

Cogliano, Francis D. *A Revolutionary Friendship: Washington, Jefferson, and The American Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2024. 354 pages. Hardcover, \$37.95.

A Revolutionary Friendship: Washington, Jefferson, and The American Republic is a significant and needed addition to the history of two of the most influential men that shaped the American experiment. *A Revolutionary Friendship* is the most recent contribution to the scholarship of the early American republic by Francis D. Cogliano, who serves as a Professor of History and Dean for North America at the University of Edinburgh. While much has been written on George Washington and Thomas Jefferson as individuals and their roles in the founding of the United States, the historiographic narrative has previously been devoid of an intricate examination into the two men's relationship. Cogliano's argument refutes the previous historiographic consensus that the relationship was doomed. His evidence effectively argues that the schism that emerged during Washington's second term, and their subsequent estrangement, was not inevitable and only appears that way when one examines their intimate connection with the end in mind. *A Revolutionary Friendship* has convincingly laid out its argument as an extensively researched piece of scholarship, rooted in primary documents, that heavily relies on the surviving correspondence between the two men. Cogliano has vividly exposed the significant impact Washington and Jefferson had on each other's lives and their subsequent contributions to the American revolution, nation-building, and early republic's government. What makes Cogliano's work all the more impressive is his ability to present an extensively researched piece of scholarly work that fills a gap in the historiography of the early republic, presenting each man as a relatable human being in a way that a non-historian can understand and appreciate.

A Revolutionary Friendship chronologically describes the emergent friendship between Washington and Jefferson as one that was built over the course of three decades with its

foundation laid upon mutual respect and genuine affection. The text flows naturally and presents the pair as imperfect men with distinctive personalities and character flaws, not the monoliths that they are usually depicted as or as the public memory views them. This research paints a clear picture of how the friendship between the two leading statesmen emerged prior to, during, and after the American Revolution while highlighting that Jefferson's role outside of Washington's 'band of brothers' made the affectionate relationship all the more unique. Cogliano is a masterful writer who does a phenomenal job of telling the story of two men who grew to genuinely appreciate each other and respect the other's opinions in the most significant and mundane aspects of their lives. Ultimately, what makes this work so extraordinary is Cogliano's ability to tell a story that is relatable to a wide audience while also doing justice to a broad range of individuals that were integral in the lives of the two founders.

Perhaps the most important contribution to the overall historiography in *A Revolutionary Friendship* are the in-depth chapters (Chapters 3, 9, and 11) that analyze both men's statements, actions, and beliefs on the treatment of Native Americans and African Americans. Cogliano's work provides an objective examination of both men's inhuman treatment of their enslaved people at their respective estates. Through the analysis of primary documents, it becomes evident that both Washington and Jefferson were ruthless disciplinarians who ordered their overseers to use corporal punishment when necessary and to sell those that they were unable to pacify. Both leading men also shared an utter disregard for the rights and lives of Native Americans. Cogliano objectively points out the flawed views held by both men in regard to Indigenous Americans, both prior to and during their presidencies and poignantly draws attention to the fact that Washington proudly embraced his nickname among Indigenous tribes in the Ohio River Valley of "Conotocaurious" which translated to "town destroyer."

Historians have often avoided directly addressing these topics or have explained away both men's egregious words and deeds in regard to the enslaved and Indigenous Americans as normalized due to the societal norms of their time. What makes Cogliano's scholarship noteworthy is that he does not do this. Rather, he argues through his analysis of their specific actions concerning chattel slavery and the treatment of their own enslaved people that the two founding fathers behaved the way that they did due to their shared belief that any national agitation concerning the institution would threaten the republic and that that was something neither was willing to risk. To do so would be to jeopardize what they had spent the better part of their adult lives building for posterity. Cogliano's argument is clear: this analysis is an understanding of their actions, not an exoneration.

A minimal critique would be that the overall scholarship would be moderately improved with the inclusion of comments made concerning the friendship of Washington and Jefferson by their contemporaries. To include leading periodicals and individuals that were close to the pair, comments and observations over the course of the leading statesman's friendship would offer a unique insight into the devolution of their bond.

A Revolutionary Friendship is a welcome addition to the historiography of the early American Republic. One of the most important aspects of Cogliano's work is a larger lesson that speaks volumes in today's divided political climate: that genuine friendships matter and are not worth sacrificing over differences in ideology. Cogliano makes a compelling argument that while Washington and Jefferson sometimes differed in their vision and means, they shared more in common than their contemporaries of the previous historiography have acknowledged. Paramount of those commonalities was a shared ultimate goal, the establishment of stable self-government for future generations of Americans was the same, and the tragedy of their

friendship was that they could not realize that. Hopefully, readers of *A Revolutionary Friendship* can avoid those same pitfalls in their own lives.

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