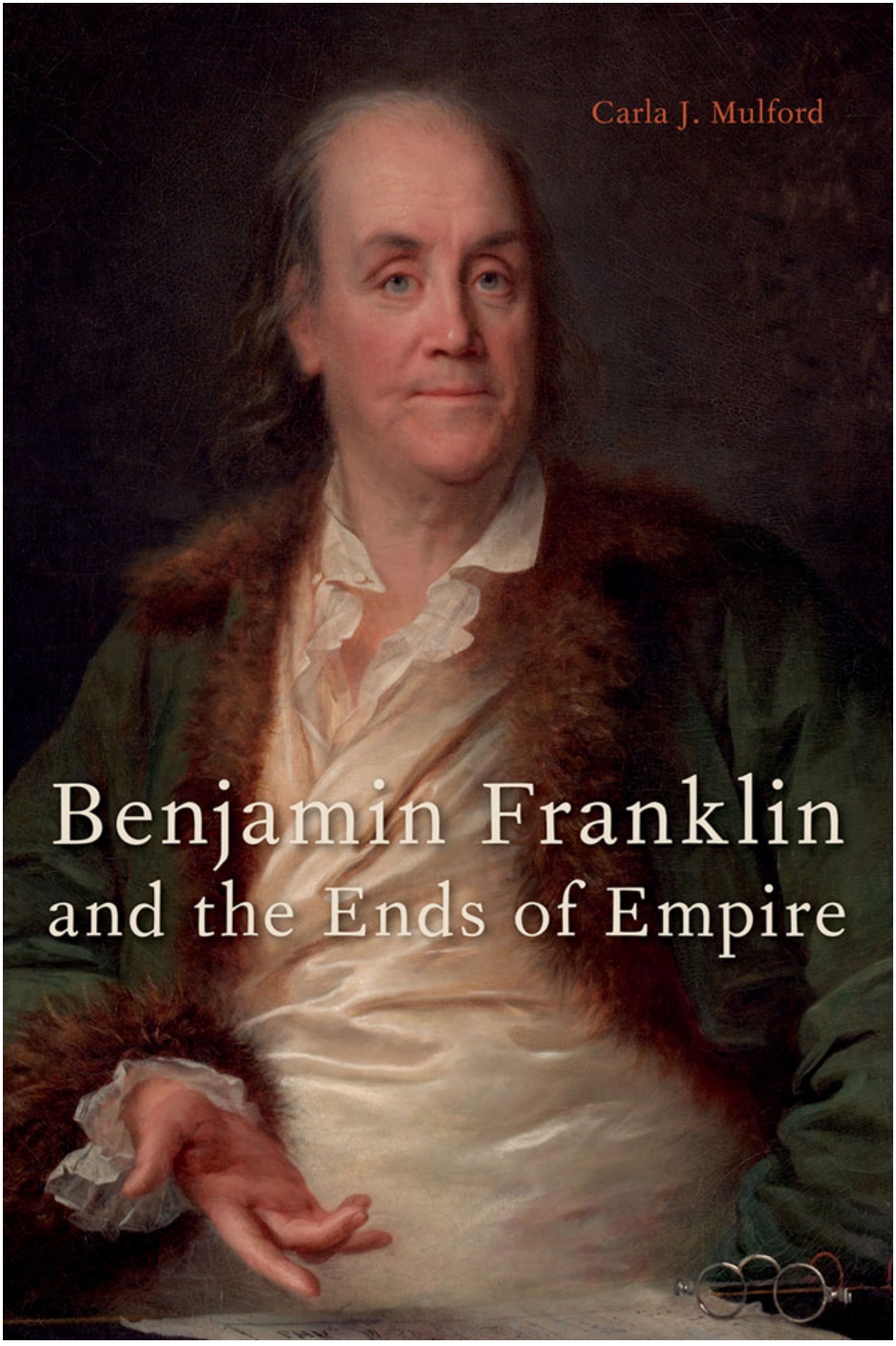
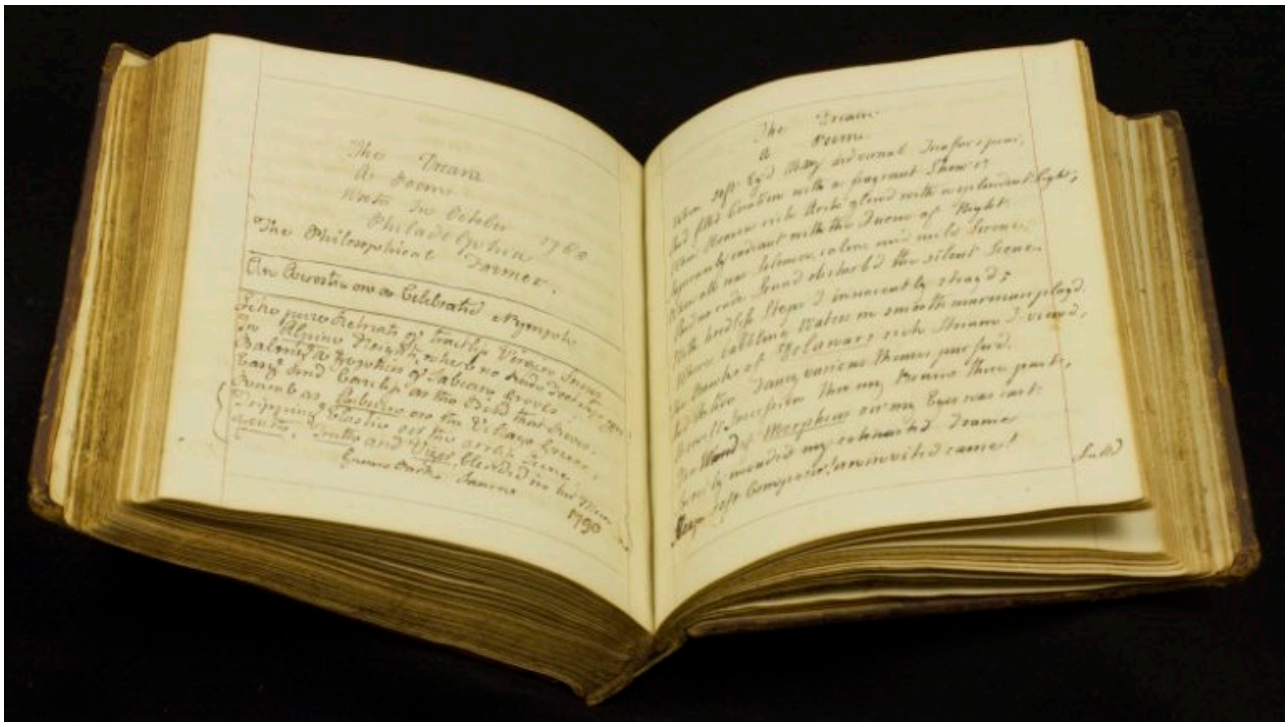
The Imperial Franklin: Revisiting and Revising North America’s Role in the British Empire


Carla J. Mulford
Benjamin Franklin
and the Ends of Empire

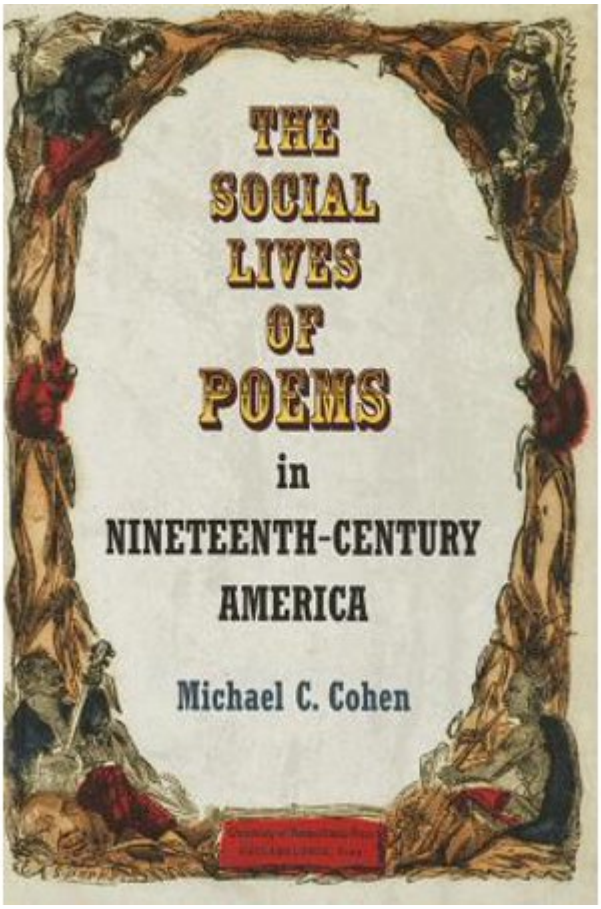
Carla Mulford’s new book examines Benjamin Franklin’s approach to empire.

“The Dream” (1768, 1790) by Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson



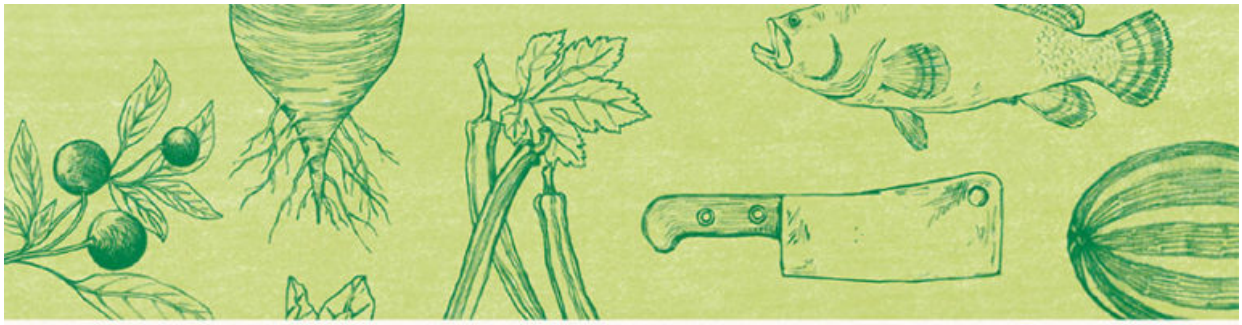
Women poets were under-recognized experts and artists in the forms associated with their homes and neighborhoods, the realms where they held power and influence.

Usable Poetry



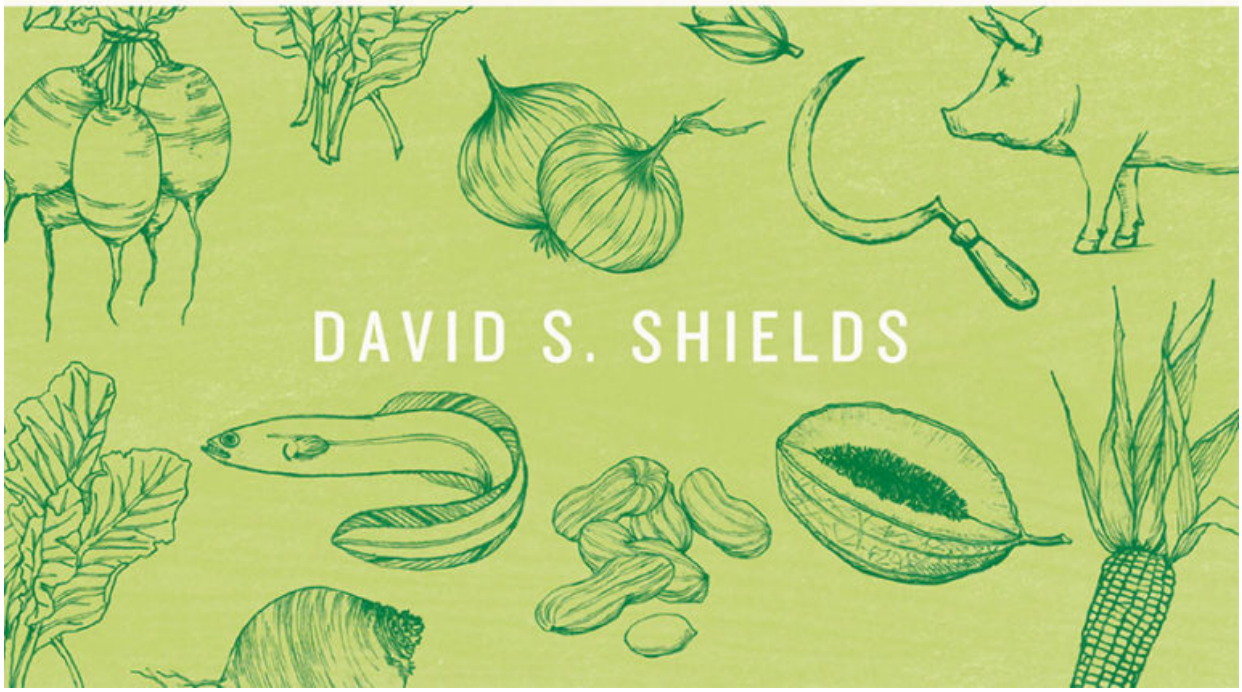
Cohen looks at how readers forged social connections through poems—by reading them aloud, recopying them, buying and selling them.

Recovering Rice



SOUTHERN PROVISIONS

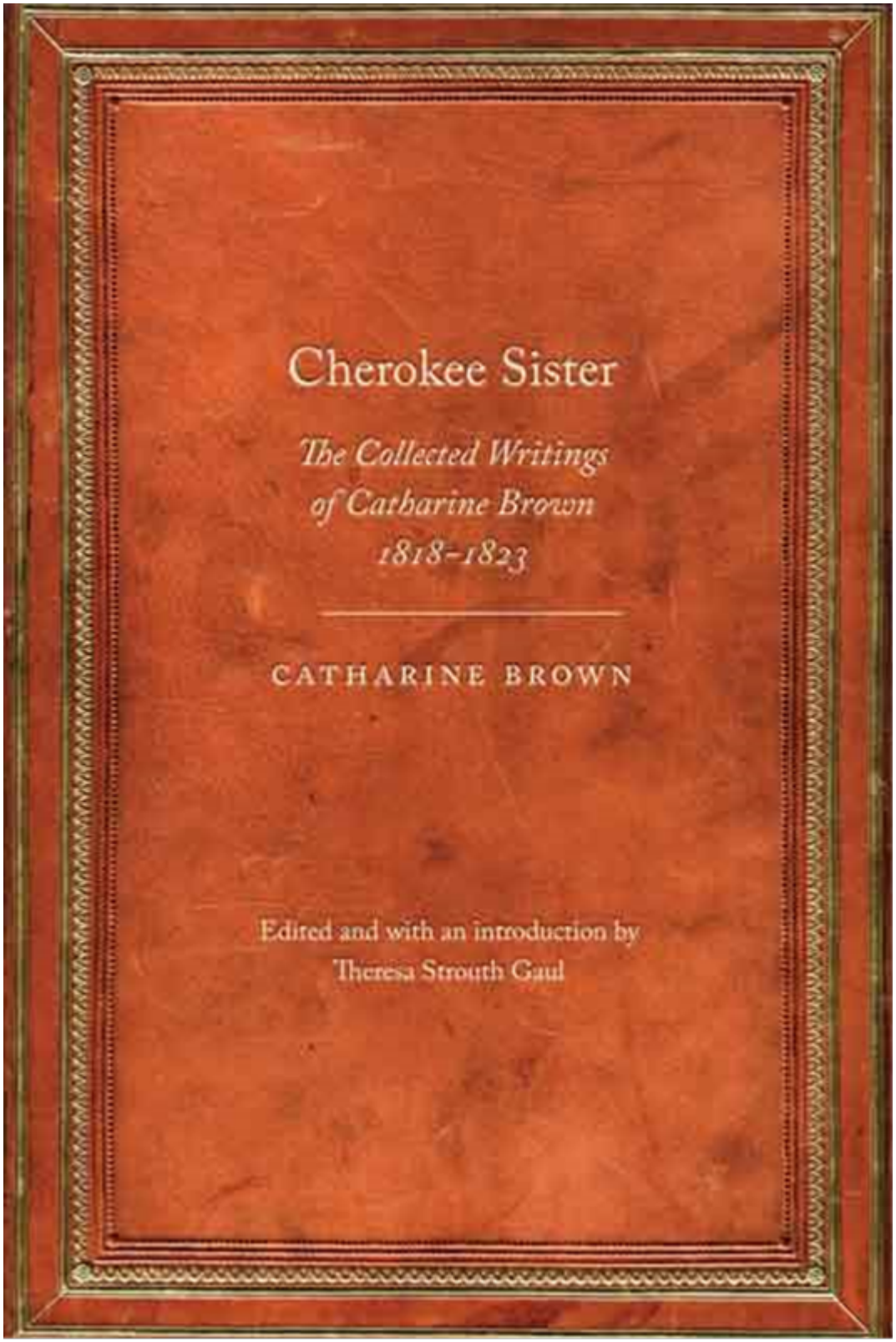
The Creation & Revival of a Cuisine



DAVID S. SHIELDS

David Shields’s book about Southern foodways contains the seeds of many future conversations.

Catharine Brown, Cherokee Evangelist



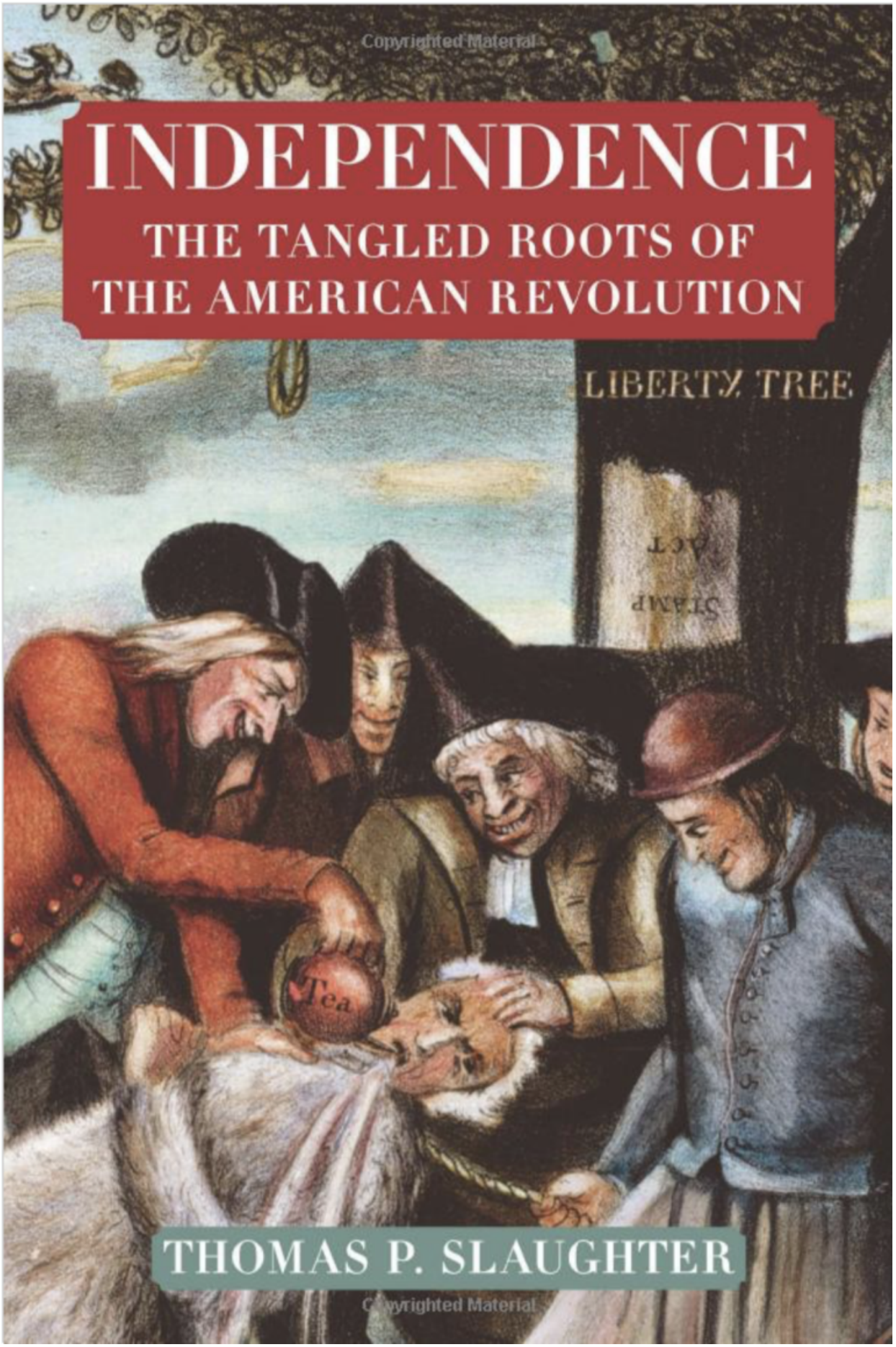
When editorial work is done well, it prods you toward a new way of thinking about a text or set of texts without closing down other interpretive possibilities.

An Inevitable American Revolution?

Copyrighted Material

INDEPENDENCE

THE TANGLED ROOTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



THOMAS P. SLAUGHTER

Copyrighted Material

Nearly since the ink was drying on the Declaration of Independence, nationalistic Americans have opined that American nationhood was inevitable, the result of a) the ultimate expression of Anglo-Saxon liberties, b) the westward march of democracy from ancient Greece, c) the frontier's effect on political culture, d) the realization of a divine plan for national glory, or e) all of the above. Historians have tended to be more guarded—but not much. Whether looking for the origins of the American Revolution through the evolution of the colonies and their governmental and economic structures, considering Britain's attempts to rationalize its empire in the aftermath of its stunning victory in the Seven Years War, or the republican lens through which many 1760s and 1770s colonists viewed those developments, historians, too, have rarely questioned whether America might have stayed in the British empire.

Thomas P. Slaughter, author of *Independence: The Tangled Roots of the American Revolution*, argues that this sense of inevitability is more than hindsight: rather, it was the consensus opinion of both Americans and Britons for much of the eighteenth century. For them, as Slaughter points out through numerous well-chosen examples, British America's operating on its own was a question of "when" rather than "if." The rub was how that "independence" would be structured. American colonists mostly desired some level of independence within the empire, along a spectrum perhaps somewhere between what American imperial possessions like Puerto Rico and Commonwealth countries like Canada enjoy today. Britons, on the other hand, from casual observers to members of Parliament to colonial governors, generally assumed that by "independence" American colonists meant a complete break from the empire.


Thomas P. Slaughter, Independence: The Tangled Roots of the American Revolution. New York: Hill and Wang, 2014. 512 pp., $35.

Only the most perceptive observers on either side, among them Benjamin Franklin and Edmund Burke, intuited the distinction between these two conceptions of independence. In the wake of Britain's budget-busting victory in the Seven Years' War and expansion into India, imperial officials worked to raise money from the continental colonies through taxation, decrease defense costs by restraining colonists so as to reduce conflict with Native Americans, tighten up colonial enforcement of imperial trade regulations, rationalize imperial administration of colonial possessions, and prop up the global operation that was the East India Company (which, in Slaughter's words, was deemed by Parliament to be "too big to fail" [153]). Radical and even moderate colonists saw each of these actions as an attempt to curtail their independence, while unsympathetic Britons characterized colonial resistance as a stalking horse for full national independence. Those perceptions, Slaughter demonstrates, resulted in an escalation of mutual misunderstandings in the 1760s and 1770s, until, by

1775, each side was entrenched in a position from which retreat was unthinkable.

Rather than writing an extended brief for Slaughter's contentions, *Independence* provides a broad and yet selective sweep of the history of the thirteen colonies that became the original United States. The challenge for any author is that there is no best way to cover that much time and space in a straightforward story. Slaughter decides on a more episodic approach, nonetheless managing to weave in a great many incidents and issues that serve as pieces to the puzzle.

The first of its three sections lays the foundations of colonists' growing pains within the empire in a series of thematic chapters surveying New England's Puritan settlements, New York's commercial ambitions, New England's rebellion during the Glorious Revolution and battles with French Canada, warfare with Indians and the French in the 1740s and 1750s, and the Seven Years' War (including a perhaps overly detailed digression on Britain's military progress in India). He also examines a series of intra-imperial conflicts ranging from the Glorious Revolution in Maryland and Virginia's Parson's Cause to early 1760s controversies over colonial legislatures' prerogatives in making their own laws. The book's second section more broadly considers conflict over the wave of imperial policies, whether through new laws or more stringent enforcement, beginning with simmering American discontent with the British military, the cat-and-mouse game of American smuggling, and exaggerated fears of the establishment of an Anglican bishop in America; the Proclamation of 1763 that limited legal colonial settlement to the Atlantic watershed; the imperial tax regime through the early 1760s; the long origins of and resistance to the Stamp Act; intra-colonial unrest in New Jersey and the Carolinas that exacerbated colonial suspicion of imperial authority, and the long fuse that exploded with the Boston Massacre. The last section quickens the pace, beginning with colonial resistance to imperial efforts to prop up the East India Company, the implementation of the "intolerable acts" of 1774, the slow organization of the Continental Congress, last ditch-efforts in Britain to avoid war, and finally, the road to Lexington and Concord that convinced so many colonists and Britons that backing down would be unacceptable.

Independence is written for a general audience and is unabashedly a synthesis of a century of scholarship, exhibiting the mastery that comes from Slaughter's distinguished career of reading and teaching the American Revolution. Those familiar with that stream will recognize Slaughter's debts to the imperial school of the early- to mid-twentieth century, placing the Revolution in the context of the British empire, and Theodore Draper's *The Struggle for Power* (1996), which first most clearly set out the terms of Americans' and Britons' differing definitions of their preferred imperial relationship. Yet Slaughter elegantly illuminates often overlooked details in the literature that provide human context. For example, New York Governor Richard Coote's scolding colonists for their fractiousness and "'Independance from the Crown of England'" (158) as early as 1699 showed the depth of British fears, and the

1741 loss of well over half a contingent of colonial volunteers to starvation and disease when they were essentially jailed on board ships outside Jamaica in a failed British attempt to take Spanish Caribbean possessions, indicated how disused colonists felt. Failure to enforce a decade-long lawsuit over the cutting down of Massachusetts pine trees (prized for masts and reserved by law for the Royal Navy) and the many specific ways that 1760s and 1770s colonial smugglers flouted the Navigation Acts demonstrated how the American economy marched forward with little respect for imperial oversight. And accounts of futile, last-minute bids to salvage an accommodation, among them back-channel discussions between Franklin and well-connected London banker David Barclay as well as public proposals by William Pitt and Edmund Burke, showed just how unsalvageable the Anglo-American relationship was.

Ultimately, Slaughter implies that no mutually acceptable accommodation could be drawn from a well already so poisoned. Over a century of recriminations had been exacerbated by a decade of increasingly outrageous violations of what each side perceived as the basis of the imperial relationship: for Americans, the ability to rule themselves within the empire, and for Britons, the necessity of Parliamentary prerogative in running its global enterprise.

Given that Slaughter places the American Revolution in the context of the British empire, relevant questions are tantalizingly unexplored. Slaughter pays considerable attention to England's conquest of India, but little to how imperial administration of India affected American and British attitudes toward the American mainland. More curiously, *Independence* slights Britain's Caribbean colonies, despite their having borne much investigation in recent years. English Caribbean planters and merchants were among continental colonists' biggest trade partners and smuggling accomplices, as Slaughter points out. Did mainland colonists consider themselves unfairly singled out for imperial ire compared to their Caribbean cousins? If, as Slaughter notes, the Continental Congress reached out to Caribbean assemblies, why did they not join the American cause? This is not to suggest that Slaughter should have written a book about Jamaica or Barbados—this work is impressive enough—only that, as with any good history, this one raises new questions for every one that it answers.

Which brings us back to the big question. What Americans and Britons believed inevitable was some sort of split between a maturing set of American colonies and its mother country. That divorce eventually happened with nearly every British imperial possession, some amicably, like Canada, others less so, like India. Each of these relationships, though, was unique. Slaughter's book serves as a well-hewn capstone to shelves' worth of books on why the *American* Revolution happened, just as scholars are shifting their gaze to how it happened: the relationships among patriots, loyalists, and disaffected; slavery and revolution; governance in flux; the challenge of living in a civil war. That doesn't mean that *Independence* will be the last word on the cause of the American Revolution—no book ever will be—but that this will be the one to read for a long time.

This article originally appeared in issue 15.3.5 (July, 2015).

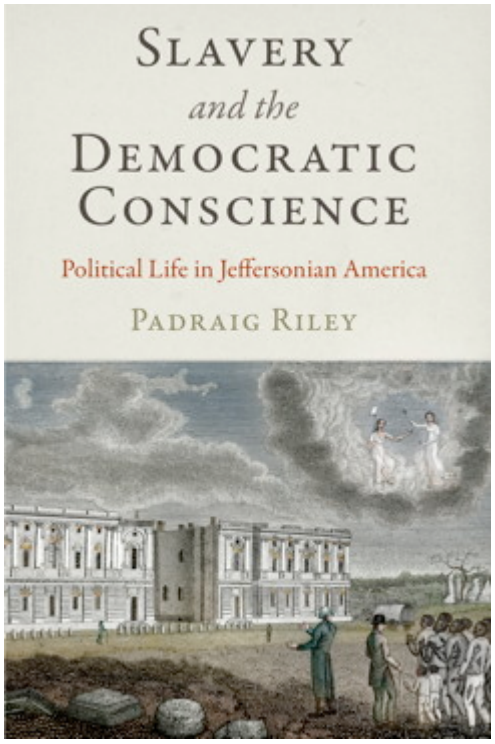
Andrew M. Schocket is professor of history and American Culture Studies and director of American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University, and author of *Fighting over the Founders: How We Remember the American Revolution* (2015).

"A Natural Representation of Market-Street, in Philadelphia": An Attribution, a Story, and Some Thoughts on Future Study



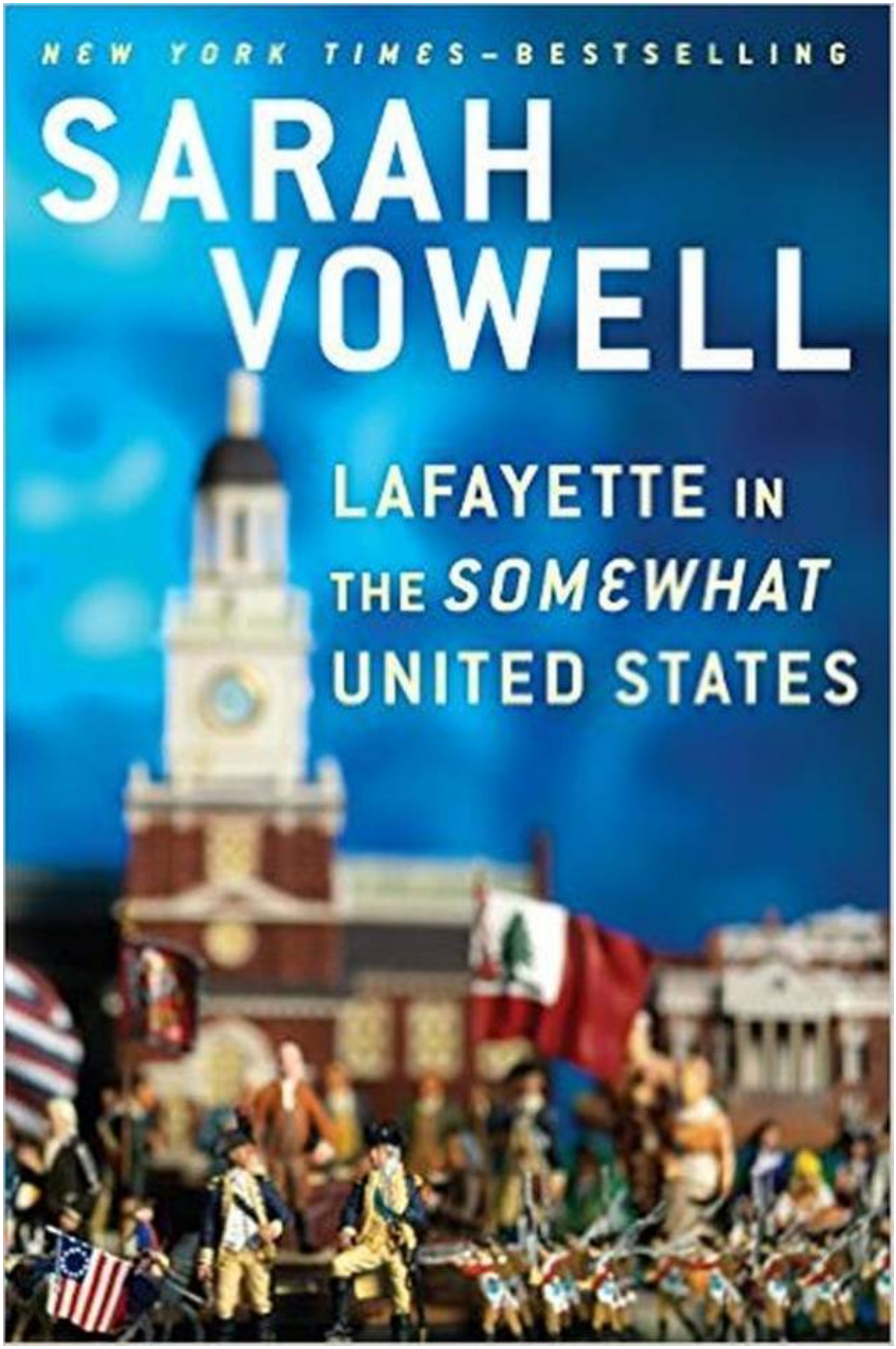
James Kidder's Market Street painting offers rich fodder for a meditation on the complex histories of private profit and public good in the cultural realm.

Beyond Thomas Jefferson and Slavery



In taking seriously northern Republicans' egalitarian ideals and the world-historical significance they attributed to the Union, Riley offers an important corrective to scholarship that exaggerates the political influence of racism.

In Lafayette's Footsteps


NEW YORK TIMES–BESTSELLING
SARAH VOWELL
LAFAYETTE IN THE SOMEWHAT UNITED STATES

Vowell has a sharp eye for paradox, contradiction, coincidence, and most especially for hypocrisy. She delights in poking her finger into the eye of American complacency.

Hamilton, Burr, Livingston, Clinton, Van Buren: Building Banks, Canals, and a Political System in New York State



Common-place talks with Brian Murphy about the business and politics of early New York State.