 141.
officer corps, from the most junior lieutenant right up to the generals, for all are the same sort of men in civilian life.” Even more surprising to de Ganot was the observation that “when an officer resigns from a regiment or is discharged because of some minor offense, he may join another regiment, so long as there is no doubt as to his honor, honesty, or loyalty…. [These laws] may be in violent contradiction with the military regulations of all other nations in the world, but they promote the welfare of the country, honor humanity, and are to the eternal glory of the men who have adopted them….”

If de Ganot found American egalitarianism refreshing and just, Duportail, the French engineer, saw it as another source of frustration. Requesting a promotion to brigadier-general, he explained to Congress that he had “seen the colonels of the army and even the militia colonels refusing to follow my directions about the works. they have been accustomed to say that they are colonels as much as I and had no orders to receive from me…. We suffer very much…and indeed very little regard is paid us in the army…. if we pass before the line, the soldiers who do not love the french, and even some ill-bred officers give us bad language….”

The more the French became acquainted with the American army, however, the more praiseworthy their sentiments became. Many officers realized that although the troops were dressed poorly, they were willing and able fighters. On July 4, 1781, von Closen visited White Plains, New York, where he “had a chance to see the American army, man for man. It was really painful to see these brave men, almost naked, with only some trousers and little linen jackets, most of them without stockings, but, would you believe it? very cheerful and healthy in appearance. A quarter of them were negroes,

58 Echeverria and Murphy, “The American Revolutionary Army,” 155-58.
59 Kite, Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail, 33.
merry, confident, sturdy.” Two weeks later, after a few skirmishes with the British, von Closen exclaimed: “I admire the American troops tremendously! It is incredible that soldiers composed of men of every age, even of children of fifteen, of whites and blacks, almost naked, unpaid, and rather poorly fed, can march so well and withstand fire so steadfastly.”

Crèvecoeur, visiting the American army in Philipsburg, “was struck, not by its smart appearance, but by its destitution: the men were without uniforms and covered with rags; most of them were barefoot.... There were many negroes, mulattos, etc.... These are the elite of the country and are actually very good troops, well schooled in their profession. We had nothing but praise for them later....” Pierre-Etienne Duponceau remembered that at Valley Forge, the soldiers’ “condition was truly pitiful; and their courage and perseverance is beyond all praise.” De Maussion, writing to his mother after the defeat at Brandywine in September 1777, explained that “this is an extraordinary people, so full of fire and energy, and yet saying so little and so devoid of all vanity. We were beaten, but we covered ourselves with glory, and such defeats are better than many victories....”

Most officers ultimately agreed with Louis-Alexandre Berthier, a captain in the Soissonnais Regiment, that “our good Americans know how to fight, even though most of them are without shoes and poorly fed.” Claude Blanchard, chief commissary of the French forces, observed that “the soldiers march fairly well together but they perform the

60 On January 16, 1776, Congress rescinded its prior restriction on the employment of black soldiers. Constantly in need of reliable fighters, the American army enlisted about 5,000 blacks during the Revolution. Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 89, 102.
61 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army, 1:33-34.
62 Chinard, George Washington as the French Knew Him, 15.
63 Radziwill, They Knew the Washingtons, 54-55.
64 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army, 1:240.
manual of arms badly." Crevecoeur had some reservations, but felt "in general the American troops are quite good. They stand fast under fire and give a good account of themselves.... They cannot, nor could they ever be, equal to our militia in France. 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, their fertile soul supplying their every need. How could these people be soldiers...."

As the war dragged on, French opinions increasingly changed for the better, and qualified statements of praise gave way to full-fledged admiration. Rochambeau remarked that, regarding preparations for the siege of Yorktown in October 1781, "I must render the Americans the justice to say, that they conducted themselves with that zeal, courage, and emulation, with which they were never backward, in the important part of the attack entrusted to them, and the more so as they were totally ignorant of the operations of a siege." Baron von Closen continued to be amazed by the performance of the black soldiers in the American army: "Three-quarters of the Rhode Island regiment," he reported, "consists of negroes, and that regiment is the most neatly dressed, the best under arms, and the most precise in its maneuvers." Séguir, visiting the Americans at West Point, "had expected to find...soldiers ill equipped, officers without instruction, republicans destitute of that urbanity so common in our old civilized countries.... It will, therefore, be easily imagined how much I was surprised at finding an army well disciplined, in which every thing offered the aspect of order, reason,

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65 Kennett, French Forces in America, 117-18.
66 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:78-79
67 Rochambeau, Memoirs, 69.
68 Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 92.
information, and experience. The manners and language of the generals, their aids de
camp, and the other officers were noble and appropriate."\(^{69}\)

By 1782, the American army had secured some financing and markedly improved
its appearance. "They were far different troops," exclaimed Crèvecœur, "from those of
the previous year.... We were struck with the transformation of this army into one that
was in no way inferior to ours in appearance." Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger,
sublieutenant in the Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment, witnessing the Americans for the first
time, "passed along the camp with pleasure, astonishment, and admiration...so strong
was the contrast with the incorrect notions I had formed that I had to keep reminding
myself that I beheld in this army the same which formerly had no other uniform than a
icap, on which was written Liberty."\(^{70}\) Von Closen also confessed that he "was struck by
the sight of these troops, armed, in new uniforms, and with excellent military bearing.... I
enjoyed seeing them very much, and the change for the better since last year in bearing,
neatness, carriage of arms, attention, silence, and style of marking was striking."\(^{71}\)

French officers were career military men, and their praise of the Continentals
revealed the achievements of the American army in the face of hardship. De Verger
found the Continentals "very war-wise and quite well disciplined. They are thoroughly
inured to hardship, which they endure with little complaint so long as their officers set
them an example.... We have seen parties of militia in this country perform feats that
veteran units would have gloried in accomplishing. They only do so, however, when the
persuasive eloquence of their commander has aroused in them an enthusiastic ardor of

\(^{69}\) Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 348-50.

\(^{70}\) Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:78, 166-67; Liberty caps, first adopted by the Sons
of Liberty, later became an important symbol of the French Revolution.

\(^{71}\) Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 239-40.
which immediate advantage must be taken." Most of the French commanders gave
credit for the Continentals’ success to the officers, whom they found well mannered and
disciplined, despite their lower-class background. The Marquis de Chastellux thought it
“impossible to imagine a more frank and noble politeness, a more courteous behavior,
than I have experienced from most all of the American officers with whom I had any
dealings.” Indeed, “one is tempted to apply to the Americans what Pyrrhus said of the
Romans: Truly these people have nothing barbarous in their discipline!”

Not every Frenchman, however, found the Americans so disciplined. Many were
disgusted by the pillaging, atrocities, and reprisals that occurred on both the British and
American sides. One officer, believing that the Americans set a poor example for his
men, “had no idea war was waged this way. The English have unfortunately adopted it
and the Americans make reprisals; but we hope by the force of our discipline to prevent it
from happening to us.”

Although Chastellux admired the “nobility and magnanimity” of the Continentals
during the British surrender at Saratoga, others decried the Americans’ performance at
Yorktown. The Chevalier de Villebresme observed that the Americans did not adopt
the manners of chivalry that were owed a defeated enemy, and a number of officers took
issue with the lack of generosity or forgiveness shown toward the British and Hessian
prisoners. The Chevalier de la Luzerne, the French emissary in Philadelphia, blamed the

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72 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army, 1:152.
73 Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:114, 222.
74 This officer was probably the Comte de Charlus. Kennett, French Forces in America, 120, 166;
Accusations against the British troops included plundering, stealing, destroying property, ill-treating
prisoners, counterfeiting money, physically abusing civilians, encouraging Indian atrocities, and burning
villages. Many of these accusations were squarely grounded in fact, and the Americans often responded in
kind. Balch, The French in America, 207. Also see Stephen Conway, “The Great Mischief Complain’d
do: Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War.” William and Mary
Quarterly, 3rd Ser. 47, No. 3. (July 1990), 370-90.
75 Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:219-20.
disagreement on "the differences of manners, the simplicity, and sometimes the maladresses of the Americans," while others reported that the American officers quickly became jealous when the French seemed to favor their British counterparts. "When the Americans expressed their displeasure on this subject," explained Crèvecœur, "we replied that good upbringing and courtesy bind men together and that, since we had reason to believe that the Americans did not like us, they should not be surprised at our preference for the English."\(^7\) Noblemen at heart, many Frenchmen preferred to keep the egalitarian Americans at a distance.

One man within whom nobility and egalitarianism combined perfectly was the pillar of American liberty, General George Washington. Even more than the Hessians, the French admired his judgment, fortitude, and, owing to their own pedigreed backgrounds, his dignified comportment. Upon meeting the general in Newport, Louis-Alexandre Berthier noticed that "the nobility of his bearing and his countenance, which bore the stamp of all his virtues, inspired everyone with the devotion and respect due his character, increasing, if possible, the high opinion we already held of his exceptional merit." Claude Blanchard simply marked "down as a happy day this one in which I have been able to see a man truly great."\(^7\)

Crèvecœur thought that "his justice, his benevolence, and his courage in the misfortunes he experienced at the head of the army made him even more beloved and respected by his men.... He has won and is still winning the admiration of all Europe by his unselfish efforts to gain freedom for his country." "He is so much adored," gushed De Verger, "that even the foreigners who see this extraordinary man cannot resist

\(^7\) Kennett, *French Forces in America*, 150-56; Rice, *American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army*, 1:151.

\(^7\) Kennett, *French Forces in America*, 98.
according him their admiration and respect." Chastellux was positively smitten with
the general, for he dubbed him the "soul and support of one of the greatest revolutions
that have ever happened or can happen again." The "strongest characteristic of this
respectable man is the perfect harmony which reigns between the physical and moral
qualities which compose his personality.... Brave without temerity, laborious without
ambition, generous without prodigality, noble without pride, virtuous without severity....
It will be said of him, At the end of a long civil war, he had nothing with which he could
reproach himself." Von Closen declared that Washington "bears with him the regrets, affection,
respect, and veneration of our entire army.... He cannot be praised sufficiently." Dumas found that "his dignified address, his simplicity of manners, and mild gravity,
surpassed our expectation, and won every heart." De Maussion dubbed him "a real
giant among pygmies, and there's not a man in this country who is worthy to unfasten the
latchet of his shoe!" The Marquis de Lafayette so reverenced the general that he named his
son, born during the war, George Washington Lafayette. "Everything announced in
him the hero of a republic," exclaimed Séguir. Moré de Pontgibaud, a volunteer, felt
that "the General was one of these master pieces of nature who inspire respect and
confidence at first sight and are gifted with all the external attributes which make them
born leaders." Hans-Axel, the Comte de Fersen, called the general "the most illustrious,
not to say unique, [man] in our century." Abbé Robin, chaplain to Rochambeau's army,

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78 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:25, 166-67.
79 Bonsal, When the French Were Here, 74; Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:113-14.
80 Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 64.
81 Dumas, Memoirs of His Own Time, 33-34, 41.
82 Radziwill, They Knew the Washingtons, 53.
84 Séguir, Memoirs and Recollections, 348.
praised Washington as "the man who is the soul and support of one of the greatest revolutions that has ever happened!... Through all the land he appears like a benevolent god."\(^{85}\)

If French opinions of the Continentals were ultimately mixed, they were even more so concerning American citizens. Dumas, as he sailed from America at the end of the war, expressed this point clearly: "The opinions of those who have seen the United States are as opposite to each other as the winds which dispute the command of the waves. Some, forgetting the time of the foundation of these colonies and their rapid improvement, look upon the Americans as if they were an ancient nation, and seek among them the advantages which are to be found only in an overflowing population. Others...persuade themselves that the Americans are a new people. They complain that they do not find among them that purity of morals which has been so much boasted of, and do not pardon the vices, the moral evil, which would have been scarcely remarked in Europe...."\(^{86}\) Expectations, prior experiences, and personal prejudices all played a part in shaping French impressions of America, and each officer had his own unique encounters with the local population. Despite these different experiences, however, there were some similarities among the Frenchmen’s opinions.

For better or worse, most officers quickly understood that the American people were fundamentally different from the French. Early experiences in Newport were pleasant for everyone involved, for once the Americans warmed to the French, they


\(^{86}\) Dumas, *Memoirs of His Own Time*, 87-88.
received them "as brothers rather than foreigners." The officers learned English from their hosts, were welcomed into local families, and most later recalled the sojourn in Newport as their happiest time in America.

As they spread out across the colonies, many Frenchmen continued to have favorable impressions of the generous and warm citizens with whom they came into contact. Because they rarely saw combat, the officers had ample opportunity to seek out high society up and down the northeastern and mid-Atlantic colonies. Baron du Bourg noted that the inhabitants of Boston "seem to be worthy and very affable people. I have been very well received in the few visits that I have been able to make." Von Closen also felt that, because of the many balls and fêtes that were thrown during his stay in the city, "the residents of Boston are, perhaps, the French army's most cordial friends...." Wined and dined wherever he went, von Closen noted during his stay in Virginia in 1781, that "one could not be more hospitable than are the inhabitants of Williamsburg to all the army officers; they receive them very cordially in their homes and do all in their power to provide entertainment for them...." A year later, in Providence, Rhode Island, he needed "only remark that the army is being very hospitably received here. The residents form a kind, goodnatured, and gay society, and all who want to cultivate their acquaintances or to make new ones, can only praise the way in which they are treated everywhere."

French officers, as members of the nobility, displayed a slight paradox in their opinions of American citizens. Although they valued high society and all its trappings, they professed an even greater esteem for simplicity, one of the noblest of virtues. Many

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87 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:21-22.
88 Ibid., 21-22, 245; Kennett, French Forces in America, 48, 55.
89 Balch, The French in America, 141.
90 Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 166, 269, 273.
French thinkers, disenchanted with the pomp and pageantry of life at Versailles, trumpeted the unaffected, simple lifestyle— one that they expected to find in America. François, Marquis de Barbe-Marbois, secretary of the French legation under the Chevlier de la Luzerne, remarked that his host in Boston in 1779 “received us with a hospitable simplicity, without display and without affection, and as if he were thoroughly glad to have us staying with him.” Ségur, camped outside Providence, was also “delighted with the simplicity and frank cordiality of my hosts, and with the purity of their morals. Their politeness was... entirely free from ceremoniousness; they were at the same time well informed, and devoid of all affectation; every thing in them was natural, and their pleasures appeared to consist in: the discharge of their duties.... In short, it really must be admitted, that truth and happiness... are everywhere to be met with in America.”

Similarly, as he traveled north from Philadelphia in 1782, Ségur “observed the same simplicity of manners, the same politeness and hospitality.... every individual displayed the modest and tranquil pride of an independent man, who feels that he has nothing above him but the laws, and who is a stranger alike to the vanity, to the prejudices and to the servility of European society.”

Crèvecoeur thought the American city dwellers as corrupt and materialistic as those in Europe, but in the country folk he found unspoiled and generous souls. In the backcountry, he discovered “the candor, the innocence, the hospitality that characterize the heart of a virtuous man. Simplicity still reigns there. Nature alone guides these good Americans.... A Frenchman can hardly be expected to like their customs because they are too simple, but a reasonable man cannot help admiring them and wishing he could

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91 Chase, Our Revolutionary Forefathers, 65-67.
92 Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 333-34, 363.
live such a life as they enjoy.”93 Count Axel Fersen, a French aide, also walked the line between praising and patronizing common Americans, who “content themselves with mere necessaries.... Their clothes are simple but good, and their morals have not yet been spoiled by the luxury of Europeans. It is a country which surely will be very happy if it can enjoy a long peace, and if the two political parties which now divide it, do not make it suffer the fate of Poland and so many other republics.”94 Chastellux noted that the “pure and respectable” manners of the Americans created a society in which “vice is so foreign and so rare.”95

While their experiences reinforced previously-held notions regarding American simplicity, most Frenchmen were genuinely surprised by the degree of equality they found among the local citizens. After spending time in Philadelphia, Crèvecoeur realized that “there is neither rank nor distinction among the citizens.... a locksmith, a cobbler, or a merchant may become a member of Congress. They all believe themselves equal....”96 Ségur, who remarked on the peaceful intermingling of different social classes at various balls in Providence, also noted that in America, “no useful profession is ever ridiculed or despised, and though unequal in point of situation, all men preserve equal right. Indolence alone would be a subject of reproach.”97 Georg Daniel Flohr, the soldier in the Royal Deux-Ponts, observed that not only were “all people...rich and well” in Rhode Island, but Americans also did not recognize class differences. “They talk to everyone, whether he be rich or poor,” he exclaimed.98

96 Rice, *American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army*, 1:48-49.
Barbé-Marbois, surprised by the lack of ceremony and formality among the leaders of Boston, explained that “we often meet senators, respected magistrates, coming back from the market carrying greenstuffs, or fish.... The Bostonian...no more blushes to carry food than does a European to carry a book or a print which he has just bought. His habits are too simple for him to make a mystery of so natural a thing.... these same men...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... would have offered the same resistance to despotism.” Traveling through Massachusetts, one of Barbé-Marbois’ companions asked a farmer “who possessed ‘the low and high justice,’ [and] how much rent he paid to the lord of the village.... At all these questions, [the farmer] started to laugh. He could not form a conception of so many obstacles placed in the way of the free exercise of the right of property and the liberty of individuals. He told us that justice was...perfectly fair and equal for everyone, and we could not make him understand at all what sort of beings lords of the village were.” Indeed, American society was so egalitarian that it sometimes offended Barbé-Marbois. “People treat us very familiarly,” he explained, “and they do it so innocently that we should be very hard to get on with if we took it in bad part. Travelers sit at our table without being invited.... Sometimes waggoners, after they have put their carts under cover and given oats to their horses, come without ceremony and sit down beside us.... the people of the lower classes are familiar to the point of annoyance....”

Barbé-Marbois was not the only officer who took offense to the American insistence on equality. De Ganot explained that many of the early French volunteers

were "particularly enraged by the fact that they find themselves completely ignored in a country where no consideration is given to birth, name, rank, wealth, or letters of recommendation. For this is a land where honor is paid only to proven merit, and where such tribute is rendered not in words, nor in mere flattery and exaggerated expressions of esteem, but rather in deference and respect for superior merit."\textsuperscript{100}

Officers with these sentiments, however, were in the minority. Most appreciated American egalitarianism and remarked in wonder on the lack of a peasant class in the colonies. Passing through Dover, Delaware, Ségu\r

 Officers with these sentiments, however, were in the minority. Most appreciated American egalitarianism and remarked in wonder on the lack of a peasant class in the colonies. Passing through Dover, Delaware, Sé\gur noted that "to an eye familiar with the...luxury of our higher classes, contrasted with the coarse habiliments of our peasants...the difference exhibited on arriving in the United States. where the extremes of splendor and of misery are no where to be seen, is truly surprising.... All the Americans whom we met were dressed in well made clothes of excellent stuff...their deportment was free, frank, and kind.... Their aspect seemed to declare, that we were in a land of reason, or order, and of liberty...."\textsuperscript{101} Rochambeau also noticed that "a settler is, at home, neither a lord of a manor nor a farmer; he is a proprietor in a full sense of the word, possessing the \textit{quantum sufficit} of his necessaries, and he lays out the overplus of his crops in the purchases of good and comfortable clothing, without any of the exterior appendages of luxury."\textsuperscript{102}

Most French observers recognized that the New World colonist had little in common with the Old World peasant. Chastellux, after dining with an Irishman in western Virginia, noticed that "in the midst of the woods and rustic tasks, a Virginian never resembles a European peasant: he is always a free man, who has a share in the

\textsuperscript{100} Echeverria and Murphy, "The American Revolutionary Army," 156-57.
\textsuperscript{101} Ségu\r, \textit{Memoirs and Recollections}, 319-20.
\textsuperscript{102} Rochambeau, \textit{Memoirs}, 108.
government, and the command of a few Negroes. Thus he unites in himself the two
distinct qualities of citizen and master, and in this respect clearly resembles the majority
of the individuals who formed what were called the people in the ancient republics; a
people very different from the people of our day...." Dumas also noticed a distinct
American character, even though the language and manners were derived from the
English. In the colonies, he explained, "we find more mildness and tolerance, more
hospitality, and they are in general more communicative than the English. The latter
reproach them with too much levity, a too ardent love of pleasure; they think them
degenerated, and charge them with weakness. But the difference of interests, attachment
to the new government, the discipline and good spirit of the army, will soon strongly
mark the national character."  

While the common American was an active member of the burgeoning republic,
he was still focused on material gain. Although the colonists referred to their language as
"American" instead of "English," Chastellux observed that they had "not notably
enriched their native language. Anything that had no English name has here been given
only a simple designation: the jay is the blue bird, the cardinal the red bird; every water
bird is simply a duck.... this poverty of language proves how much men’s attention has
been employed in objects of utility, and how much at the same time it has been
circumscribed and straitened by the only prevailing interest, the desire of augmenting
wealth...."  

Although many French officers found the Americans charming and inspiring, not
everyone had favorable encounters with the locals. French sailors brawled with citizens

103 Chastellux, Travels in North America, 2:397.
104 Dumas, Memoirs of His Own Time, 88.
105 Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:78, 2:498.
in Boston and Charleston, and most officers felt that the average American was uncouth in manner and inferior in intelligence. The Comte de Vergennes, French minister of foreign affairs, foresaw the animosity between the soldiers and the locals, and warned that if they came in too close contact “the gallantry and légèreté, of the former contrasting with the austerity and rusticity of the latter, a bloody conflict will result.”106 “Our allies,” Count Axel Fersen remarked, “have not always behaved well to us, and the time that we have spent among them has not taught us to like or esteem them.”

Prince de Broglie thought the Americans irresolute, phlegmatic, and greedy, while an officer serving under the Comte d’Estaing found them “easy to deceive, indolent by nature, suspicious; they always think they see what they fear; they won’t take the trouble to examine the reasons for their belief.” Baron Johann Kalb also complained of American greed, arguing that “these people pretend that they are sacrificing everything for... liberty.... An ordinary horse costs twenty thousand dollars.... Would that I were at my own home, and had never embarked in this galère.”107 Von Closen also felt that “the Americans occasionally do not scruple to bleed us as much as they can, and when one arrives at a tavern at night, they are even more demanding. The next day they present the bill, and many times I have had to pay, in addition to the charge for food and forage, ‘for the trouble,’ 2-4-6 crowns.”108

Abbé Robin was struck more by the blandness he found in the colonies, where the people’s “character is cold, slow, and mild. They are not very industrious..... Their softness of character is due to the climate as much as to their customs....”109 Barbé-

106 Kennett, French Forces in America, 6-7, 37, 57.
107 Perkins, France in the American Revolution, 421-34.
108 Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 128.
109 Perkins, France in the American Revolution, 434.
Marbois, feeling a little homesick in Philadelphia in 1779, also found the Americans reserved and inhospitable. "We...have come to a coldly beautiful land," he lamented, "where friendship does not extend outside the family, where a stranger is still a stranger at the end of six months, where a bachelor is called a 'single man' and treated as if he were in fact isolated from the rest of nature, where religious and national prejudices are not yet really wiped out, so that all hope of any close connection with the people must be excluded from our expectations, where they cannot yet believe in the sincerity of a Frenchman...."\(^{10}\)

Crèvecoeur, although he admired American simplicity, found most of the citizens beneath him. After entertaining a household with his violin, he felt it "fair to say that most of their tunes are fit only to bury the devil. They have neither taste not sentiment; there is something pitifully uncultivated about them." Frankly, "whoever tries to instill in the Americans a taste for the social life we enjoy in France is simply wasting his time and trouble.”

While they would not have called every aspect of American society "uncultivated," the French found many things amusing or downright annoying. Crèvecoeur echoed the Hessians in noting that the Americans’ “favorite drink seems to be tea, which is ordinarily served from four to five in the afternoon.... It should be remarked that those least well off always drink coffee or tea in the morning and would, I believe, sell their last shirt to procure it. The use of sugar generally marks the difference between poverty and affluence."\(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Chase, *Our Revolutionary Forefathers*, 137-38.

Chastellux found himself constantly forced to sit through the “absurd and truly barbarous practice” of drinking toasts with his dinner companions. “They call to you from one end of the table to the other, ‘Sir, will you permit me to drink a glass of wine with you?’... The bottle is then passed to you, and you must look your enemy in the face.... You wait till he likewise has poured out his wine and taken his glass. You then drink mournfully with him....”\(^{112}\) Von Closen also felt that “the many healths that are drunk (\textit{toasts}) are terribly tiring. From one end of the table to the other a \textit{Gentleman} calls upon you, sometimes with a glance only, to drink a glass of wine with him, an honor that you cannot politely refuse. Another peculiarity of the country is that in most houses, even in rich ones, you use no napkins at all, and each person wipes himself on the tablecloth, which must be very soiled as a result.”\(^ {113}\) Ségur, traveling north from Philadelphia, reported “only two things which shocked me more than I can express, one a vile custom, the moment a toast was given, of circulating an immense bowl of punch round the table, out of which each guest was successively compelled to drink; and the other was that, after being in bed, it was not unusual to see a fresh traveler walk into your room, and without ceremony, stretch himself by your side, and appropriate a part of your couch.”\(^ {114}\)

Von Closen was taken aback by a number of other customs that he observed in Newport. “It is considered courteous,” he explained, “every time that you meet, to go forward and extend and shake hands.... Moreover, their manners are very easy, and even free; you lean on your neighbor without ceremony, you put your elbows on the table during dinner, and, what would be considered evidence of bad breeding or too much liberty in France, is regarded in this country as suitable behavior, and generally accepted.

\(^{114}\) Ségur, \textit{Memoirs and Recollections}, 335-36.
The outward appearance of Americans rather generally indicates carelessness, and almost thoughtlessness…"\textsuperscript{115}

Claude Blanchard, relaxing at a “turtle party” in Newport that centered around the main dish of a “three or four hundred”-pound turtle, was not the only French officer to observe that “neither the men nor the women dance well; all stretch out and lengthen their arms in a way that is far from agreeable.”\textsuperscript{116}

De Ganot, who fancied himself an unbiased observer, grew weary of French criticisms of American society. Although he referred specifically to the volunteers, he surely would have felt that every officer should “put aside their pettiness, their vainglory, their absurd prejudices. Then they will see that Americans, just like people everywhere, have agreeable manners and that the men are sociable, their wives virtuous, and their daughters well educated. And they will realize that this country…[is] at least a place where they can settle down, live, and enjoy the pleasures of life just as peaceably as anywhere else.”\textsuperscript{117}

If some observers remarked on the social habits of local men and women, most French officers, even more so than the Hessians, focused their attention squarely on the fairer sex. Recognizing that American women had little in common with the ladies back home, the Frenchmen admired their appearance, studied their manners, criticized their industry, questioned their virtues, and marveled at their freedoms. Almost every officer

\textsuperscript{115} Von Closen, \textit{Revolutionary Journal}, 49.
\textsuperscript{116} Stephen Bonsal, \textit{When the French Were Here} (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1945), 71-72.
\textsuperscript{117} Echeverria and Murphy, “The American Revolutionary Army,” 160.
praised the beauty of American women, but they gave mixed reviews of the local ladies’ manners and social graces.

De Verger regretted having to leave Newport in 1781, because “one can say in praise of the fair sex there that there are few places, or indeed none in the world, where the strain is so beautiful and so admirable.” Von Closen, who took the time to sketch and publish silhouettes of many of the women he met, fancied himself an expert on the differences in looks and demeanor between ladies of the various colonies. He preferred the women in Boston to those in Philadelphia, because “they are more consistently beautiful and livelier. Perhaps the seriousness of the Congress influences the beauties of Philadelphia.” The ladies of Williamsburg, “although they are not the prettiest I have seen, form a very agreeable and, in general, very well bred society. Perhaps the oppressively hot climate of Virginia has some influence upon the inhabitants; it is probably the reason for their being less gay and much less active that those in the North.” While in Newport, he observed “that the fair sex here is really unusual in its modesty and sweetness of demeanor. Nature has endowed the women on Rhode Island with very fine features... but their teeth are not very wonderful. The great quantity of tea consumed here perhaps contributes to this.” Ultimately, he decided that “Baltimore women have more charm than the rest of the fair sex in America.... Their hair is dressed with infinite taste, and they value French styles highly....”

Ségur, on the other hand, preferred the women of New England. “Europe,” he explained, “does not offer to our admiration women adorned with greater beauty,

118 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army, 1:135.
elegance, education, or more brilliant accomplishments than the ladies of Boston..."120

After his march from Newport to Philipsburg, Rochambeau reported that the only men he lost were "ten love-sick soldiers of Soissonnais who returned to see their sweethearts in Newport." Williamsburg in June 1782 witnessed the marriage of a French officer and a rich American widow, and the Chevalier de Coriolis, a lieutenant in the Bourbonais, was so smitten with a young lady in the town that he proposed to her on four separate occasions, each time without success.121 Barbé-Marbois, typically more critical than some of his fellow officers, noted in 1779 that while he quickly got used to the lack of powder in the Americans' hair, he had "not yet seen a beautiful woman, but I have seen several who were rather pretty. There are none of these Parisian waists, so slim and fine that they are sometimes out of proportion with the rest of the body, but if you wish well-set-up bodies, formed by nature and not by the tailors, you have only to speak and we will show them to you by the hundred."122

The women Crèvecoeur met were "quite precocious. A girl of twenty here would pass for thirty in France. It must be admitted, though, that nowhere have I seen a more beautiful strain.... They have charming figures, and in general one can say they are all pretty, even beautiful, in the regularity of their features.... But they fall short in one very noticeable respect, and that is their frigid manner. Once off the [dance] floor, they lose much of their charm and show little vivacity and gaiety in your company...."123 The French officers again presented the Americans with the difficult task of displaying grace and refinement, while at the same time remaining simple and unaffected. In Europe, a

120 Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 380-82.
121 Scott, From Yorktown to Valmy, 55, 77-78.
122 Chase, Our Revolutionary Forefathers, 69-70.
123 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:21.
well-trained noblewoman was a connoisseur of conversation, able to entertain her male guests with a polished but seemingly spontaneous manner.\textsuperscript{124} Held to these standards of propriety, American women were bound to fall short. They were born with simplicity, but they lacked the social graces.

Baron du Bourg, who visited a ladies dancing school a few times, "found nearly all the women—extremely handsome, at the same time extremely awkward. It would be impossible to dance with less grace, or to be worse dressed, although with a certain extravagance."\textsuperscript{125} Prince de Broglie also had mixed emotions about the women he met in Philadelphia, because the local ladies, "though sufficiently magnificent in their clothes, are not generally dressed with much taste...they have less of vivacity and charm than our Frenchwomen. Although they are well shaped, they are lacking in grace, they do not courtesy well, nor do they excel at dancing."

Other officers also compared American women unfavorably to their French counterparts. One officer decided that "making tea and seeing that the house is kept clean constitute the whole of their domestic province."\textsuperscript{126} Prince de Broglie also found tea-making to be the American hostess’ greatest strength. "The ladies of Philadelphia," he noted, "although pretty magnificent in their attire, do not, as a rule, dress with much taste... Although they are well formed, they lack grace and make very bad curtsies. They do not excel in dancing, but know how to make capital tea."\textsuperscript{127} Chastellux was often frustrated in the evenings, for "music, drawing, reading aloud, and fancywork by


\textsuperscript{125}Perhaps du Bourg failed to realize that women attend dancing school in order to become better dancers. Perkins, \textit{France in the American Revolution}, 429-30; Balch, \textit{The French in America}, 149-50.

\textsuperscript{126}Perkins, \textit{France in the American Revolution}, 429-30.

\textsuperscript{127}Balch, \textit{The French in America}, 235.
the ladies are resources unknown in America, though it is to be hoped they will not long neglect to cultivate them."\textsuperscript{128} Dancing and "fancywork" were important female qualities among the nobility of eighteenth-century France, and in this respect most soldiers found the American women sorely lacking.

Von Closen, easy to please, was the exception. The fair sex in Williamsburg, he noted, "are very fond of minuets. It is true that some of them dance them rather well, and infinitely better than those up North; to make amends for this, the latter dance the schottische better."\textsuperscript{129} Ségur was also satisfied with the women he met, "well worth admiration, no less for their virtues as mothers of families, than for the social charms of their conversation. Without pretending to the grace of our countrywomen, they had a peculiar grace of their own, which was by no means less attractive on account of its simplicity."\textsuperscript{130}

Although many disparaged the female social graces, the French officers were amazed by the freedoms that young American women enjoyed. Contrasting the openness of American manners with the strictness with which French girls were guarded, Chastellux marveled at the little things, such as a soldier and a young woman holding hands in public. "I mention these trifles," he elaborated, "only to show the extreme liberty that prevails in this country between the two sexes, as long as they are not married. It is no crime for a girl to kiss a young man; it would indeed be one for a married woman even to show a desire of pleasing." He was similarly surprised that another young lady that he met "had no objection to being looked at, having her beauty commended, or even receiving a few caresses, provided it was without any appearance of

\textsuperscript{128} Chastellux, \textit{Travels in North America}, 2:383.
\textsuperscript{129} Von Closen, \textit{Revolutionary Journal}, 169.
\textsuperscript{130} Ségur, \textit{Memoirs and Recollections}, 332.
familiarity or wantonness. Licentious manners, in fact, are so foreign in America that
collection with young women leads no further, and that freedom itself there bears a
character of modesty unknown to our affected bashfulness and false reserve."¹³¹

Georg Daniel Flohr was pleasantly shocked to learn that once American girls
were “sixteen years old, their father and mother must not forbid them anything anymore,
cannot give them any orders on anything any more, and if they have a lover he can freely
go with them.”¹³² Ségur wrote home, explaining that American parents “allow their
guests to walk about for whole days alone with their daughters of sixteen years of age,
who have no other protection than their modesty, and whose ingenious familiarity,
besperks their innocence, and commands respect from the most depraved hearts.”¹³³

After much thought and observation, Chastellux became concerned for the future
of female morality in America, and he warned the Reverend James Madison, president of
the College of William and Mary, that “the virtue of women, which is more productive of
happiness, even for men, than all the enjoyments of vice... has two bucklers of defense.
One is retirement, and distance from all danger.... The other is pride.... Let them learn
to appreciate themselves; let them rise in their own estimation, and rely on that estimable
pride for the preservation of their virtue as well as of their fair name.” In order to
preserve their virtue and strengthen their pride, Chastellux recommended that America
women dress more conservatively.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:68, 120.
¹³³ Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 383-85; French bourgeois parents usually supervised the courtship of
their daughter, always remaining within hearing range of the girl and her beau. Lee, The Reign of Women,
20.
¹³⁴ Chastellux, Travels in North America, 2:540-41.
For his part, Crèvecoeur, having noticed in his travels a surprising number of prostitutes, decided that American women had too much liberty, for upon reaching puberty "they become their own mistresses and are free to keep company with anyone they wish. Among the country people...the girls enjoy so much freedom that a Frenchman or an Englishman, unaccustomed to such a situation, straightaway seeks the final favors. It is actually the custom, when a young man declares himself to be in love with a young girl, without even mentioning marriage, to permit him to bundle with her."  

"Bundling" was a northern practice that absolutely fascinated the French officers, for it broke sharply with the social mores to which they were accustomed. De Verger, camped near Hartford, explained it best: "A stranger or a resident who frequents a house and takes a fancy to a daughter of the house may declare his love in the presence of her father and mother without their taking it amiss.... Then, if he is on good terms with the lady, he can propose bundling with her. This means going to bed with her. The man may remove his coat and shoes, but nothing more, and the girl takes off nothing but her kerchief. Then they lie down together on the same bed, even in the presence of the mother — and the most strict mother." Louis-Alexandre Berthier added that "people here cannot believe that a man would think of seducing a girl, so that latter are allowed an extraordinary amount of freedom.... When young people fall in love, they inform their parents and from that moment on are constantly together. They even spend half the night in conversation after their parents have gone to bed without taking the slightest advantage of this liberty, which is regarded as a sacred trust, by doing anything wrong."  

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Barbé-Marbois, sincerely puzzled by this custom, noted that “it wounds the modesty of American women if you pronounce the words legs, knees, shirt, garters.... But you may suggest to a young lady that she bundle, and she looks upon the suggestion as a courtesy. Sometimes this strange favor is granted to a traveler, however little he may be known.... The first French officers who were allowed to practice it however, behaved themselves with so little reserve that older people urged mothers not to allow them to bundle with their daughters any more.”

Crèvecoeur’s runaway imagination led him to wonder if the women of Philadelphia “bundle with one another? That is what many people think. One dare not state it as a fact, but their attitude towards men, their conduct when in their company, the disappearance of the lilies and roses of their youth...and their distaste for bundling with men are all good reasons for believing that one is not mistaken.”

If their response to bundling ranged from shock to salaciousness, some French officers were truly impressed by the depth of love they found in American marriages. Lafayette contrasted French and American unions, explaining that “in the marriages of chance one makes in Paris, the faithfulness of the women is often contrary to nature, to reason, and, one could almost say, to justice. In America one marries her lover.”

Marriages among the nobility in France were often arranged by the families in order to merge titles and estates. Because of this, unhappiness and infidelity were common.

“The women of this country who fall in love with someone really love him and are

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137 Chase, *Our Revolutionary Forefathers*, 102-04.
faithful,” exclaimed Crévecoeur. “One must give them their due. Although difficult to arouse, once in love they succumb to the most tender and sincere feelings.”

Barbé-Marbois was similarly surprised to perceive that “life is not pleasant except for married people. Nothing is so rare as an unsatisfactory household; the women are sincerely and faithfully attached to their husbands; they have few pleasures outside their families…. They live in the midst of their children, feed them, and bring them up themselves.” Echoed de Broglie: “they bring up their children with great care, and pride themselves on a scrupulous fidelity towards their husbands.”

Rochambeau also noticed that once young America women “have once entered the state of matrimony, they give themselves up entirely to it, and you seldom see, particularly in the rural districts, a woman of loose manners.”

As loving as American wives may have been, Chastellux found some of them to be quite lazy. He noted that the ladies of Virginia were dull and tiresome, and “the convenience of being served by slaves still further increases their natural indolence; they always have a great number of slaves at hand to wait on them and on their children; they themselves suckle their infants, but that is all.” Another time, having been denied by the lady of the house in his request to stay the night, he vented: “Indeed, American women are very little accustomed to give themselves trouble, either of mind or body; the care of their children, that of making tea, and seeing the house kept clean, constitute the whole of their domestic province.”

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141 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:72.
142 Chase, Our Revolutionary Forefathers, 108-09; Governesses were commonly employed to raise young French aristocrats.
143 Balch, The French in America, 235.
144 Rochambeau, Memoirs, 108-09.
145 Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:81, 2:441-42.
Although French ladies performed very few household chores, the women of the lower classes often worked as hard as their husbands. Flohr noticed that even among the farmhouses of Rhode Island, “they are always dressed like ladies of the nobility. If they should have to cover even half-an-hour’s distance, they will ride a horse or in a carriage.” Indeed, “one does not see a white person do any work...which made me wonder many a time where their wealth came from.”

If the French mirrored the Hessians in their fascination over American women, they likewise spent little time thinking about the local gentlemen. The Comte de Deux-Ponts, who admired northerners for their energy, courage, and strong Protestant character, noticed that “the Anglo-American is fleshier than the Frenchman, without being taller. He is quite strong, of a robust constitution, his phlegmatic temperament renders him patient, deliberate, and consistent in all his undertakings.” “The Americans,” Crévecoeur observed, “are tall and well built, but most of them look as though they had grown while convalescing from an illness. (There are some, however, who are big and fat, but not very vigorous.) The Americans do not live long; generally one notices that they live to be sixty or seventy, and the latter are rare.” He gave no reason for their lack of longevity, perhaps because he was too busy staring at the local ladies.

Although they matched the Hessians in their admiration of American women, the French broke with their European counterparts concerning another subset of the local population: British loyalists. While the Germans lamented their sad fate and unjust
treatment at the hands of the rebels, the French held the opposite view. De Ganot believed that during the years leading up the war, the royalist party had been intent on “establishing the worst sort of despotism and threatened to wreck the prosperity of the colonies.”

Crèvecoeur felt that “the vast majority of [loyalists] are cowardly and cruel, judging by their treason and innumerable crimes against their compatriots. Some... feigning to be on the side of the Americans, were spies paid by the English government to betray their compatriots. Finally, a great number of these miserable creatures decided to take up arms against their country, lured by money and permission from the English to pillage and sack the homes of their fellow citizens.” He marveled at the “poor politics” of the British, who, through their support of the loyalists, “only alienated [the colonists] further from the mother country.”

Lafayette, flush with the spirit of liberty, was surprised to find so many loyalists in America. “When I was in Europe,” he explained to General Washington, “I thought that here almost every man was a lover of liberty and would rather die free than live slave. You can conceive my astonishment when I saw that toryism was as openly professed as wighism itself.”

Crèvecoeur did admit, however, that he had “met other Tories who, bound by fortune and gratitude, declared from the start their adherence to the King. Few as they were, they were honest, and one can only pity their misfortune and the hatred they have aroused.” He also lamented the family discord that the revolution sometimes occasioned, for “in many families you find two brothers, or sometimes a father and mother, holding opposite opinions. One is a defender of liberty, while the other is a confirmed Loyalist.

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150 Echeverria and Murphy, “The American Revolutionary Army,” 155.
151 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army, 1:23.
What evils result from this division of opinion, which disturbs the union and sows discord in the midst of families who should be happy together!"153 Other Frenchmen probably felt as Crèvecoeur did, for the Tories were a significant force in the struggle for military and political power in the northern cities.

Indeed, the fight for independence was on every soldier's mind, and while most strongly supported the revolution, they had different reasons for doing so and different conceptions of the causes of the war. As the French government debated the benefits of a formal alliance with the United States, Séguir and his compatriots "were irritated at the tardy circumspection of our ministry; we had become weary of an irksome peace, which had lasted more than ten years, and every heart beat with the desire of retrieving the disgrace of the last war, of taking the field against England, and of flying to the aid of America."154

Voltaire believed that the colonists were fighting for the simple truths of "reason and liberty."155 Chastellux, on the other hand, recognized deeper motives. He was "firmly convinced that the Parliament of England had no right to tax America without her consent, but I am even more convinced that when a whole people says 'I want to be free,' it is difficult to prove to it that it is wrong." De Maussion believed that "this war was incited by the oppression of England and her insistence on doing what was wrong, and not what was merely unjust – two very different things."156 Barbé-Marbois also blamed the British, who encouraged a military spirit in the colonies by inciting the locals against

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156 Radziwill, *They Knew the Washingtons*, 66.
the Indians and the French. "The colony," he elaborated, "at the beginning, enjoyed a sort of independence. It had the right to make war and peace with the neighboring savages, to mint money, and to administer justice, without mentioning the king of England in its public acts. The spirit of liberty has continued up to our own time and become actual revolution." It was hardly surprising that the French held Britain, its longtime rival, responsible for the war in America.

Ségur explained that "the British government took umbrage at the growing prosperity [of its colonies], and unjustly used their power to arrest its progress.... The Americans complained loudly at London, and were ill received...and the acts of parliament, respecting tea and stamps, carried the irritation of the public mind to the highest pitch.... the English ministry only replied to the Americans by threats and violent measures. They then rose and fled to arms, the cry of liberty resounded on all sides, the revolution broke out, and they declared their independence."

The rebels were certainly stubborn, and Chastellux gave much of the credit for the rebellion's success to the colonial leaders, especially in Virginia, "where cupidity and indolence go hand-in-hand and serve only to limit each other. It was doubtless no easy matter to persuade this people to take up arms, simply because the town of Boston, three hundred leagues away, did not choose to pay a duty upon tea, and was in open rupture with England. To produce this effect, activity had to be substituted for indolence, and foresight for indifference." Rochambeau also focused on the relationship between the northern and southern colonies at the beginning of the revolution. Boston, he noted, "declared itself at the very beginning of the war in favour of liberty and independence....

157 Chase, Our Revolutionary Forefathers, 75.
158 Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 371-72.
The opinion of the inhabitants of the north, consisting principally of land holders of equal fortune, were naturally of a democrical tendency, whilst those of the inhabitants of the south, consisting of many rich proprietors, intermingled with whites in less easy circumstances, and of a great quantity of negroes, were, on the contrary, quite aristocratical. All quickly united, however, to stand up for the liberty, equality, and independence of the mother country...."160 Echoed Dumas: "the state of Massachusetts was the cradle of the revolution. The fermentation of parties produced there at the very beginning the most decided champions of republican principles."161

Comte de Granchain, Chevalier de Ternay's major d'escadre, recognized that he did not fully understand the complexities of the independence movement and did “not know if this people possesses all the natural and political rights to liberty that they claim, but I do know that the era of their freedom will be one of the most important in the history of mankind, and I am glad I could be a witness to it and have a hand in bringing it about.”162

Like de Granchain, most Frenchmen were excited to be a part of the American push for independence. While some possessed a genuine enthusiasm for the cause, others were captivated by the quest for glory and notoriety. “Serving America,” Lafayette gushed, “is to my heart an unexpressible happiness.”163 De Maussion, writing to his mother with news of the battle of Yorktown, felt that “we have not fought in vain. Any regret I may have had through all these years because I did not enjoy the privileges of an

160 Rochambeau, Memoirs, 106-07.
161 Dumas, Memoirs of His Own Time, 96-98.
162 Kennett, French Forces in America, 170.
officer, but remained a simply volunteer, have vanished and trouble me no more. I know now that I have been an actor in events which the world and history will never forget.”

Brigadier-General Duportail revealed different sentiments to different audiences. To the French minister Luzerne, he focused on the “question of finishing with honor a thing which is a much ours as the Americans.... The Americans with less shame that we, can yield and return to the domination of the British.... but for France...she has irrevocably attached her honor to that independence and its annihilation would be for the nation an affront that could never be effaced.” Two years later, in 1782, he wrote General Washington from France, emphasizing “how much i long to join your excellency and the american army. i consider myself as an american if not by birth by a mutual adoption. The Cause of America is mine, all my pleasure is in it, and i will not leave it before we attained the success.” If Duportail was torn between feelings of honor and enthusiasm, General von Steuben, born in Germany, primarily sought fame and fortune. “The Citizen of America,” he explained, “if he suffers can reflect that it is for the Liberties of his country, for his wife, his children, indeed for all that is dear to man. The subject of France waits his reward from his king.... Neither of these cases apply to me. I am a stranger in the Country. I sacrifice my time, my Interest & my Health & what is more than all these, I risk a reputation gained by twenty seven years service in Europe.”

While most supported the notion of independence, some Frenchmen took issue with the reverence in which the Americans held their personal liberties. Conrad Alexandre Gérard, the French minister to the U.S., irate after reading public threats

165 Kite, Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail, 184, 254.
166 Palmer, General von Steuben, 294.
against French merchants, thundered that “nothing proves more conclusively, it seems to me, the abuses of unlimited freedom of the press.” The French did, however, make extensive use of the American press as an effective propaganda machine during the war.¹⁶⁷ Barbé-Marbois, on the other hand, was pleased to learn that “American newspapers are open on equal terms to anyone who wishes to become an accuser.... Here an attack destitute of proof or at least of appearance of truth, makes no impression on the public. The liberty of its object is not at all endangered. If he wishes to repel the insult, the same field of battle is open to him.... In this way a weapon which is dangerous under a government which is arbitrary in some respects, is blunted for the innocent and is to be feared only by the really guilty.”¹⁶⁸

Chastellux, remarking on his book On Public Happiness, reasoned that “America has all the necessary conditions for being happy.... It will always be a great deal that principles of tolerance, liberty, and equality of rights remove the perceptible obstacles which work among us against the happiness of Peoples.”¹⁶⁹

The practical implementation of abstract principles of government made many French officers uneasy. Accustomed to strong, centralized power, they found the American political system plodding and ineffectual, devoid of decision-making or authority. The supremacy of the law seemed to them almost tyrannical; they were shocked when a local sheriff attempted to arrest Rochambeau for not fully compensating a farmer for the damage the French camp inflicted on his field.¹⁷⁰ Ségur cited the

¹⁶⁸ Chase, Our Revolutionary Forefathers, 104-105.
¹⁶⁹ Chastellux, Travels in North America, 2:530.
¹⁷⁰ Kennett, French Forces in America, 72, 165; Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:167-68.
incident as a prime example of “the idea which each American entertained of the
inviolable power of the law.”\textsuperscript{171} Baron von Closen, indignant and amused, dubbed it “an
experience unlike any, I believe, since the beginning of the world.”\textsuperscript{172} Rochambeau
simply found it and other events typical of “the rigidity of republican principles as
regards the respect prescribed by law to property.”\textsuperscript{173}

The Marquis de Barbé-Marbois thought that the American legal system grew in a
pure form out of the wealth of the New World: “It is, of course, a very natural thing that
offences should be infrequent in a society where there are no needy persons at all, where
forbidden things are very few in number, where the simplicity of the government leaves
each man master of his actions more than anywhere else....”\textsuperscript{174}

Chastellux feared that the American lawmakers relied too heavily on philosophy,
for “abstract ideas will never form the basis of a reasonable constitution. Even
experience is too brief and too faulty. The times and the place must be consulted, as well
as customs and even habits....” Believing that he had discovered the true motivation
behind the American system of government, he explained that any enlightened thinker
“must be convinced that, in the present revolution, the Americans have been guided by
two principles, while they were perhaps imagining that they were following but one....
The positive principle I call everything that reason alone might dictate.... I call the
negative principle everything that they have done out of opposition to the laws and
usages of a powerful enemy for whom they had conceived a well-founded aversion.”\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{171} Ségur, \textit{Memoirs and Recollections}, 376.
\textsuperscript{172} Von Closen, \textit{Revolutionary Journal}, 257-59.
\textsuperscript{173} Rochambeau, \textit{Memoirs}, 22, 93-94.
\textsuperscript{174} Chase, \textit{Our Revolutionary Forefathers}, 91.
\textsuperscript{175} Chastellux, \textit{Travels in North America}, 2:530-36.
Thus, many of the articles of the U.S. Constitution were reactions against the British system, rather than products of new political ideologies.

Prince de Broglie, similarly critical of American legislators, determined that “Congress is composed of ordinary people... the persons of ability had discovered the secret of obtaining for themselves the important offices, governorships and other valuable posts, and therefore had deserted Congress. The assemblies of the several States seemed to avoid sending to congress the men most distinguished for their talents.”176

Chastellux also criticized specific provisions in the Constitution. The separation of the judicial branch from the legislative body was a mistake, “for the lawyers, who are certainly the most enlightened part of the community, are removed from the civil councils, and the administration is entrusted either to the ignorant, or at least to the unskilled.” Worried about attracting the most qualified men to positions of civil service, he observed that Americans had “cast off all hereditary distinctions, but have [they] bestowed sufficient personal distinctions?... I have no doubt that love of country will always prove a powerful motive, but do not flatter yourself that it will long exist with its present intensity.” Universal male suffrage in New England was also problematic, because although economic equality was a reality, a stratified society must someday emerge. He argued that “the ideal worth of men must ever be comparative: an individual without property is a discontented citizen when the state is poor; place a rich man near him, he becomes a manant, a yokel. What then will one day become the right of election in this class of citizens? A source of civil unrest, or corruption, perhaps both at the same time.”177

Dumas, however, disagreed. The constitution of Massachusetts "is perhaps the code of laws which does the most honour to mankind. We cannot read without emotion, and without feeling the mind elevated, the preamble to this act, the declaration of the rights common to all the members of the republic, and on which the several articles of the constitution are founded. The last words are, 'to the end it may be a government of laws, and not of men.'" Ségur also lauded the American system of government, in which lawmakers prosecuted "their labors in an enlightened age, without being obliged to triumph over a military power; to limit an absolute authority;...no ancient prejudice, no antiquated chimera came to place itself between them and the light of truth. One single effort, a single war, to shake off the yoke of the mother country, has been sufficient to free them from all restraint.... The result of this position...has been the establishment of a form of government as perfect as can issue from the hands of man."  

If American republicanism contrasted sharply with Old World absolutism, so too did religious tolerance in the colonies differ from the strict Catholic regime in France. Many educated Frenchmen, including members of the aristocratic officer class, although technically Catholic, were not devout adherents to the faith. American piety, therefore, combined with easy tolerance to present the French soldier with a stunning array of sects and churches. Von Closen, a member of the German Reformed church, declared that "there is no country on the globe where there is as much tolerance as in America. In the same town there are often 7 or 8 religious groups: Anglicans, Presbyterians, Anabaptists,

178 Dumas, Memoirs of His Own Time, 96-98.
179 Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 367-68.
180 Chase, Our Revolutionary Forefathers, 30-32.
Quakers, New Lights, Methodists, etc." Ségur likened Philadelphia to "one noble temple, raised to the spirit of toleration; for it is there we behold catholics, presbyterians, calvinists, lutherans, unitarians, anabaptists, methodists, and quakers, all in great number, and each professing their form of worship at full liberty, and living with each other in perfect anmity." Flohr, like his officers surprised by the sheer number of different sects in America, noted Lutheran, Reformed, "very few" Catholics, "Congregationalists and German Reformed, Quakers, Dunkards, Anabaptists, Baptists, Jews, Arians, Presbyterians, Moravian Brethren, Seventh-Day Advantists, Tertzianer, and Freemasons."

Chastellux, an officer and a philosopher, could "only congratulate America on being the only country possessing true tolerance, that absolute tolerance, which has not only triumphed over superstition, but which makes even the enemies of superstition blush at the ignominious compromises they have made with her." The American emphasis on piety, he felt, actually worked against the establishment of pure morals. "What a gloomy silence reigns in all your towns on Sunday! One would imagine that some violent epidemic, or plague, had obliged everyone to shut himself up at home.... the sexes separate, the women at a loss what to do with their fine dresses...fall into a state of dull listlessness, which is only to be diverted by frivolous discourse and scandal; while the men, wearied with reading the Bible to their children, assemble round a bowl, not prepared by joy, and at the bottom of which they find nothing but stupid intoxication."
Accustomed to celebrating holy days, many Frenchmen were taken aback by the strict observance of the Sabbath in New England.\textsuperscript{185} Barbé-Marbois noticed that the citizens of Connecticut “do not cook, sweep, cut the hair, shave, or even make the beds. It is forbidden for a woman to kiss her child on Sunday or on a fast day.”\textsuperscript{186} Claude Blanchard, chief commissary of the French forces, found that in “Providence some amiable women of a lively disposition, at whose houses I frequently called, were even unwilling to sing on Saturday evening.”\textsuperscript{187}

Although he was mum on the subject of the Sabbath, Rochambeau looked with favor upon the separation of church and state, for he feared the power of the Anglican church. “The first act of Congress,” he explained, “was to exclude from political as well as civil assemblies all ecclesiastics without exception…. by these precautions, religion was prevented from taking a part in political deliberation; everyone professed his own religion with exactitude; the sanctity of the Lord’s day was scrupulously observed…. Such preamble must naturally lead to pure and simple manners.”\textsuperscript{188}

Despite the tolerance they witnessed in America, some French officers still felt conspicuously Catholic. Barbé-Marbois observed that “all their places of worship resound with prayers addressed to the Lord for their great and illustrious ally, and this is a circumstance worthy of note in a country where religious intolerance, and prejudice against the French, have been carried to the most extravagant lengths.”\textsuperscript{189} De Verger also noticed an anti-papist sentiment when he was in Williamsburg, where “the inhabitants are chiefly Presbyterian, but all other religious groups are tolerated except the Catholics.

\textsuperscript{185} Scott, \textit{From Yorktown to Valmy}, 33.
\textsuperscript{186} Chase, \textit{Our Revolutionary Forefathers}, 106.
\textsuperscript{187} Bonsal, \textit{When the French Were Here}, 73.
\textsuperscript{188} Rochambeau, \textit{Memoirs}, 107.
\textsuperscript{189} Chase, \textit{Our Revolutionary Forefathers}, 82.
There are many French in these parts who came here as refugees after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes."¹⁹⁰ Ségur, a Protestant, recognized religious freedom in America, and maintained that “the example of this toleration was set by the catholics. No church, therefore, was privileged or considered the established church...and there existed between them, not a fatal spirit of jealousy, a source of discord, but a laudable emulation of charity, benevolence and virtue.”¹⁹¹

Like the Hessians, the French were fascinated by the strange customs of the Quakers. Crèvecœur was surprised to learn that “it is against their principles to take any interest in the war.... They do not permit slavery in their Society, and that is why none of them is served by negro slaves.... Their form of worshipping the Supreme Being seems rather bizarre.... The sexes are separated, and one never sees men sitting in the women’s pews. The utmost silence reigns, and the members of the sect seem lost in the deepest reflection.... When they feel so inspired, the men, as well as the women and girls, may speak.... It often happens that they leave the meetinghouse without having uttered a word....”¹⁹²

Von Closen was equally fascinated. The Quakers, who were romanticized in intellectual circles in France, “are very moderate, speak very laconically, and live very frugally, detesting public celebrations. The basis of their religion is the fear of God and the love of their neighbors.... They are, as a rule, very charitable.... Grasping and shaking hands, more or less strongly and protractedly, takes the place with them of all other courtesies and demonstrations of friendship. The Quaker never swears; they say

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¹⁹⁰ Rice, *American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army*, 1:153; Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, thereby outlawing Protestantism in France.
that a vow should remain in one's heart and not be expressed in words.”\textsuperscript{193} Barbe-Marbois noted that the Quakers “never greet people, never take off their hats, get out of nobody’s way, never pay compliments – all of which is very convenient. They always call each other ‘thee’ and ‘thou,’.... The ‘white’ or reformed Quakers speak in the third person singular, calling those to whom they are speaking ‘Friend.’... Do you not think...that this way of saying it is as good as any other?”\textsuperscript{194}

Chastellux was one of the few Frenchmen not impressed by the Quaker faith. “The law observed by many of them of saying neither you nor sir,” he elaborated, “is far from giving them a tone of simplicity and candor.... Nor does their conduct belie this resemblance: concealing their indifference for the public welfare under the cloak of religion, they are indeed sparing of blood, especially of their own; but they trick both parties out of their money, and that without either shame or decency.”\textsuperscript{195}

Ségur, however, came to the Quakers’ defense: “This simple, moral and pacific sect, that of the friends, whom many have vainly attempted to ridicule...still exists as a memorial of the only society which, perhaps, ever professed or practiced evangelical morality and christian charity in all their purity and simplicity without any alloy or any degree of prejudice.... Others have, at all times, had the language of philosophy in their mouths; but these men only have lived and continue to live like true sages. In spite, therefore, of the ironical contempt with which they are generally spoken of...I have never either seen or listened to them without a feeling of respect.”\textsuperscript{196}

\textsuperscript{193} Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 50-52.
\textsuperscript{194} Chase, Our Revolutionary Forefathers, 143-44.
\textsuperscript{195} Chastellux, Travels in North America, 1:166.
\textsuperscript{196} Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 326-27.
The relationship between religion and rebellion in the colonies was a strange affair. On one hand the French recognized the Quakers' refusal to fight. On the other they observed some preachers who used the pulpit to stir their flock to action. Chastellux attended a service in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and "especially noted the skillful manner in which [the minister] introduced politics into his sermon by comparing Christians redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, but still compelled to fight against the flesh and sin, to the thirteen United States, who have acquired liberty and independence, but are still obliged to employ all their strength to combat a formidable power and preserve the treasure they have gained." Chastellux, *Travels in North America*, 2:485. Barbé-Marbois reported that in Boston, "a number of highly placed persons to-day look upon religion as a political instrument, and most of the ministers have been ardent promoters of the Revolution."  

Crèvecoeur also noticed a bellicose spirit among the Protestants, but he did not find it praiseworthy. Unable to tear himself from the influence of Old World religious strife, he noted "with sorrow the unhappy results for mankind of that religious tolerance which is said to ensure the well-being of a state but which, in my opinion, becomes on the contrary a source of evil when a sect as intolerant and fanatic at the Presbyterian dominates through sheer numbers those living peaceably within their respective faiths." Rather than praising diversity like most of his fellow officers, Crèvecoeur decided that, "the Roman and Presbyterian religions are made to live alone and, furthermore, far apart.... Literary men have come out in favor of religious tolerance, but in expressing

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198 Chase, *Our Revolutionary Forefathers*, 71.
these sentiments they believed men were what they hoped they were, not what they are.  

French "literary men" had also reflected on another segment of the colonial population – the American Indian. Having first set foot in the New World in the sixteenth century, French explorers, missionaries, traders, and soldiers had extensive contact with a number of different tribes. Theories regarding the "savages" origins abounded within French intellectual circles, and tracts such as Jean-Bernard Bossu's *Travels in the Interior of North America 1751-1762* and Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon's *Natural History* were widely discussed. While thinkers such as Buffon used the American Indian as an example of man’s decadence when left in a state of nature, others trumpeted the notion of the "noble savage" – simplicity in its purest form. As recently as the Seven Year's War, 1756-1763, the French had allied with the Indians in raids on British outposts in the thirteen colonies. Reports of Indian drunkenness, atrocities, and bloodthirstiness mixed with Bossu's reports of honor and civility to present a complex picture to future French travelers.  

The officers in Rochambeau’s army, therefore, were not sure what to expect during their first encounters with Indians in America. Soon after they arrived in Newport, a delegation of Oneidas, Tuscaroras, and Caughnawagas visited Rochambeau to reaffirm their old alliance. Many Frenchmen were startled by the Indians’ appearance. “These barbarians,” Crèvecœur reported, “go naked and paint their bodies different

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199 Rice, *American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army*, 1:82-83.
colors, though their natural color is approximately that of copper. They pierce their nostrils, from which they hang large medallions, and likewise their ears.... In the most intense cold they wear only a thin wool blanket.... The oil and the dye they use on their bodies makes them stink and look disgusting. They are very fond of strong liquor and are always smoking.... These people have many good qualities and are basically much less barbarous than they appear, as witness to the war we fought in Canada in which they rendered the greatest service to France.\textsuperscript{201}

Von Closen, who seems to have overlooked these “good qualities,” declared that “one cannot imagine the horrible and singular faces and bizarre manners of these people.... Their language, or rather their gibberish, had nothing in common with any known tongue.... They appeared to be very fond of dancing and made their own music, which began with a humming and increased to the accompaniment of gestures, grimaces, and contortions of the eyes, body, feet, etc., to a point in the end where it became very piercing and distasteful.... the colors gradually become blended and appear only as a shining, slimy mass, disgusting to all the spectators....”\textsuperscript{202}

De Verger explained that the Indians “prefer rum above all things, and when drunk they are very dangerous.... We drilled, then fired our muskets to the accompaniment of cannon fire, which alarmed them to no end.... When they got ready to dance, half remained standing and the rest, having removed their animals skins and displaying very well-proportioned bodies that were oiled and rouged, began to dance with swords in their hands while their comrades intoned a very monotonous chant....”\textsuperscript{203}

\textsuperscript{201} Rice, \textit{American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army}, 1:19-20.
\textsuperscript{203} Rice, \textit{American Campaigns of Rochambeau’s Army}, 1:121.
Georg Daniel Flohr was present at the ceremony too. With language less derogatory that that of his officers, he observed that “except for a carpet plaided from tree bark, which they had hung around their bodies, these savages were completely naked.... When they talked to each other their language sounded as if geese were cackling.... [They] danced in a wondrous way, always in one place, and all naked, except that on their legs they had deerskins up to their knees.... They never use chairs but always sit on the ground.”

Not all of Flohr’s impressions of the natives were positive. Regarding rumored Indian activity, he reported that in the spring of 1781, the Iroquois “visited the English and ravaged the country to badly that it was impossible to live in the border area. Even though they had been forbidden to kill Frenchmen, if they caught some anyway they did not give any pardon to them either.... If they caught an American officer, they tied him to a tree and stripped him completely naked and stabbed his whole body full of holes with sharp sticks or knives. If they saw that he was soon to breathe his last, they took straw or similar material and wrapped it around him and burned him alive.”204

Whether because of ethnocentrism or simple snobbishness, the French officers did not share their German counterparts’ respect for Indian culture. Chastellux was disgusted by the Indian village he visited near Schenectady, New York, which he called “nothing but an assemblage of miserable huts in the woods.... The squah was hideous, as they all are, and her husband almost stupid.... [Although they] are commended for their bravery and fidelity...as an advanced guard they are formidable, as an army they are nothing. But their cruelty seems to augment in proportion to their decrease in numbers.... Those

204 Selig, “A German Soldier in America,” 585-88.
who are attached to the Americans...will ultimately become civilized, and be
intermingled with them. This is what every feeling and reasonable man should wish,
who...disdains the little artifice...of extolling ignorance and poverty, in order to win
acclaim in Palaces and Academies.”\(^{205}\)

Ségur, on the road to Providence, also “passed through a village or rather an
irregular assemblage of miserable huts bearing that name.... These Indians
[Narragansetts]...had preserved an inviolate attachment to the manners, worship, and
mode of living of their countrymen. They had made no advances towards improvement,
nothing was altered in the miserable construction of their huts and in the shape of their
clothes or rather covering.”\(^{206}\) Clearly, very few soldiers discovered the “noble savage”
that they had read so much about. Of course, any Indian residing on the east coast of
America in the late eighteenth century was certainly very different in deed and
comportment from his counterparts in Canada one hundred years prior, but no Frenchman
seems to have made this distinction. The officers hailed from the aristocracy, and it was
difficult for them to lay aside their class prejudices when analyzing the American Indians.

Unlike the Germans, the French were active participants in the conquest of the
Atlantic world. As colonial realists, they were accustomed to notions of cultural
dominance and the subordination of lesser-developed peoples. France shipped hundreds
of thousands of Africans to plantations in the Caribbean, and the officers in the American
Revolution were familiar with the institution of slavery. Their opinions on the subject
were decidedly mixed.

\(^{205}\) Chastellux, *Travels in North America*, 1:208.
Many did not question the institution itself, and instead focused on its effect on the American people. Chastellux believed that Virginians would always remain aristocratic by nature, "because the sway held over [their slaves] nourishes vanity and sloth, two vices which accord wonderfully with established prejudices." Crevecoeur found that "no white man works in the fields unless driven by poverty to this extremity. An individual’s wealth is gauged by the number of negroes he owns.... The blacks are naturally lazy and can only be made to work through punishment. In this respect the Virginians are quite cruel to their slaves and do not spare them." The locals "are very hospitable and receive you in a most cordial manner, but they are exceptionally lazy. When a gentleman goes out of his house – something he does rarely – he is always followed by a negro groom who rides behind him.... The [men] manage things admirably but are very wary and lock up everything, a necessary precaution against the negroes, who are great thieves." Flohr also noticed that the American farmer’s wealth came at the expense of his slaves: "the least of these Gendelmänner has 30-40-50 blacks...who are bought and sold on these plantations like cattle, and all work has to be done by blacks."

Whether because they supported slavery in any form, or because the system seemed milder in North America than it did in the Caribbean, some Frenchmen had no qualms about employing slaves during their stay in the colonies. Rochambeau departed from France with six servants, but planned on supplementing them with black slaves once he reached America. Crevecoeur noted that illness thinned both their ranks and the

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British, and "Negroes without masters found new ones among the French, and we garnered a veritable harvest of domestics. Those among us who had no servant were happy to find one so cheap." Some runaway slaves fled to the French ranks, where they were absorbed into those that the officers had purchased or seized. After the planters of Virginia demanded the return of their servants, Chastellux assured them that Rochambeau desired "to preserve with the greatest care the property of the inhabitants of Virginia."211 Rochambeau himself responded to the complaints, arguing that several of his officers "have negroes the property of which is founded upon rights as sacred as those of the Virginians."212

Chastellux became a staunch apologist of the North American slave system, because the blacks' "natural insensibility extenuate in some degree the sufferings attached to slavery.... I was assured, however, that it was extremely mild in comparison to what they experience in the sugar colonies.... This is because the people of Virginia are in general milder than the inhabitants of the sugar islands... [and] the yield of agriculture in Virginia not being of so great a value, labor is not urged on the Negroes with so much severity.... I must likewise do the Virginians the justice to declare that many of them treat their Negroes with great humanity. I must further add a still more honorable testimonial in their favor, that in general they seem grieved at having slaves, and are constantly talking of abolishing slavery and of seeking other means of exploiting their lands."213

211 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:64, 146.
212 Scott, From Yorktown to Valmy, 78-80; See also Kennett, French Forces in America, 156.
213 Chastellux, Travels in North America, 2:438-39; Scholars continue to debate whether North American or Latin American slavery was the more oppressive system. For further discussion, see Frank Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1847) and Robin
Barbé-Marbois also felt that North American slavery was not an oppressive system. In fact, "Pennsylvania and almost all the United States north of it are a peaceful and happy refuge for negroes. Examples of severity are rare. Slaves are here regarded as being part of the family; they are assiduously cared for when they are sick; they are well fed and clothed.... Several negroes in the southern states, freed by their masters, have made considerable fortunes. Some are known to have as many as two hundred slaves. The most admirable order reigns on their plantations, but it is said to be maintained only by means of punishment, and these negroes are said to be much more severe than whites."\(^{214}\)

Louis-Alexandre Berthier, visiting a plantation on the island of Martinique, remarked on the harsh punishment of "stubborn" and "lazy" slaves. "Such severity," he explained, "which seems inhuman to a European, is necessary to maintain the authority of a handful of whites over an enormous number of blacks. Nevertheless, the negroes of good character are more fortunate than most of our peasants, who despite their labors often lack for bread.... I have noticed that these free Negroes are the most unfortunate of all. They eat up all their earnings so that when they become old and lame they have to live on alms, whereas the slaves are sure of being cared for and fed to the end of their lives."\(^{215}\)

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\(^{215}\) Rice, *American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army*, 1:231; This same argument was employed by antebellum Southern planters against attacks from Northern abolitionists.
If men such as Berthier, Barbé-Marbois, and Chastellux attempted to place slavery in a less offensive light, other Frenchmen lashed out at the institution, both in America and down in the French Antilles. Von Closen, traveling through Virginia in 1781, noticed that "the large number of negro slaves that they hold are often treated very harshly and even cruelly, are left to run around almost naked, and are not considered to be much better than animals. The whites believe that they debase themselves if they engage in the work they say is fit only for these wretched beings.... A beagle, a lap-dog, very often leads a happier life and is much better fed that the poor Negroes or mulattoes, who have only their allowance of corn daily with which to do as they please.... They are thievish as magpies or faithful as gold...." Flohr, who as a young German may not have been as prejudiced as his commanding officers, "was often embarrassed for" the naked slaves he witnessed in Williamsburg. They were "kept like cattle" and bred "like young cattle, the more young ones they have, the better for the master who owns them." He thought their treatment unchristian and "completely against human nature."217

Baron von Closen, during his journey from Boston to the West Indies, came into contact with an Austrian slave ship. "The commerce...in Negroes," he declared, "is an abominable and cruel thing, in my opinion. On board these ships they are treated worse than beasts.... All these unfortunate beings are naked, and at the least movement that does not suit the Captain, they are beaten to a pulp.... The loss of a fifth of them, from sickness or despair during a voyage of 2 or 3 months, is expected."218

216 Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 187.
217 Flohr had probably met a number of blacks in Germany, where they were a common presence in European courts and armies. Selig, "A German Soldier in America," 582-83.
218 Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 286-87.
In Saint-Domingue, Ségur visited a plantation he owned, where he “beheld my unfortunate negroes, with no other dress than a pair of drawers, constantly exposed to a scorching sun...stooping from morning till night over the indurated soil, forced to dig it without intermission, admonished if they discontinued their work for a moment, by the whip of the superintendents....” After surveying the plantation, he “made some regulations with the view of ameliorating the condition of my slaves. I extended their hours of rest, augmented the portion of ground they were permitted to cultivate for their own account, and enjoined moderation on the part of the superintendents in their chastisements. In return, I received the blessings of all.”

Dumas, stationed temporarily in Saint-Domingue, longed to return to New England, where “the friend of humanity, he who is sensible of the dignity of his nature, is not incessantly afflicted and incensed by the horrors of slavery. In order to judge by my own eyes how far avarice can carry contempt for human nature and harden the heart, I resolved to see the public sale of a cargo of negroes of both sexes.... one of them, seated near a young woman whom he held by the arm, could not be taken from her but by force, and she, while he was on the stool, lamented aloud and covered her face with her hands. The barbarous purchaser did not even think of uniting them.”

De Verger also witnessed a slave purchase in the Caribbean: “The poor slaves believed that their last hour had come.... The land on the plantations is cultivated by negroes and there is always one of them who has a big postillion’s whip in his hand with which he pitilessly beats those who neglect their work. Each blow is hard enough to

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219 Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 437; Ségur fits perfectly the image of the paternalistic slave owner, who viewed his servants as a happy family, of which he was the kind patriarch. For more on paternalism, see Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).
220 Dumas, Memoirs of His Own Time, 111-112.
break the skin.”

Lafayette hoped to alleviate the suffering of blacks in the Americas, and he proposed to General Washington a plan “which might become greatly beneficial to the Black Part of Mankind. Let us unite in purchasing a small estate where we may try the experiment to free the Negroes, and use them only as tenants – such an example as yours might render it a general practice, and if we succeed in America, I will cheerfully devote a part of my time to render the method fashionable in the West Indies.”

French officers differed sharply in their opinions of American slavery, but this disagreement mirrored French society, where anti-slavery agitation was beginning to clash with colonial interests.

Slavery was not the principal factor that rendered life in America easier than in Europe. Land was abundant in North America, and most French observers believed that this truly made the new United States a land of opportunity. After considering his prospects back home in France, de Maussion sought to convince his wife that “there is a great future here for a man willing to work as a planter in South Carolina, and I’d like to acquire a plantation which has been offered to me at a very moderate price. We might spend a few years in improving it while our children are little and in trying to make it pay well as others have done.” His entreaties successful, de Maussion settled in America with his family, although he and his wife ultimately returned to France, separately.

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221 Rice, American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1:176.
222 Gottschalk, Letters of Lafayette to Washington, 259-60.
223 France's first abolition society formed in 1788. The 1791 slave revolt in Saint-Domingue forced France to emancipate all of its colonial slaves in 1794, but Napoleon reinstated slavery and the slave trade in 1802. After his removal, the government attempted to outlaw the slave trade again in 1818, but did not fully emancipate the slaves in its colonies until 1848. Lawrence C. Jennings, French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802-1848 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 1.
224 Radziwill, They Knew the Washingtons, 113.
Chastellux, after contemplating a man who had cleared a large area for his house and farm in Connecticut, noted that "any man who is able to procure a capital of five or six hundred livres of our money, and who has strength and inclination to work, may go into the woods and purchase a tract of land, usually a hundred and fifty or two hundred acres…. such is the immense and certain profit from agriculture, that notwithstanding the war, it not only maintains itself wherever it has been established, but it extends to places which seem the least favorable to its introduction." Barbé-Marbois, using German immigrants as an example, also outlined the path to riches in America: "Without repugnance, they give up their liberty for several years to a rich cultivator…. They receive wages which put them in a position to become proprietors themselves at the end of their engagement…. By dint of saving from the small profits which they make at first, they make larger profits, extending step by step their domains, so that finally…they attain surprisingly large fortunes." Even Rochambeau noticed that "it is not uncommon that a labourer, who works assiduously for the space of six years on an average, can accumulate a sufficient sum to purchase a piece of ground."

In America, Barbé-Marbois realized, "a childless wife is a real misfortune. In Europe, the widow of a farmer seldom manages to get married again if she has many children; here the more she has the richer she is considered…. They are surrounded by everything that can make life agreeable and easy…. They are little exposed to illnesses, because there is no class of society either excessively idle or overwhelmed with immoderate labor, none either very necessitous or gorged with superabundance."

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228 Chase, *Our Revolutionary Forefathers*, 120-21.
Ségur believed that available land, scarce in both France and Germany, would protect the virtue of the American people. He explained that “a great danger in every country arises from the misery and compulsory inactivity of a numerous class, entirely destitute of all share in the property of the soil; but in the United States, this evil cannot exist, since there is everywhere a greater proportion of land than of men, and that all those who can and will work, find means of existence, and even of becoming rich, without ever being tempted to have recourse to swindling, theft, murder, or revolt.”\(^{229}\)

Indeed, some soldiers, enticed by the promise of a better life, remained in America after the war was over. Desertion from the French army was minor compared to that during wars in Europe; the alien character of the American environment and society conspired to keep men loyal. Despite this challenge, about two hundred soldiers, many from the Deux-Ponts regiment, did desert the French army. More than one-third of the Deux-Ponts men found friends and family among the German settlements in Pennsylvania, where they were able to easily blend into the population and pursue opportunities that did not exist in Western Germany.\(^{230}\)

Desertion among the French sailors was much higher, especially during the winter of 1780-81. Bored and cold, almost one thousand men signed on with vessels bound for Europe or joined the crew of an American ship. Thirty-one of Rochambeau’s officers voluntarily resigned their commissions while in America. Some remained in the colonies and married, while others returned home. Fourteen officially retired in 1782; most settled in America. Many soldiers, after sailing back to Europe, immigrated to the United States

\(^{229}\) Ségur, Memoirs and Recollections, 369-71.
\(^{230}\) Scott, From Yorktown to Valmy, 25, 83-84, 104-06; Kennett, French Forces in America, 166; Selig, “A German Soldier in America,” 582; Von Closen, Revolutionary Journal, 120.
at a later date. Roughly seventy men from the Royal Deux-Ponts alone came between 1783 and 1791.231

Even though most Frenchmen returned home at the end of the war, most did so with fond memories of their time in America. “I am quitting with infinite regret,” the Comte de Ségur editorialized, “a country where, without obstacle or difficulty, we are...sincere and free. Here all private interests merge into the general welfare; every one lives for himself, dresses as he pleases, and not as it pleases fashion. People here think, say, and do what they like; nothing compels them to submit to the caprices of fortune or of power.... There exists no restraint beyond that of a very limited number of just laws which are equally dispensed to all.... I have never found, in short, any thing else in this political Eldorado, but public confidence, frank hospitality, and open cordiality.”232

Lafayette rejoiced “at the blessings of a peace where our noble ends have been secured.... What a sense of pride and satisfaction I feel when I think of the times that have determined my engaging in the American cause!”233 Similarly, Lieutenant-Colonel Jean Baptiste de Gouvion, preparing to depart Philadelphia in 1783, declared that “although the part I acted in this happy and glorious revolution was but small, I shall always take pride in remembering that I was an American officer.”234 Dumas also became reflective as he sailed from America. Although some “already prophecy the dismemberment of the United States at not distant period...I am far from participating in this opinion.... Proud of their institutions, which are the most just and the most

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231 Kennett, French Forces in America, 85-86; Scott, From Yorktown to Valmy, 104-106.
233 Gottschalk, Letters of Lafayette to Washington, 259-60.
234 Kite, Brigadier-General Louis Lebègue Duportail, 275.
reasonable that human wisdom ever dictated, the North Americans will make a point of maintaining the national honour. These good laws will be perpetuated among them from age to age, because they will always recognize in them the purest source of public prosperity and individual happiness."235

Although a few officers, such as Chastellux, recognized the differences in government, manners, and opinions among the thirteen colonies, most Frenchmen took home with them a sense of American togetherness and unity in the struggle for independence.236 Indeed, although it is unclear if the returning soldiers, flush with notions of personal liberty, played an active role in the French Revolution of 1789, La Luzerne was certainly worried about the possible implications of American radicalism. He wrote to Vergennes in 1782 that although the troops had not yet set out for home, “I don’t think I can inform you too soon that the soldiers and even some officers will bring back the sort of ideas likely to provoke emigration…. We will have to be on our guard against the love of change, the spirit of enterprise, and also against the seductive and generally well founded reports which will be made of the beauty and fertility of this climate, of the liberty its inhabitants enjoy, of the equality which reigns among them, and of all sorts of other advantages…. ”237 Regardless of their opinions of America and its people, the French soldiers recognized that the republican experiment was a powerful and captivating force in both the Old and New Worlds.

235 Dumas, Memoirs of His Own Time, 102-03.
236 Chastellux, Travels in North America, 2:428-29.
237 Kennett, French Forces in America, 169.
CONCLUSION

Although the French were familiar with American institutions and ideals before their government signed the alliance, it was an abstract familiarity, grounded in literature and discussion. Once on American soil, French officers were surprised by a great many things, including the degree of religious tolerance, the unassuming manners of local women, the exoticism of American Indians, the paucity of indigent colonists, and the fickleness of state militias. The Germans, although they had access to Enlightenment ideas, experienced America, if not with a *tabula rasa*, then certainly with less romanticism. Their insight, however, was hardly more penetrating than that of the French, for the Germans carried with them, instead of idealized expectations, Old World conservatism and the need to maintain an adversarial relationship with the colonists.

In some respects, the revolution’s foreign soldiers simply confirmed what the colonists already believed. America in 1780 was exceptional, and most of Europe recognized this. The republican experiment ushered in a new form of government, and the French officers, for one, welcomed it as the realization of their Enlightenment ideals.

America truly was the land of opportunity. The fertility and abundance of American soil was something that no *philosophe’s* tract could adequately describe. Maybe prosperity had made the Americans self-interested and lazy, but the foreigners were envious of their lifestyle. Maybe Americans were uncouth and lacking in manners,
but the women were pretty and the men were judged by their achievements, rather than their birth.

Late-eighteenth-century European society was opening up, as ideas flowed freely across national borders and state economies increasingly relied on global commerce. The industrial revolution continued to pick up steam in Britain, and thinkers in France and Germany realized that the world was changing. Their troops’ confusion and wonder in America reflected global relationships in microcosm. Misinformation and misinterpretation were frustrating realities of contemporary diplomacy, and the fragile New World economy reflected the instability of global reliance on specie. A woman’s expanding position in society brought newfound freedoms, but rendered her role malleable and undefined. Conflicted men lauded female liberty while they continued to value coquettishness and traditional social graces.

The French romanticization of American simplicity stood as an early indicator of public dissatisfaction with the Bourbon monarchy. Although many officers supported their king against the insurgents in 1789, the successful republican experiment in America, which those officers had fought to effect, clearly helped trigger the French Revolution. While German principalities experienced no such struggle for liberty, thousands of soldiers were lured by the prospect of equality and opportunity into forsaking their loved ones in Europe and remaining in America after the war was over.

Although patriotism alone was unable to win the war, the French and the Germans came away impressed by its power. The spirit of the American troops was contagious, even if their poverty and sloppiness was not, and this growing faith in the public will also made its way to France before 1789. General Washington, with his Old World grace and
status as the rebel figurehead, appealed to the European taste for nobility and honor; he was something of a security blanket for homesick officers. His place secure in American history, the foreigners augmented the swirling esteem for the first national hero.

For every Chastellux or Riedesel, there were one hundred Soissonnais or Waldeckers. These men, although a silent majority in the pages of history, were the true carriers of the American spirit back to Europe. Tales of savagery, slavery, tolerance, and prosperity filtered through the streets of villages throughout France and Germany. The soldiers’ experiences dispelled some rumors and confirmed others, and the largely positive reports spurred future immigrants to action.

The French and the Germans had very different experiences in America. Imprisonment, hardship, the climate, local citizens, battle, expectations, leisure, and nationality combined to give each man a unique impression of the young United States. The accuracy of these impressions was secondary to their impact upon the soldiers’ lives and the window they opened into the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic world.
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