
REVOLUTIONARY NETWORKS IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS

Heather Freund
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

In Paris in 1790, the Marquis de Lafayette gave the key to the Bastille to Thomas Paine to present to George Washington. Paine wrote to Washington that it was “an early trophy of the Spoils of Despotism and the first ripe fruits of American principles transplanted into Europe...That the principles of America opened the Bastile [sic] is not to be doubted, and therefore the Key comes to the right place.”¹ Paine and Lafayette knew each other, and Washington, through their participation in the American Revolution. Thus, the episode was a symbolic token of the connection between the American and French Revolutions and tangible evidence of lasting personal relationships in the Age of Revolutions.² Along with Thaddeus Kosciuszko, Paine, and Lafayette are examples of individuals who participated in more than one theater of this revolutionary age. This paper focuses on how their international fights for liberty resulted in complex notions of personal and national identity and connections between revolutions. The fact that these individuals and others participated in more than one theater of the Age of Democratic Revolutions and recognized it as a time of great promise demonstrates its significance and the importance of understanding the dynamics of the period from both an individual and international perspective.

Historians often refer to the period from approximately 1776-1830 as the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, a time in which people on both sides of the Atlantic rebelled in the name of liberty and equality, amongst other things. There were struggles for freedom in the North American colonies, France, Haiti, Ireland, Poland, Greece, Latin America, and elsewhere. Some writers, like Paine, considered themselves to be living in a revolutionary era, but the term Age of

¹ To George Washington, May 1, 1790, in *Thomas Paine Collected Writings*, Compiled by Eric Foner (New York: The Library of America, Inc. 1995), 374.

² George Spater, “American Revolutionary, 1774-89” in *Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine*, ed. Ian Dyck, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 51-57.

Revolutions is a modern historiographical construct. Many scholars have linked the various revolts and revolutions of the age, whether because they occurred at the same time, were inspired by similar ideals, included some of the same leaders, or all of the above. Contemporaries saw attempts to make profound socio-political changes in the American Revolution and later revolutions and revolts. Revolution will be defined here as profound change. A revolt represents a failed attempt at revolution, as in the case of Poland, but is included in the Age of Revolutions because similar ideologies were present and revolutionary leaders sought assistance from other revolutionary governments and individuals.

In addition to local causes, many revolutions and revolts clung to some of the language of the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that began before and continued through the Age of Revolutions. It was marked partially by a burgeoning public sphere due to higher literacy rates, which meant information could spread more quickly and easily. The American Revolution was the first in this era of revolutions, and while it may seem to pale in scope and violence in comparison to the French Revolution, it stands out due to its relative success. It succeeded in overthrowing colonial rule and establishing a republican government in a time of monarchies. It was an inspiration for others seeking freedom and sovereignty for their country or people. The monarchy was never restored and, although the young United States did not abolish slavery, compared to the outcomes of many contemporary revolutions and the place of the United States in the modern world, its significant achievements should not be undervalued.

The American Revolution featured many foreigners, typically depicted in historical literature and contemporary accounts as looking for adventure or military experience.³ Some, however, were genuinely inspired by the ideals of the revolutions, and saw their own struggles reflected in the cause of another people. Regardless of their initial motivations, some of these Atlantic revolutionaries spent the rest of their lives fighting for liberty. Lloyd Kramer writes that, “individuals can never be separated from the social, cultural, and symbolic world in which they act and construct an identity for themselves.” He also suggests that “the meanings of ideas, individuals, or national cultures emerge through relations of similarity and difference with other ideas, individuals, or national cultures,” and interactive environments and different encounters

³ I am defining foreigners as non-Americans, although I realize that Paine was only somewhat a foreigner in the sense that both he and the colonists were British.

create identity, including revolutionary identity.⁴ It seems Lafayette, Kosciuszko, and Paine developed an identity partially defined by their experiences in national revolutions, but their interpretations of events were influenced by their backgrounds in their home countries. They encountered new people, new ideas, and new environments that they had to relate to previous experiences and fit into their conception of themselves as individuals in a revolutionary age.

Atlantic revolutionaries were men who left their homelands to fight for a revolutionary cause, an act that would not necessarily aid their domestic interests, and for which they could die, as many did. They came from a variety of places and many seemed to be looking for a fresh start and/or military experience. In focusing on the Marquis de Lafayette of France, Thaddeus Kosciuszko of Poland, and Thomas Paine of England in the American Revolution, this paper will analyze their motivations for getting involved, socio-political ideologies, impressions of the colonies and other revolutionaries, impact on the revolution, and international fight for liberty after the American Revolution. Historians have looked at the involvement of specific individuals or countries, especially France, in the American Revolution, but no historian has examined the experiences of a group of Atlantic revolutionaries from different countries, each with different backgrounds, motives, and goals. The individuals examined in this paper chose to participate in the American Revolution, even in direct defiance of their home government, and they survived the war to become international sons of liberty by participating in other revolutions and helping to create an informal revolutionary network through correspondence and through meetings in cities such as Paris. Based on their letters, memoirs, and pamphlets, it is clear their motivations extended beyond a desire for military glory they were aware that they were living and participating in a unique era. My research indicates that Lafayette, Paine, and Kosciuszko were committed to spreading liberty and that involvement in the American Revolution had a defining impact on their lives and helped lead to the development of revolutionary networks in the Age of Revolutions.

Few historical studies have linked the revolutions through individuals from different countries or analyzed the development of such personal revolutionary networks. Biographers mention friendships among revolutionaries, but do not analyze them as links connecting revolutions. The American Revolution was the first in the age of democratic revolutions, so it is

⁴ Lloyd Kramer, *Lafayette in Two Worlds: Public Cultures and Personal Identities in an Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2, 12.

a useful starting point for a broader analysis of revolutionary ties. Analyzing the acts of individuals and their personal networks enables the historian to examine ties between the famous American and French Revolutions, and other lesser-known struggles inspired by the same principles of liberty and equality. Lafayette, Kosciuszko, and Paine all started with the American Revolution and participated in other revolutions after it, becoming part of a revolutionary network and developing identities partially shaped by fighting for liberty in different countries.

While contemporaries saw links between the Atlantic Revolutions, historians have only been discussing them seriously for about 50 years. Many historical studies of the Age of Revolutions focus heavily on the promise of the age, particularly during the American Revolution and the beginning of the French. R. R. Palmer discussed north Atlantic and European revolutions and the broader revolutionary environment in his classic two-volume study, *The Age of the Democratic Revolutions*.⁵ He noted the breakdown of bonds between ruler and ruled and between social classes, resulting in the creation of a revolutionary mentality. He regarded this period as “one big revolutionary agitation” where many countries had their own revolutions with their own causes, but in which people began to oppose government ruled by privileged classes.⁶ Wim Klooster focuses his comparative study of Atlantic revolutions on the American, French, Haitian, and Latin American revolutions. He defines revolution as “violent regime change.” He emphasizes four main elements of revolutions in this period: they have to be understood in terms of international politics; none was foreordained; they resembled civil wars due to divided loyalties; and democracy was the “temporary by-product of some insurrections,” not the lens through which to see them as Palmer did.⁷ Susan Dunn has specifically compared the American and French Revolutions. She notes familiar similarities in ideology and commonly cited differences in history, but that both sets of revolutionary leaders wanted representative government.⁸

⁵ R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959-1964).

⁶ Palmer, *Age of Democratic Revolution*, 1: 4-5, quote p. 7. His study largely ignores Haiti and stops in 1800, leaving out the Latin American revolutions, but includes the Polish Revolt. For his definition of revolution, which is politically focused, see 1:21.

⁷ Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1-2, 175 note 2.

⁸ Susan Dunn, *Sister Revolutions: French Lightning, American Light* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), 6, 11-12. Dunn notes that the French had to address their feudal past, while the Americans

Hannah Arendt focused on the place of violence in war and revolution, but also on the centrality of the social question and the hope that comes with revolution. She wrote: “Crucial...to any understanding of revolutions in the modern age is that the idea of freedom and the experience of a new beginning should coincide.”⁹ This would link her with Palmer in one element, and fits well with the views of Atlantic Revolutionaries who were trying to help different countries begin anew. Other scholars have also emphasized social interests in the revolutions. Adam Zamoyski’s *Holy Madness* argues that people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century conceived of political life in religious terms and thus interpreted the Age of Revolutions in this light.¹⁰ Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh argue that sailors and slaves spread revolutionary ideas in the age of Atlantic revolutions and were responsible for much of the resistance and agitation in the North American colonies. They describe “vectors of revolution” involving sailors in North America and the Caribbean, slaves and free blacks in the British army, and the abolitionist movement, placing non-elites at the center of how revolution spread in the Atlantic.¹¹ Historians generally acknowledge different focuses for different revolutionary environments. Much like the figures examined in this study, diverse backgrounds brought different motivations and priorities.

The American Revolution in Europe

Depictions of the British North American colonies in Europe generally emphasized them as exotic and the people as innocent. They were a place where one could start fresh, unencumbered by their past or the trappings of a society based on privilege. Zamoyski suggests

did not have to overcome hereditary social orders and were already accustomed to representative government. The French Revolution was thus more profound in its change, as there was no tradition of rights, unlike in America. Dunn suggests the Americans were more concerned with freedom and political independence, while the French wanted equality.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 22-24, 55, 180, 29. She argues that the social question only developed a revolutionary role when men began doubting that “poverty was inherent in the human condition.” She rooted this realization more in the American colonial experience and drew no link between the American and European revolutions, aside from highlighting the link between property and freedom in both revolutions.

¹⁰ Adam Zamoyski, *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots, and Revolutionaries, 1776-1871* (New York: Viking, 2000). Zamoyski interprets even seemingly secular aims as religious ones, an interpretation that begs further scrutiny in light of the very anti-religious elements in some revolutions, particularly the French.

¹¹ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000), 216, 241-247. This approach is significant in giving agency to non-elite actors, but their evidence is sparse at times.

that Europeans viewed the American revolt as a “dramatic condemnation of the evils of Europe” and carrying out European hopes. Europe was old and corrupt, while America was new and pure. The contemporary French writer Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, “The Americans appeared to be doing no more than carrying out what our writers had conceived,” suggesting a link to the European Enlightenment, whose ideology was clear in revolutionary documents such as the Declaration of Independence and in European revolutions later.¹² Palmer wrote that, “The first and greatest effect of the American Revolution in Europe was to make Europeans believe, or rather feel...that they lived in a rare era of momentous change” and that it “proved that the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment might be put into practice.” It was, as de Tocqueville had mentioned, the application of intellectual ideas to a real situation, including notions of liberty, equality, the rights of man, religious freedom, and popular sovereignty.¹³

Palmer described the importance of the European public sphere in enabling news of the American Revolution to spread. It spread through the press, reading clubs, Masonic lodges, the stories of soldiers returning from America, and through propaganda the Americans distributed. He also discussed the large number of writings on America in Europe. Part of the reason some Europeans supported the Americans was due to their hatred of the English. That motivated some soldiers to fight. England was a tyrant not only to the American colonists, but to its European enemies as well.¹⁴ It was a different cause to the fight for liberty, mixing international relations with ideology. American ambassadors used this tension between England and the continent as it tried to gain allies. According to Charles Toth, “The American declaration that all men were created equal produced an exciting response, and the intellectual community proceeded to lecture the despotic regimes that the shackles of tyranny would soon be severed.”¹⁵ The Americans were the innocent colonies fighting for liberty against the powerful and tyrannical British Empire. They were sending a message that there was an alternative to the old order. Paul Cheney sees French support for the American Revolution as “a sublimated form of nationally

¹² Zamoyski, *Holy Madness*, 10-11, 20.

¹³ Palmer, 1: 239.

¹⁴ England was at war with various European countries through much of the eighteenth century, mostly the Bourbon monarchies. England achieved a significant victory in the Seven Years War (1756-1763), receiving large territorial holdings from France and Spain and significantly expanding the British Empire. Lasting enmity led France to seek opportunities to regain its colonies from the British, such as by supporting the rebellious colonial Americans.

¹⁵ Charles W. Toth, ed., preface to *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité: The American Revolution & the European Response* (Troy, NY : The Whitston Publishing Company, 1989), 5.

specific dissatisfaction and reformist impulses” like other scholars, but also argues that French ambitions were part of “a broader philosophical history of commerce.” An enlightened, independent society in America would progress faster and thus make for a more profitable trading relationship.¹⁶ Cooperation between the Americans and French was both economic and ideological, though there were sharp contrasts between the two countries.

Contemporaries described great enthusiasm in Paris for the revolution. American agent Silas Deane thought the French translation of *Common Sense* sold more copies than the original.¹⁷ He was in charge of recruiting foreign officers, engineers, supplies, and other assistance for the American cause. Men across Europe joined the American war, particularly to help train the army. Zamoyski writes that the first foreign volunteers for the American Revolution were French—men looking for glory, officers approved by the French government to help the Americans (despite supposed French neutrality), and professional soldiers without prospects in France. Lafayette fell into the last category, with no hope of gaining experience and glory as a soldier since France was at peace. The largest number of volunteers came from Poland, knowing no English but needing to escape after their own failed rebellion. Kasimir Pulaski distinguished himself and died in battle. Kosciuszko, however, survived and proved instrumental in the colonial victory as an engineer.¹⁸

According to Zofia Libiszowska, there was widespread support in Poland for the American Revolution initially, though the country was neutral due to its trade relationship with Britain. The press reported news from the colonial conflict beginning as early as 1763, relating America’s problems with Poland’s own struggles against foreign powers such as Prussia and Russia. Contemporary writers referred to it as a revolution, by which they meant, “a great social-political change based on strong ideological foundations.” Writers felt certain American republicanism would defeat monarchy.¹⁹ As a liberal, Enlightened country interested in granting more rights and freedom, they related to the ideals of the American Revolution.

¹⁶ Paul Cheney, “A False Dawn for Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism? Franco-American Trade during the American War of Independence,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2006): 468, 471.

¹⁷ George Spater, “American Revolutionary, 1774-89” in *Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine*, ed. Ian Dyck, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 29.

¹⁸ Zamoyski, *Holy Madness*, 20 and 28.

¹⁹ Zofia Libiszowska, “Polish Opinion of the American Revolution,” *Polish American Studies* 34, no. 1 (1977): 5-9, quote p. 9.

The individuals who volunteered to fight with the Americans came from these traditions of hatred of the English, fascination with America and its promise, and belief in the ideals of the revolution. Historian Gary Nash depicts them as “part of larger transatlantic struggles for universal rights” such as freedom against oppression.²⁰ Their struggle was also anti-imperialist, though cast in a larger language of rights. Rediker writes that the descriptor “citizen of the world” was used to “capture the unity of the age of revolution.”²¹ It suggests further the complex ideas of citizenship and nationalism in this pre-nation period. These phrases certainly would have described people such as Lafayette, Kosciuszko, and Paine at various points in their journeys on the “boisterous sea of liberty.”²² Paine would eventually possess multiple citizenships. Lafayette’s and Kosciuszko’s commitment to fighting for liberty after the American Revolution ended demonstrates how it became an integral part of their identity.

Once they arrived in America, each of the individuals examined here demonstrated a strong commitment to the cause of liberty. Although their writings suggest they were aware of one another and met, it does not seem they directly corresponded, though they did interact with other foreign revolutionaries such as Baron de Kalb and the Comte de Rochambeau. They seem to have socialized more in Paris following the American Revolution. Their drive to defend liberty after their experiences in one revolution is indicative of their place as professional revolutionaries. None was considered an intellectual, but each was described as “disinterested,” referring to an Enlightenment ideal of impartiality and lack of self-seeking interest. Perhaps that was part of their broad appeal. Kosciuszko was a professional soldier, Lafayette was a nobleman willing to learn from the Americans, and Paine was a propagandist able to put the issues and ideology of the revolution into terms ordinary people could understand.

Motivations

Thomas Paine was the first of the three revolutionaries in this study to arrive in the North American colonies. He came to Philadelphia in 1774, before the revolution started, but at a time when tensions between the colonies and Britain were high. He was a 37-year-old English artisan, a stay-maker and former excise officer who, according to Foner, sought “a new

²⁰ Gary B. Nash and Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *Friends of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson, Tadeusz Kościuszko, and Agrippa Hull* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 2.

²¹ Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 246.

²² Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Nash and Hodges, *Friends of Liberty*, 6.

beginning in America” and an escape from a life “of almost unrelenting failure.”²³ Personally and professionally, Paine struggled until he discovered his talent as a journalist and propagandist for the American colonies. He was involved in local politics as a member of the Lewes Town Council and the Headstrong Club debating society. Politically, he was a Whig, which suggests a focus on the tradition begun with the Glorious Revolution of constitutional monarchy and representative government through Parliament. There are no writings available from before Paine migrated to the colonies other than his pamphlet “The Case of the Officers of the Excise” (1772), written as part of the national campaign to improve salaries; he was asked by his fellow officers to compose the pamphlet, suggesting some confidence in his writing abilities. The piece was not political per se, but contained roots of ideas he would elaborate on in later political writings, including a concern that poverty would result in corrupted morals and neglect of duty. He also communicates a distaste for the rich and English society.²⁴ In this sense, he fit quite well with the sentiments of radical colonists.

Paine’s views on freedom were similar to the radical Levellers of the English Revolution of the 1640s. Paine wrote, “I consider freedom as personal property” and “where I use the words *freedom or rights*, I desire to be understood to mean a perfect equality of them.” This explains his interest in the American struggle and his opposition to practices such as slavery. Equality, according to historian and Paine biographer Eric Foner, was a “protest-ideal” in eighteenth-century European terms and “was a powerful weapon of attack against vast and abusive privileges and inequalities.”²⁵ This fits directly with the use of the term by Paine and others during and after the American Revolution. He spent much of his life challenging hierarchy and asserting equal rights for all.

Paine spent time in London promoting the cause of the excise officers, but ultimately failed. However, it was here that he met Benjamin Franklin, who helped him gain passage and contacts in America. When he traveled to America, Paine had letters of introduction from one of the leading men in colonial America, who would put him in contact with men who could help him gain employment and make a fresh start in the world. According to Eric Foner, Paine would

²³ Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

²⁴ Foner, *Tom Paine*, 14-15; Spater, “American Revolutionary,” 20-21; Paine, “Case of the Officers of Excise” (1772) in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, collected and edited by Philip S. Foner (New York: The Citadel Press, 1945), 2: 3-15.

²⁵ Foner, *Tom Paine*, 143, 124.

likely have considered America “a land of abundance and equality, where individual merit, not social rank, set the limits of man’s achievement.”²⁶ Such conceptions were common in Europe and among immigrant populations. It would have appealed particularly well to Paine’s social and political ideology. Such egalitarianism also seemed to make the American cause more appealing to foreigners such as Paine.

Thaddeus Kosciuszko’s path to the rebellious colonies was like Paine’s in that he had no prospects in his home country of Poland, but the circumstances were different. Although a nobleman, the Polish nobility was broad compared to other countries and membership did not necessarily mean great wealth. Both his parents died by the time he was 12 and his family’s feudal holdings were dwindling. He chose to leave after a failed attempt to elope with the daughter of a provincial governor—Kosciuszko’s status was not high enough as a member of the lower gentry. He had military training and tried unsuccessfully to join the army of the king of Saxony before answering the call for military engineers to join the American cause. His biographers debate whether he was recruited or had letters of recommendation, but the account given by Alex Storozynski in a recent biography suggests neither was true, based on Kosciuszko description of his experiences. Storozynski instead suggests that the American cause appealed to Kosciuszko and he traveled to the New World with other foreigners, presenting himself to Benjamin Franklin and counting on his merits to earn him a place in the army. After interviewing the 30-year-old Polish volunteer for his sincerity and skill, Franklin recommended him to Congress.²⁷

Although Kosciuszko left Poland due to heartbreak, he, like Paine, was influenced by Enlightenment ideals and sought to see them influence his own country. He followed other Poles such as Casimir Pulaski and hoped to “either distinguish myself, or end my misery.” He eventually wished to serve his country and bring happiness, which, according to Storozynski, he associated with freedom.²⁸ Nash writes that he wanted to define his life and “left Europe as a

²⁶ Foner, *Tom Paine*, 16.

²⁷ James S. Pula, *Thaddeus Kościuszko: The Purest Son of Liberty* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1999), 30-33; Alex Storozynski, *The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 16-21; See also Miecislau Haiman, *Kosciuszko in the American Revolution* (Boston, MA: Gregg Press, 1972) for this debate over the circumstances under which Kosciuszko came to the American colonies.

²⁸ Storozynski, *The Peasant Prince*, 16.

dedicated son of the Enlightenment” and “cast himself as an international friend of liberty.”²⁹ In this endeavor, he joined Paine, Lafayette, and others. According to Pula, Kosciuszko was a man whose cultural and personal background “forged a personality rich in patriotism, support for national self-government, advocacy of political liberty and personal freedom, tolerance for divergent religious and cultural traditions, and a general humanitarianism spanning all classes and varieties of people.”³⁰ He was not just a foreign adventurer. He believed in liberty and freedom and wanted a chance to prove himself in a worthy cause.

When the Marquis de Lafayette made the decision to travel to America, he was a nineteen-year-old nobleman with a young wife who was pregnant with their second child. He was orphaned at age 12, like Kosciuszko, and lived with his wife and her parents. His decision to leave went against the wishes of his in-laws and the king. He kept his plans a secret, and when people found out he almost did not go. Some historians, such as biographer Louis Gottschalk, have argued that Lafayette came to the rebellious colonies more for glory and military experience than an interest in liberty. They suggest that he was bored with court culture and wanted military experience, so he jumped at the chance to aid the American cause. Kramer disagrees that Lafayette’s motives were completely self-serving, and the nobleman’s letters and memoirs suggest he was interested in the cause of liberty in addition to earning glory and honor. In Paris, he became familiar with the colonial revolt at a dinner for King George III’s brother, the Duke of Gloucester, and through his interactions with Benjamin Franklin and other Americans. He defended the American “insurgents” and volunteered for service, paying his own costs, unlike other foreigners. Lafayette wrote about the American Revolution in his *Memoir of 1779*: “Never before had such a glorious cause attracted the attention of mankind; it was the final struggle of liberty, and its defeat would have left it neither asylum nor hope.” Even if he only wanted to achieve glory, he would not have suffered the privations of Valley Forge or served as a volunteer rather than a paid officer if he did not believe in the cause. He may have been bored at Versailles and eager to earn military experience, but he chose to come to America for that adventure and experience.³¹

²⁹ Nash and Hodges, 34.

³⁰ Pula, *Thaddeus Kosciuszko*, 36.

³¹ Marquis de Lafayette, “Memoir of 1779” in Stanley J. Idszerda, ed., *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution, Selected Letters and Papers 1776-1790* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 1: 7-13, quote p. 7. All documentary sources for Lafayette are from the Idszerda volumes, but

Lafayette's service was mutually beneficial to him and the Americans. He received the prospect of military experience and an opportunity to distinguish himself. The Americans gained a Frenchman with rank and connections as they sought French support. Silas Deane stated that Lafayette was offered a generalship due to his high birth, alliances, reputation, disinterestedness, "and above all his Zeal for the Liberty of our Provinces." Lafayette recognized the American Revolution was a different kind of politics and war than existed in Europe; he was interested in learning about this republican warfare. His presence in the Continental Army, scholar Lloyd Kramer notes, "lent an aura of legitimacy and of European support to the American struggle." He traveled to the American colonies with Baron de Kalb, his German mentor, and other French officers. In a letter to his wife, Adrienne, he referred to himself as a "defender of that liberty which I idolize...I bring only my sincerity and my goodwill, and no personal ambition or selfish interest. In striving for my own glory, I work for their happiness." Lafayette connected America's happiness with that "of all mankind."³² His quest for honor and glory was through the fight for liberty. It was not simply gaining territory for a prince, but fighting to free a land and people from a tyrannical king. Historians who have simply classified his goals as either self-serving or virtuous miss the combined motivations that were involved for Lafayette.

Although representing different social and national backgrounds, Paine, Kosciuszko, and Lafayette had some overlapping motives for traveling to the colonies as "friends of liberty." Each strove to serve with distinction in America. Paine was starting over, while Kosciuszko and Lafayette were trying to gain honor that would lead to prestige back home. Benjamin Franklin helped each of them become acquainted with and gain entry into colonial American society. All expressed a desire to promote freedom and liberty while making a place for themselves in the world. With their diverse backgrounds, it is important to examine how they defined these revolutionary ideologies.

each volume will be cited in modified full form due to different associate and assistant editors for each volume.

³² Silas Deane, "Agreement with Deane," December 7, 1776, in Idszerda, *Lafayette in the Age of American Revolution*, 1: 17; Lafayette to Adrienne de Noailles de Lafayette, June 7, 1777, 1: 58 ; Kramer, *Lafayette in Two Worlds*, 17-18.

Observations and Ideologies

When they arrived in the colonies, Paine, Lafayette, and Kosciuszko encountered a different culture. Even to the Englishman Paine, the colonies represented a different version of British society (which was part of what led to the imperial crisis). Each came with idealized notions of American promise, and the international revolutionaries responded favorably to the seemingly egalitarian society free from feudal hierarchy and royal privilege. This aligned well with Enlightenment notions of an ideal society. Slavery was the main exception to this impression, a practice each wrote about with disapproval. Their first step upon arriving in America was to establish themselves with employment (Paine) or a military commission (Lafayette and Kosciuszko).

Paine and America benefited from one another. He came “with a unique combination of resentments against the English system of government and opportunities for immediate self-advancement and self-expression.” He favored the American version of the English system and, with recommendations from Franklin, received offers of employment as a tutor and was approached to help the struggling *Pennsylvania Magazine*; he was very successful as its editor. He arrived with the intention of setting up an academy, but never did so.³³ He quickly became involved in colonial politics and grievances against Britain. His first major writing in the colonies, though, was against slavery. Published in March 1775, “African Slavery in America” called the slave trade immoral and highlighted the hypocrisy of American demands for rights, asking people to consider “with what consistency, or decency they complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery.” This argument was common in Britain among those opposed to the colonial cause, but Paine considered the slave trade Britain’s fault and a justifiable American grievance. Two weeks later, the first American anti-slavery society was formed, which Paine immediately joined.³⁴ He already conceived of an independent America, long before the colonists did.³⁵

Paine, according to Foner, was likely influenced by the writings of English radicals such as Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, and James Burgh, who believed the “liberty and virtue” of England was deteriorating due to corruption, a common sentiment among those who supported

³³ Foner, *Tom Paine*, 17, 72.

³⁴ Thomas Paine, “African Slavery in America” (March 1775) in Philip Foner, *Complete Writings* 2: 15-19, quote p. 18.

³⁵ Paine, “A Serious Thought” (October 1775) in Foner, 2: 19-20.

the colonial rebellion.³⁶ Paine's most famous political manifesto is *Common Sense*, in which he attacked the English constitution, monarchy, and tyranny and promoted the cause of American independence. He referred to America as "the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from *every part* of Europe."³⁷ The ideas expressed in this 1776 pamphlet were repeated and expanded in future writings during the American Revolution and after. He went beyond a demand for the "rights of Englishmen" to broader claims of equality, liberty, and freedom. He defended the republic as a form of government, even for a large country. He considered this argument to be even more important than that for independence.³⁸ He believed in government policies for the greater good, not the interests of an individual or a faction—indeed warning against such practices. He was a radical, much like Kosciuszko.

Kosciuszko's radicalism came from his experiences studying in Paris and exposure to Enlightenment ideas there and in his native Poland. As a Polish noble, he was a member of the "most politically free of any nobility before the French Revolution," who prided themselves on their perceived equality, including freedom of speech and veto power over the king.³⁹ Thus, he could identify with American principles, even if, according to Pula, he only came to America "through dire necessity." Kosciuszko and Lafayette experienced initial difficulties receiving commissions as officers due to all the foreign adventurers falsely claiming to be military geniuses looking for high salaries and glory. Kosciuszko presented himself to Congress as a volunteer, but had to prove himself first, which he did in a plan to fortify the Delaware River. He was then appointed as colonel of engineers in the Continental Army.⁴⁰ Initially, he wrote, and perhaps spoke, in French. Eventually, his writings appear in broken English. He spoke highly of American troops in such cases as the siege of Ninety-Six in 1781, writing that they "will afford the Example what Fortitude, persevirence [sic], Courage and exertions of the troops can performe."⁴¹ He valued these traits and practiced them, it seems, repeatedly described by contemporaries as humble and well-liked.

³⁶ Foner, *Tom Paine*, 7-9.

³⁷ Thomas Paine, "Common Sense," in *Thomas Paine Collected Writings*. Compiled by Eric Foner. (New York: The Library of America, Inc. 1995), 23.

³⁸ Foner, *Tom Paine*, 75.

³⁹ Nash and Hodges, 25.

⁴⁰ Pula, 39-40; Nash and Hodges, 35.

⁴¹ Quoted in Haiman, *Kosciuszko in the American Revolution*, 115. The Siege of Ninety-Six refers to an altercation between British and American forces while Kosciuszko served as a field engineer under Greene in the southern department. It ended in American defeat.

Like Paine, Kosciuszko opposed slavery. He had a black servant, Agrippa Hull, but he was a free man and was treated as a close friend rather than a slave, including when they were in the south with General Greene's army. When Colonel John Laurens died and his effects were distributed, Kosciuszko demonstrated his compassion for slaves in writing to Greene that some of Laurens' clothes should be given to the deceased man's "two negroes...they are naked [sic]...and their skin can bear as well as ours good things." He did not discriminate based on skin color or nationality, feeding British soldiers from his own poor rations and complaining to General Leslie when another general would not do a prisoner exchange with a mulatto soldier by appealing to Leslie's honor.⁴² Kosciuszko had experience with serfdom in Poland, which he also wanted to end. His will provided funds to free some of Thomas Jefferson's slaves, though Jefferson never carried out his wishes.⁴³ Kosciuszko became close friends with General Horatio Gates, who requested him on his southern campaign not only because of his skill and his friendship, but also because he was "a pure republican." He "knew what the fight was all about. The goal was not merely a victory on the field of battle, but the realization of a political ideal."⁴⁴ He fought for liberty, in essence not only for the United States, but for his native Poland as well. He would use his exposure to revolutionary ideology in America to develop a radical philosophy, which he applied to his attempted revolution in Poland a decade after the American Revolution ended.

Lafayette had a similar experience to Kosciuszko upon first arriving in the colonies, but his willingness to enlist purely as a volunteer without pay set him apart from other foreign revolutionaries. He learned English quickly and fought on America's terms, without trying to impose European standards on them. This attitude endeared him to the Americans, especially George Washington, for whom he initially served as an aide de camp; Lafayette later named a son after him.⁴⁵ Washington famously wrote, "I do most devoutly wish that we had not a single Foreigner among us, except the Marquis de La Fayette, who acts upon very different principles

⁴² Thaddeus Kosciuszko, Kosciuszko to Greene, 2 Sept 1782, in *Autograph Letters of Thaddeus Kosciuszko in the American Revolution*, Edited by Metchie J. E. Budka (Chicago: The Polish Museum of America, 1977), 77; Haiman, 97; Kosciuszko to General Leslie, Nov 28, 1782, *Autograph Letters*, p. 148.

⁴³ Nash and Hodges describe the situation of Kosciuszko's will at length.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Pula, 150.

⁴⁵ Kramer, 20-21.

than those which govern the rest.”⁴⁶ Rather than spending most of his time seeking high commissions, he tried to learn from his military teachers, so his comparative humility won over the skeptical generals and helped him fit into American society. Lafayette described Americans in a letter to his wife upon first arriving: “A simplicity of manners, a desire to please, a love of country and liberty, and an easy tranquility prevail everywhere here.”⁴⁷ He compared it to England, only simpler and cleaner. The French seem to have been treated badly due to all the foreign adventurers, but Lafayette nonetheless maintained a positive outlook, soon losing his foreigner status and acquiring an American identity mixed with his native French. This is in contrast to Pulaski and Kosciuszko, who always retained their Polish identity.⁴⁸

Lafayette frequently referred to glory, honor, and liberty in his correspondence. His meanings were the same as for the Americans, though he, like Paine and Kosciuszko, opposed slavery. He even proposed a plan to General Washington to benefit “the Black Part of Mankind” by buying a small estate for “free Negroes” to work as tenants. He later purchased a plantation in the colony of French Guyana and prohibited the selling or exchanging of “negroes” to experiment with “Enfranchising Our Negro Brethren.”⁴⁹ Lafayette desired a command in order to earn glory in the fight for liberty. To him and other European aristocrats, liberty “meant freedom from arbitrary, despotic, or tyrannical government,” and aristocrats had a duty to oppose tyranny and defend personal liberty. Fighting for the American cause thus fit his values. Although he pondered the ideals of the revolution before he arrived, he was quickly “won over by American republican habits and ideas,” and he embraced his role as “The emblem of liberty” in France.⁵⁰ Lafayette saw the principle of equality as central to the revolution, with the army’s motivation as its greatest virtue. According to Kramer, “Americans meant as much to him as he

⁴⁶ George Washington to Gouverneur Morris, 1778, in *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution, Selected Letters and Papers, 1776-1780*, Stanley J. Idzerda, Roger E. Smith, Linda J. Pike, and Mary Ann Quinn (eds.) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 2: 116-7.

⁴⁷ Lafayette, 1: 61.

⁴⁸ Lafayette, 1: 61-98. Other Frenchmen in his group had a less positive impression. Du Rousseau de Fayolle described the Americans as unlike what they heard about in France—divided, vain, undisciplined, and ignorant. Chevalier Dubuysson referred to Americans as cowards for not fighting for their own liberty and suggested that Europe did not know the causes of the war.

⁴⁹ Lafayette, to George Washington, Feb 5, 1783 in *Lafayette in the Age of American Revolution*, Stanley Idzerda, Robert Rhodes Crout, Carol Godschall and Leslie Wharton, (eds.), 5: 91-92; Lafayette to Henry Knox, June 12, 1785, 5: 330.

⁵⁰ Idzerda, Introduction to *Lafayette in the Age of American Revolution*, 1: xxiii-xxvi.

meant to them.”⁵¹ He was not fighting just to escape France or for pure self-interest, but for American ideals.

For all the differences in their backgrounds, Kosciuszko, Lafayette, and Paine could all agree on the importance of liberty and equality and the evils of slavery. This reflected their life experiences and belief in Enlightenment ideas of liberty and equality. They were critical of people fighting a war for freedom while simultaneously holding slaves, but they seemed optimistic that slavery could end after the revolution. Their background was evident in their manners of address: they referred to George Washington and other important colonial leaders as “his excellency” and other similar titles of deference true in monarchical societies, and perhaps eighteenth-century Europe more broadly. This did not change over time, demonstrating the respect they had for the Americans. The letters and other writings of the “Atlantic revolutionaries” demonstrate both their initial impressions of America and revolution and provide insight into their ideologies and the influence of their revolutionary experiences on them.

Contributions to the Revolution

All three Atlantic revolutionaries served in the army in different capacities. Lafayette became a general, Kosciuszko was a military engineer, and Paine is best known as a pamphleteer and propagandist. Paine briefly joined the army as an aide de camp in 1776, but left and began writing *The Crisis* papers in December 1776, which helped inspire a dispirited and deserting army and motivated them to continue fighting for independence. He was then elected by the Continental Congress to serve as Secretary to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, where he helped secure the alliance with France in 1778-9.⁵² Paine is most famous for writing the pamphlet *Common Sense*, which galvanized the colonial population into believing that reconciliation with England was impossible and they could prosper as an independent United States. As Foner points out, “There were numerous political writers of the eighteenth century far more original and sophisticated in their ideas. What made Paine unique was that he forged a new political language.”⁵³ The colonies had great thinkers like Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, but to unite a divided colonial population, they needed someone who could speak the language of the everyman. Paine was endlessly optimistic about mankind, calling for unity in the colonies: “Let

⁵¹ Kramer, 19-26.

⁵² Spater, 30-31.

⁵³ Foner, *Tom Paine*, xxxi.

the names of Whig and Tory be extinct; and let none other be heard among us, than those of a *good citizen, an open and resolute friend, and a virtuous supporter of the RIGHTS of MANKIND and of the FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES OF AMERICA.*”⁵⁴ He and Lafayette both pushed for a strong national government, recognizing the fragile union in the colonies and their vulnerability to European powers as a result.

Paine purposefully timed the release of his pamphlet with the king’s speech in January 1776 rejecting colonial attempts at reconciliation. Paine wrote to Henry Laurens that he “saw the people of this country were all wrong, by an ill-placed confidence.” Paine believed Britain planned to conquer, not compromise with its rebellious colonies. He was critical of the colonial attachment to the mother country. He commented that his pamphlet enabled previously dangerous discussion of independence and “The light which that performance threw upon the subject gave a turn to the politics of America which enabled her to stand her ground.” He even named the new nation the “United States of America.”⁵⁵ He changed the political conversation from conciliation to independence and encouraged people to realize that, with the king no longer listening, it was their only option.

Paine used his talents with the English language to produce written arguments for independence. As an engineer, Kosciuszko had a more visible, but equally critical, impact on the American Revolution. His services were requested by major American generals, particularly Horatio Gates and Nathanael Greene, but also George Washington.⁵⁶ Kosciuszko served in the Northern, Middle, and Southern departments, preferring active duty in the field. His first major service was to improve the defenses at Fort Ticonderoga. Although the Continental Army was forced to retreat, he helped delay the pursuing British army. His efforts were praised. Pula credits Kosciuszko with making the turning point of the revolution—the American victory at Saratoga—possible. His most lasting contribution, however, was designing and constructing West Point. Kosciuszko was appointed chief engineer by Gates and the Board of War, taking over for a French engineer, Lieutenant Colonel Louis Radiere. He spent 28 months directing the building of fortifications considered vital to the protection of New York. Gates and others

⁵⁴ Paine, “Common Sense,” in Eric Foner, 54.

⁵⁵ Paine, To Henry Laurens, Jan 14, 1779, in Philip Foner, 2: 1162-3; Ian Dyck, “Local Attachments, National Identities and World Citizenship in the Thought of Thomas Paine,” *History Workshop* no. 35 (1993): 121.

⁵⁶ Pula, 40.

preferred Kosciuszko over the Frenchman due both to his skill and his temperament; he treated people with respect, so there were fewer conflicts under his management. Although his friends sometimes sought promotions for Kosciuszko, he was timid and averse to conflict. He was confident, but did not promote himself, writing to Gates, “I am not actuated by Interest, otherwise than the ambition of signaling myself in this War.” He wanted to serve “the public cause” first and foremost, rather than spend his time chasing titles and recognition.⁵⁷ In another letter to Colonel Troup, he wrote “if you see that my promotion will make a great many Jealous, tell the General [Gates] that I will not accept of one because I prefer peace more than the greatest Rank in the World.”⁵⁸ This attitude hurt his ability to advance through the ranks, but endeared him to his fellow officers and soldiers.⁵⁹

Lafayette and Kosciuszko crossed paths in the northern department with the planned invasion of Canada, but otherwise their military contributions were quite different, as were their personalities. Both were dedicated sons of liberty, but Lafayette was more interested in earning military honors than Kosciuszko. Although he was the last of the Atlantic revolutionaries considered in this paper to arrive in the colonies, he quickly embraced the cause and his military role, much like Paine with his writing. He adapted quickly to American habits and suffered with Washington’s army at Valley Forge. Lafayette was very aware of his appearance and tried to control the image he portrayed. He appeared at various times French or American, sometimes both. In the army, he became American, except when leading other Frenchmen. As a mediator, he was both French and American, which was both helpful and detrimental. He worked hard to help establish the French alliance during the war and maintain trade relations after it. These efforts were some of his more significant contributions.⁶⁰

In the army, Lafayette sought a commission as a general (still volunteer) as soon as possible, and was eager to lead the proposed expedition to invade Canada. He expressed his thanks to the President of Congress for giving him the command to lead his fellow Frenchmen “driving theyr [sic] natural and tyrannical enemy out of the lands they had taken from ‘em, and enjoying all the advantages of liberty by theyr strict union with thirteen other states.” He goes on to refer to himself as an “instrument of revolution.” Here the historic hatred of the French for the

⁵⁷ Quoted in Haiman, 18-19, 34.

⁵⁸ Pula, 99-119, quote from pp. 105-6.

⁵⁹ Pula, 105; General Greene’s letters also refer to Kosciuszko’s modesty.

⁶⁰ See especially Idzerda et al, Vol II, Part II and Kramer, *Lafayette*.

British came through, particularly in light of the recent outcome of the Seven Years' War, but these feelings were mixed with Lafayette's American sensibilities as an agent of liberty through revolution. The ultimate failure of the Canadian expedition made Lafayette fear for his honor and glory, since his European friends and family knew he was head of an army; he wrote to demand "some glorious operation" to preserve his honor.⁶¹ Congress granted him leave to return to France to aid negotiations for French involvement. In his *Memoir of 1779*, he discussed this role as well as his efforts to refute the claims of discontented adventurers and generals who had not received commissions. As public opinion was in favor of the American cause, France joined the war. At that point, Lafayette wanted to fight for France rather than the Americans, awaiting orders from the king. The king forgave him for going to America in defiance of his orders, but Lafayette remained with the Continental Army, eventually serving in the final major battle at Yorktown opposing Cornwallis.⁶² He kept the Americans in his mind constantly, trying to get supplies and discussing peace negotiations. Although important to the military, Lafayette's most crucial role was as a diplomat working both the American and French sides, navigating both parts of his identity.

It is clear in looking at the influence of foreign revolutionaries on the American Revolution that Paine, Kosciuszko, and Lafayette were all effective in their revolutionary roles. Each carved a niche for himself and each is remembered for that service. Paine's *Common Sense* galvanized the colonists to fight Britain for their independence and he raised army morale with *The Crisis*. He published other writings in support of the revolution and on some of the issues being debated, such as monetary policy and matters of government. Kosciuszko was well-liked for his modesty and engineering skill, playing an important role at Saratoga and the construction of West Point. Lafayette was an officer in the Continental Army, but perhaps his larger legacy was as a mediator between American and French worlds trying to secure French support throughout the war. All three expressed a commitment to the American cause. Even if they were trying to gain experience or begin a new life, they chose to make their mark with a young nation fighting for liberty. Once the revolution ended, it became clear that the American Revolution had an indelible effect on each of them.

⁶¹ Lafayette, To the President of Congress, 31 January 1778 in Idzerda et al, eds., 1: 268; Lafayette to George Washington, 19 February 1778, 1: 301.

⁶² Lafayette, *Memoir of 1779*, 2: 5-6, 17.

Professional Revolutionaries

Paine would have retired from public life, he reported to George Washington, but the French Revolution demonstrated that “the ardour of Seventy-Six is capable of renewing itself.”⁶³ The French Revolution began in 1789 on the heels of American independence and included some of the same figures and ideological influences. The American Revolution officially ended in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris between the new United States, England, and France principally.⁶⁴ People in the new nation were excited, but the enthusiasm existed across the Atlantic as well. This was particularly true among people hoping the principles of the American Revolution, such as liberty and equality, would take root in their own countries, whether through revolution or enlightened rule. Charles Toth writes that it “must be understood that the American Revolution proved to be the catalyst for the gathering political storm in Europe since it provided the occasion for the redress of even the most ancient of grievances.”⁶⁵ As Palmer, Klooster, and other scholars have noted, conditions in various countries differed from the American situation, but some principles were held in common, such as the focus on liberty. This could mean personal liberty, such as for serfs and peasants. It could also refer to national liberty, such as freedom from foreign interference, as in the case of Poland’s desire to be free from Russian control. Sometimes it meant both. Regardless, many referenced the American Revolution as a successful example of declaring independence and rights. Paine, Lafayette, and Kosciuszko each took their experiences in the American Revolution and applied them in other European revolutions, relying on old networks built in America and expanding them in Europe to seek support for other fights for liberty.

Kosciuszko was the most eager to return to Europe, but his return was delayed while waiting to receive some of the pay owed to him from the Continental Congress for his service. He was initiated into the Society of the Cincinnati in 1783, which was founded for officers who had served in the American Revolution; Lafayette and Washington were also members. Kosciuszko was present for Washington’s farewell to the army and received a ring, a sword, and a pair of pistols from the founding father. He also attended a gathering at General Greene’s home that included other foreign revolutionaries such as Lafayette and Baron von Steuben,

⁶³ Paine, To His Excellency George Washington, July 21, 1791, Philip Foner, 2: 1318-1319.

⁶⁴ Spain and the Netherlands were also involved, but came to the war later and were comparatively minor actors.

⁶⁵ Toth, Preface to *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, 13.

evidence of the social networks that formed between revolutionaries, regardless of their country of origin. Kosciuszko received a special resolution from Congress, at Washington's urging, in honor of his service.⁶⁶ Although they were unwilling to separate his promotion from the mass promotion of officers that occurred at the end of the war, Congress was "deeply impressed with [his] great merit and beneficial services," so issued a special report:

Resolved, That the Secretary at War transmit to Colonel Kosciuszko the brevet commission of brigadier general; and signify to that officer, that Congress entertain an high sense of his long, faithful and meritorious service.⁶⁷

Although the commendation was simple and fairly general, it demonstrates the importance of Kosciuszko's role in the revolution in the eyes of Washington and others. Kosciuszko never sought American citizenship, always planning on returning to Poland and seeing that as his true home, fond as he was of America.

Kosciuszko planned to travel to France, but his plans after that were unclear. As a backup plan, he requested appointment as Chief Engineer with the rank of Brigadier General if Congress maintained military forces during peacetime. Kosciuszko also expressed his warm sentiments toward both Greene and his second country.⁶⁸ Once in Paris, he wished to return to America, contrasting it with Europe, where "every parson [sic] finds great pleasure in cheating himself out of Common sense" and "you find by experience that domestick life with liberty to be the best gift, that nature had to bestow for the human species." He hoped Poland would experience liberty's influence.⁶⁹ He returned to his home country and tried to be a vehicle for this process. Pula writes that Kosciuszko and others called for a noble democracy with full equality before the law, including for peasants. He describes Kosciuszko's beliefs: "A philosophical democrat, his ideals of equality were shaped in the cauldron of revolution in America where his exposure to the institution of human slavery further cemented his beliefs."⁷⁰ He did not seek high titles or praise, but saw virtue in equality and liberty for creating a better society. Scholar Andrzej Walicki has written on Polish political thought—specifically

⁶⁶ Pula, 207-208; Haiman, 157, 162.

⁶⁷ *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), 25: 673.

⁶⁸ Kosciuszko, Farewell to Nathaneal Greene, 14 July 1784, in Budka, *Autograph Letters*, 175.

⁶⁹ Kosciuszko, To Williams, 26 Aug 1784, Budka, 181. No first name is given, so it is unclear who Williams was.

⁷⁰ Pula, 215.

Kosciuszko's—relating his ideas strongly to both the Enlightenment and the American Revolution. He describes Kosciuszko's republicanism as new and radical, including a separation of church and state. The American Revolution was crucial to his ideology and enabled him to combine the ideology of the Americans, who were free of “feudal ballast,” with “his attachment to the libertarian traditions of Polish noble democracy” to create a political ideology that helped link Poland to the revolutionary age.⁷¹ Kosciuszko was better able to articulate his revolutionary views due to his American experiences. When he assembled an army, he based it on the American model—a citizen army that leveled social differences.⁷² North America was his revolutionary training ground.

Poland formally expressed their desire for reform and freedom from Russian influence with the Constitution of the Third of May in 1791, which reflected the influence of the American example with its three branches of government and focus on the people as the origin of government authority. Russia, however, suppressed the attempted revolt led by Kosciuszko and other radicals. Kosciuszko fled Poland to seek international support from France, but the Terror had just begun, so he only received empty promises. Kosciuszko eventually returned to Poland to attempt revolution again, issuing his Act of Insurrection in 1794. Polish historian Miecislaus Haiman argues that it belongs alongside the American Declaration of Independence and French Declaration of the Rights of Man for its expression of political ideas. Kosciuszko's slogan was “Liberty, Integrity, and Independence,” demonstrating the issues of both freedom and sovereignty involved. He understood Poland's situation was different from the American and French examples, and adapted his document accordingly, while also appealing to “Nations which prize liberty above all other worldly goods,” implying the United States and France—other countries who had undergone revolution. As Libiszowska points out, many Poles admired the American Revolution, but were particularly inspired by the French, which was a contemporaneous revolution in a country with a feudal and monarchical history like Poland.⁷³ Kosciuszko's efforts to gain any substantive foreign support for his insurrection were unsuccessful, as was the last uprising he led, which the Russians again crushed. He was badly

⁷¹ Andrzej Walicki, *The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood*, Translated by Emma Harris (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 95.

⁷² Nash and Hodges, 102, 108.

⁷³ Pula, 216-7, 224; Miecislaus Haiman, “American Influences on Kosciuszko's Act of Insurrection,” *Polish American Studies*. 3 no. ½ (1946): 1-4, quote p. 2; Libiszowska, “Polish Opinion,” see especially pp. 11 and 14; Nash and Hodges, 101-111.

wounded in battle, then imprisoned by Empress Catherine II until her death, when her son freed him. There would be no liberty or independence for Poland in Kosciuszko's lifetime.

Paine stayed in the United States for the period right after the war, but wished to continue his public service. In a letter to the Continental Congress in October 1783, he discussed his service in the revolution. Ever the propagandist, he wrote about his revolutionary activities, "From a principle, devoted to the love of liberty, and a disposition to assist injured and suffering people, I felt a pleasure in sharing their fate without even troubling myself about consequences." He expressed his pleasure of "being ranked among the founders of a New Empire raised on the principles of liberty and liberality." This speaks to both the theme of ideological identification with the American cause and his belief in the great potential of the new United States with his application of the word "Empire" to a new country; Lafayette used similar language. This may simply be Paine's rhetorical flourish, but there seemed to be a general sentiment amongst contemporaries that prospects for the new nation were bright. Nonetheless, Paine felt like an underappreciated refugee. His pamphleteering during the revolution was largely at his own expense, and he donated the profits to the army, keeping costs low to improve circulation. Congress appointed him to write the history of the revolution, which he never finished. Paine wanted to go to England to educate the people about the American cause and start a revolution there, but he did not want to return to America due to his feelings of alienation. In essence, he used his dual identity as an American and an Englishman, suggesting in one letter that his "knowledge of England" was the reason he succeeded so well in American politics. His point was that he knew what arguments would work against England, and he used this knowledge when appealing to American audiences. He felt the reverse was true as well. Both supported his goals as a revolutionary propagandist.⁷⁴

Paine eventually returned to Europe to try to sell the plans for an iron bridge he had designed. He traveled to Paris and spent time with Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson, who was the American minister to France. Through them, he also met the marquis de Condorcet and the Archbishop of Toulouse, figures of the Enlightenment pushing for reform in France. Paine did not oppose the king, who he regarded as a friend of America and open to reform. Historian George Spater argues that Paine's republicanism was a response to the "challenge of the

⁷⁴ Paine, To a Committee of the Continental Congress, October 1783, Philip Foner, 2: 1227-42, quotes from pp. 1227 and 1228, respectively; Paine, To Major General Nathaneal Greene, September 9, 1780, Philip Foner, 2: 1189.

American Revolution” and that his ideas were constantly developing during the war, but stopped between the revolutions. In England, Paine was friends with Edmund Burke and other important Whigs who hoped that France would achieve “progress from a benevolent monarch advised by enlightened ministers.” This revolution, which Paine saw as connected to the American, had some support in Britain, particularly in its earlier stages.⁷⁵

Paine traveled to France in fall 1789, after the fall of the Bastille, and observed the hope and promise of the revolution to spread liberty and equality. He defended the revolution in his famous political tract *Rights of Man* (1791), which was a direct response to Burke’s denunciation of the French Revolution in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Paine dedicated his work to George Washington, sent him copies, and arranged for its printing in America. He also kept his American friends informed about events in France and England. He was in contact with the group (which included Lafayette and Jefferson) who wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which bears some resemblance to the American Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights with its proclamations of equality before the law, freedom of speech, and other liberties. Paine helped write a manifesto urging the formation of a republic after Louis XVI’s attempt to flee to Austria.⁷⁶ Networks of people who knew each other from the American Revolution were eager to spread actively those ideals in France. They were professional revolutionaries of sorts. As Foner writes, “Paine was at his best at the very moment of overthrow, when principles of government were called into question and new classes emerged into political life.” He found a niche as a revolutionary propagandist and served two revolutions. When he was elected to serve in the General Assembly, however, his lack of French language skills and the different experience of running a government versus publicizing one did not suit Paine’s personality. He was close to the moderate Girondin faction and was imprisoned during the Terror as an Englishman and suspected monarchist since he voted against the king’s execution. James Monroe, American Ambassador to Paris, eventually saved him; America refused to claim him as a citizen at first, which sparked Paine to write a bitter public letter to George Washington, who was president at the time. Paine eventually published a second part to

⁷⁵ Spater, 46-7.

⁷⁶ Spater, “European Revolutionary” in *Citizen of the World*, 51-57.

Rights of Man, where he openly asserted his desire for revolution in England. He could never return to England after this due to sedition charges, for which he was convicted in absentia.⁷⁷

Lafayette continued to play an active diplomatic role in addition to his military service until the end of the war. In his correspondence and related letters from others, it is clear that he was well regarded, but sometimes showed his youth and inexperience. His writings demonstrate at times a strong self-awareness and acknowledgment that he was not the most brilliant officer and did not always deserve the accolades he received. Like Paine, he was concerned with disunity and even supported a Washington dictatorship at the end of the war. He also tried to navigate his dual identity as both French and American, making objectivity difficult at times. He referred to the actions of other foreigners in his letters and met Thomas Paine (whom he called “the patriotic author”) and others as a member of the American Philosophical Society, so they were aware of one another and interacted at the very least.⁷⁸ Lafayette received permission to return to France in 1781 and did not return before the war ended in 1783. In France, he was the personification of the American Revolution and aided Benjamin Franklin in his efforts to get supplies and funds. King Louis XVI was pleased with Lafayette’s service, granting him the rank of *maréchal de camp* in his army and membership in the Order of St. Louis, a major accomplishment, especially for one so young. Lafayette also founded the French branch of the Society of the Cincinnati for French officers in the American Revolution.⁷⁹ He had proven himself in his home country, finally receiving the honors he sought.

A revolutionary identity formed amongst the people in this study, and it was perhaps most evident in Lafayette, as he spent the rest of his life supporting revolutions for liberty until 1830, including the French Revolutions, attempted Polish revolts, and the Greek revolt. He mentored young revolutionaries in Paris. Lloyd Kramer argues that his revolutionary identity emerged through his political role in the French Revolution in the Estates General, National Assembly, and military; he also designed the revolutionary cockade. Politically, he “defined himself as a representative of American constitutional values and as an advocate of inalienable

⁷⁷ Foner, *Tom Paine*, 212 for quote; Spater, “European Revolutionary,” 60-4. Gouverneur Morris, one of Paine’s enemies, was the American Ambassador in Paris at the time of Paine’s imprisonment and made only feeble efforts to gain his release. Not until Monroe replaced Morris were serious efforts made to secure Paine’s release.

⁷⁸ Lafayette, *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution*, Stanley Idzerda, Robert Rhodes Crout, Lloyd S. Kramer, Linda J. Pike, and Mary Ann Quinn (eds.), 3: 141-169, 230, 235-6.

⁷⁹ From Segur to Lafayette, Idzerda et al, 4: 448; Introduction to Idzerda, 5: xxi-xxiii.

natural rights,” and militarily, he saw himself “as a unifying figure who reconciled all strands of the Revolution and nation within himself.” In his own country’s revolution, he continued the fight for liberty that he began in the American Revolution, helping draft the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The document contained the fundamental rights that composed Lafayette’s political identity and from which, in his mind, all legitimate government had to originate. He served as the commander of the National Guard, but again did not accept any pay. He was a revolutionary volunteer.⁸⁰

France was less interested in the American rights Lafayette advocated as the revolution radicalized and released old resentments, a situation that had not existed in the American Revolution. Lafayette defended the king’s rights, challenged the Jacobins, and left France in August 1792; he was then captured and imprisoned in Austria. Each of these events, Kramer argues, led to the breakdown of his revolutionary identity. Although Napoleon eventually gained his release, Lafayette disagreed with his oppressive policies. Lafayette continually remade himself to suit changing circumstances and was shaped by them, which is perhaps one of the most interesting facets of his revolutionary identity—the ability to adapt to different types of revolutions both within his country and in other countries. As Kramer observes, “No other prominent figure of Lafayette’s generation lived through so many revolutionary events or participated so extensively in the sequence of national revolutions.”⁸¹ He made no claims to be an intellectual, but he associated with them and spread their ideas, much like Paine with his propaganda. He could have resigned from public service, but seemed to see himself as a vehicle for causes of liberty like the other figures in this study. He sufficiently rejuvenated his image to continue involvement in French politics and used his revolutionary networks to try to garner support for causes of liberty in France and elsewhere. He could observe a situation, place it in the context of his experiences, and adapt accordingly.⁸²

Americans in Paris such as Jefferson, Paine, and Gouverneur Morris served as much sought-after advisors to the French revolutionaries writing the first republican Constitution. They were optimistic about the chances for revolutionary reform, though each came from

⁸⁰ Kramer, 33-49, quote p. 34.

⁸¹ Kramer, 253.

⁸² Kramer, 50, 59-75, 253.

different moments in the American Revolution, according to scholar Philipp Ziesche.⁸³ While Jefferson had been part of the 1776 revolution that fought against “coercive governmental power, Morris helped craft the Constitution for the revolution of 1787 that resulted in the “centralization of state power under the guidance of a national elite.” These different experiences influenced their interpretations of the revolution and their interactions with revolutionaries. There were distinct differences between the revolutionary environments that the Americans did not necessarily understand, but the American presence legitimized the French Revolution, much as Lafayette’s participation had done the same in the American Revolution, according to Ziesche.⁸⁴ Morris proved too conservative for revolutionaries such as Lafayette, but both he and Jefferson were part of the revolutionary community that existed in cities like Paris and London.

Kosciuszko, Paine, and Lafayette completed their service to the American Revolution with honor, though they were not necessarily given credit in the manner they felt they deserved. Each had become at least part American and when they returned to Europe, each expressed some nostalgia for America and a desire to come back to the simple land of freedom. They forged a place for themselves in a second country as revolutionaries and carried that experience going forward, where they eventually tried to effect change and revolution in their home countries. Revolution seemed to pique curiosities and brought both hope and uncertainty. It could also bring foreign assistance, though not for all causes. Appealing to people and countries in revolutionary networks for assistance proved both successful (France) and unsuccessful (Poland).

Conclusion: Returning to America and the Revolutionary Legacy

Years after the end of the American Revolution, each of the three Atlantic revolutionaries returned to the country for which they fought. Lafayette visited in 1824-5 and Kosciuszko in 1797-8—both to great fanfare. They were heroes to the American people. Jefferson met with both of them, beginning a warm friendship with Kosciuszko, whom he regarded “as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known, and of that liberty which is to go to all.”⁸⁵ Their friendship would

⁸³ Philipp Ziesche, “Exporting American Revolutions: Gouverneur Morris, Thomas Jefferson, and the National Struggle for Universal Rights in Revolutionary France,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 419-447.

⁸⁴ Ziesche, quote 429, 435.

⁸⁵ Nash and Hodges, p. 159.

continue after Kosciuszko was forced to return to Europe in light of the Alien and Sedition Acts, which made conditions in the U.S. dangerous for foreigners, even national heroes. Upon returning to Europe, he freed his serfs and provided them with land upon his death in 1817. Lafayette also did a tour of the U.S., meeting with old friends and important officials. He flattered the Americans with praise for their revolution and the successful, orderly nation it created. Both he and Kosciuszko criticized the young nation and Jefferson for not abolishing slavery.⁸⁶

Paine had a rather different experience, more a refugee than a hero. After being saved from the Terror by Monroe, President Jefferson arranged for him to return to the U.S. in 1802. However, Paine's anti-religious tract, *Age of Reason*, and his letter criticizing George Washington made him unpopular, his revolutionary service all but forgotten except by old friends from the revolution like Jefferson. Paine lived out his remaining years mostly in ignominy. In a letter he wrote, "My motive and object in all my political works, beginning with *Common Sense*...have been to rescue man from tyranny and false systems and false principles of government, and enable him to be free, and establish government for himself." He not only wanted to destroy inequality, but also provide the framework for a better system. As historian Michael Durey notes, Paine's particular brand of independent radicalism does not fit into any neat category. He had citizenship in three countries: his native England, and later, France and America due to his revolutionary involvement. Yet he was not welcome anywhere. He remains a controversial figure due to his radical views, but one who nonetheless had a profound impact on the Age of Revolutions.⁸⁷

It seems each of the figures in this study defy neat categorization. Even if allowing for self-aggrandizing narratives, the opinions of others still suggest that each was a true "son of liberty." Lafayette, Kosciuszko, and Paine each left their home country under different circumstances but for a similar purpose—to prove themselves while fighting for a worthy cause. They could have chosen another path, but they elected to travel the revolutionary road. Each understood the unique moment they lived in and forged bonds of friendship with other domestic

⁸⁶ Nash and Hodges, 156-210; Kramer, *Lafayette*, 190-217.

⁸⁷ Paine, To John Inskeep, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, Feb 1806, Philip Foner, 2: 1480; Michael Durey, "Thomas Paine's Apostles: Radical Emigrés and the Triumph of Jeffersonian Republicanism," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 44, no. 4 (Oct 1987): 661-688; Dyck, "Local Attachments," 119.

and international revolutionaries. Each left his mark in a different way. Lafayette was a mediator between American and French interests in addition to serving as a volunteer general. Kosciuszko was a brilliant military engineer who designed West Point, which still stands today. Paine wrote pamphlets that stirred up passions and united divided colonists behind a revolutionary cause and boosted morale when victory seemed doubtful. Each man is remembered differently. The American Revolution was their first revolutionary experience, but it was not their last.

Previous scholarship has focused more heavily on revolutionary networks in cities such as Paris and London. My research has demonstrated that these connections actually began in the American colonies. People met in France and England to discuss revolution, but many of them were there because they knew one another from previous revolutionary experiences in America. Based on their papers and those of their revolutionary compatriots, Paine, Lafayette, and Kosciuszko all knew each other and spent time in Paris together. Perhaps they would not have felt that bond if not for the American Revolution. Revolutionary networks were not just part of the French Revolution and the radicalism of the 1790s. Historians need to assess how those networks were established beginning in the 1770s and continued through the age of revolutions.

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