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Guillaume Ansart, ed. and trans. *Condorcet: Writings on the United States*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012. 147 pp. \$62.95. ISBN 978-0-271-05381-3.

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Scholars and *afficianados* of the early national period of U.S. history who have been fascinated by the commentaries of Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (especially in his chapter "What is an American") and de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* should take note of Guillaume Ansart's addition to this significant genre of interpretations of the American Revolution and the subsequent fledgling republic. *Condorcet: Writings on the United States* adds another significant dimension to the discussion, despite the fact that this "last" of the *philosophes* never visited the New World. This short yet superbly edited and translated book includes four major documents: *Influence of the American Revolution on Europe* (1786), Supplement to Filippo Mazzei's *Researches on the United States* (1788), *Ideas on Despotism: For the Benefit of Those Who Pronounce This Word Without Understanding It* (1790), and *Eulogy of Franklin: Read at the Public Session of the Academy of Sciences* (1790). It is obvious that Condorcet read extensively about the United States, although he knew that many of his sources were tainted because of their British origin (pp. 43-44), but he evidently cultivated professional relationships with luminaries like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, the latter of whom was in Paris until after the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789.

Throughout these selections, one can "hear" the echo of Crèvecoeur and de Tocqueville as well as those of lesser fame like La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Madame de la Tour de Pin, and the future king Louis-Philippe. In small part, surprisingly, even the memoirs of the infamous and "anti-American" Talleyrand (who spent some two years in exile in what he considered the uncultured continent) could agree with some of Condorcet's observations. All of these other commentators did, of course, spend significant time in the United States.

Condorcet was first attracted to the American ideal of religious toleration. As a "confirmed" Deist in a society that officially persecuted dissenters from Catholicism, he was excited by what he heard about the freedom of religion in that trans-Atlantic republic (pp. 28, 39, 47, 103). This gave him hope that it would be a beacon of enlightenment for the future that could traverse the Atlantic. His enthusiasm on this topic was reiterated many times less than a decade later by La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt in his eight-volume *Voyages dans les États-Unis d'Amérique*. That author traveled extensively throughout the new republic and commented often on the various religious denominations represented in each town and village he visited. He could rejoice that his spirit and that of Voltaire were functioning in a political experiment across the Atlantic even though his own country was "dragging its feet" on this principle.

In these selections, when Condorcet examined the international scene, he also presented some very forceful "food for thought" while placing it in the context of the American experiment. For example, he decried the stupidity of war (pp. 30-31) while realizing that Americans were justified in their actions. His arguments remind one of medieval Thomistic philosophy on what constitutes a "just war." Most interesting were his comments about war and the need to regulate it with international agreements more than thirteen decades before the Geneva Conventions.

Very important to Condorcet was how governments were organized and where the locus of power lay. His strong opinions on the viability and reasonableness of a unicameral legislature permeate these works. He thoroughly admired the United States' first constitution, i.e. the Articles of Confederation. He disliked strong central governments and desired that governmental power should instead emanate from the local community. That ideal did not work during the French revolutionary period and certainly failed in America's early national period. When John Adams, the American ambassador to the Court of St. James, asked why the British did not send an ambassador to the officially recognized United States, he was asked if there should be one or thirteen ambassadors. Condorcet did examine carefully the constitution of 1787 proposed at Philadelphia and was dismayed. In the context of U.S. history, he sounds like an anti-Federalist on par with the vociferous Patrick Henry. Condorcet opposed that first constitution's requirement for unanimity for any amendment (p. 118), and he strongly criticized proposed age requirements for federal office (pp. 55-56) and the non-election of judges (pp. 68-69). In addition, he vehemently opposed the concept of term limits for office holders as long as the voters were satisfied with their performance. Here he echoed the voices in Donald F. Melhorn, Jr.'s book, sounding in many ways like a Jacksonian Democrat forty years before his time.<sup>[1]</sup> However, his opposition to conscientious objectors for military service (p. 77) still makes him a product of the late eighteenth century whose opposition to mercantilism caused him vigorously to espouse Adam Smith's concept of free trade (pp. 40-41).

The last significant section of Ansart's anthology is the twenty-eight page *The Eulogy of Franklin*. Here we find a paean to the American philosophe and especially to his justly famous *Poor Richard's Almanac*, with its recipes for success in life and personal happiness. After a number of pages which sound like Franklin's autobiography, Condorcet reminds us that this American founder opposed religious fanaticism while promoting private associations which encouraged the common good. He lauded Franklin for his inventiveness, including the lightning rod which Europeans quickly and thoughtfully adopted but which was debated thoroughly in Boston at the same time between the "electricians" and "anti-electricians" in the 1750s ("let God's will be done!").

We should all thank Guillaume Ansart for compiling this anthology. Historians of U.S. history need to read Condorcet's commentary and place it in the context of de Tocqueville's classic work. This is a text that students of the early national period should all read, and it is to be hoped that Pennsylvania State Press will release an edition in paperback to make it more financially accessible to them.

#### Notes

[1] Donald F. Melhorn, *Lest We Be Marshall'd: Judicial Powers and Politics in Ohio, 1806-1812* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 2003).

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