Introduction

In November 1774, a pamphlet addressed to the people of America was published in Philadelphia and reprinted in other major cities in the colonies and in London. It forcefully articulated American rights and liberties and allayed the fears of many colonists of British military power. The pamphlet contended that the crisis that had unfolded between Britain and America since the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 was not simply a dispute between a mother country and her colonies. Instead, it was part of the ongoing universal struggle for human freedom. To further their cause, Americans needed to stand together, prepared to declare and fight for their independence. The pamphlet’s author assured his readers that by emancipating themselves from Britain’s imperial shackles, Americans would inspire people who suffer under tyrannical governments to “demolish those badges of slavery” that stifle the natural human aspiration to be free.

The author of this radical and strikingly optimistic pamphlet was not Thomas Paine—nor was it John Adams, Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, or Benjamin Franklin. It was Charles Lee, a former British army officer turned revolutionary, a man who became one of the earliest supporters of American independence and who served as George Washington’s second-in-command and military confidant during the early years of the Revolution. Lee fought on and off the battlefield for expanded democracy, freedom of conscience, individual liberties, human rights, and for the formal education of women. While many revolutionaries shared Lee’s commitment to independence, few shared his radical outlook. Fewer still shared his confidence that the American Revolution should be waged—and could be won—primarily by militia (or irregulars) rather than with a centralized regular army.

To the eighteenth-century American gentry, who for decades had emulated an idealized and erroneous notion of English gentility, Lee was not a
true gentleman. For Americans, a true gentleman was a man of honor and integrity; he embraced rigid rules of etiquette and manners, demonstrated emotional self-restraint, exhibited a proper sense of decorum in public, and displayed elegance in speech and dress. Lee displayed none of these traits. He was careless in his dress and in his personal habits and hygiene. His manners were no better, although he could be charming, especially in the presence of females. More often, Lee was rude, profane, crude, irritable, egotistical, dogmatic, coarse, and abrupt. He was brutally honest and had a temper that flared at the slightest provocation and a biting and sarcastic wit that frequently left its intended target deeply wounded.

After dining with Lee in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the winter of 1775, the Congregational minister Jeremy Belknap, a graduate of Harvard, an early historian of New Hampshire, and a chaplain for American troops stationed outside Boston, found him “a perfect original, a good scholar and soldier, and an odd genius; full of fire and passion.” But Belknap could not ignore Lee’s outward appearance. He described him as a man with “little good manners; a great sloven, wretchedly profane, and a great admirer of dogs.”

Mercy Otis Warren, author of one of the earliest histories of the American Revolution and the sister and wife of two of Massachusetts’s leading revolutionaries, described Lee as “plain in his person even to ugliness, and careless in his manners to a degree of rudeness. . . . His voice was rough, his garb ordinary, his deportment morose.” And a soldier who had served under Lee during the Revolution remembered that “the soldiers used to laugh about his great nose.” To his American contemporaries, Lee was an eccentric, and he looked the part. Contemporary descriptions and engravings depicted him as a cartoonish, almost grotesque figure with a lanky frame; lean face accentuated by a low-slung jaw and a long, sharp hooked nose; darting eyes; unusually small hands and feet; slovenly dress; and intelligent yet profane conversation. To complete the picture, one or more of his unruly canine companions was always at his side.

Lee evidenced classic signs of what modern psychiatry would classify as manic-depressive disorder (or bipolar disorder). He experienced frequent swings in mood from extreme highs to emotional lows. Perhaps commenting on Lee’s mood shifts, Washington described him as “fickle.” Lee displayed periods of mania with high energy and exaggeratedly good moods. During his manic episodes, he recklessly took major risks when safer and surer alternatives existed or he went on spending sprees that often left him
Major General Charles Lee. This engraving of Lee with his dog Spado is an example of the contemporary caricatures of Lee that existed. By Alexander Hay Ritchie, after a caricature by Barham Rushbrooke. Date unknown. Source: Library of Congress.
in financial straits. Lee experienced phases of hypersexuality during which he obsessively talked of or thought about sex or engaged in numerous sexual encounters with different female partners. He drank to excess and was prone to fast, erratic talking, uncontrollable thoughts, jealousy, delusions of power, poor judgment, insomnia, and an inability to concentrate. Lee’s depressive episodes lasted for weeks, during which time he exhibited a lack of energy, mysterious physical ailments, restlessness, anxiety and sadness, insecurity, and feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and helplessness. Lee’s mental health may have been the cause of his slovenly appearance and poor interpersonal skills. He was unable to maintain many close relationships, leading to a fundamental loneliness that sometimes overwhelmed him. Perhaps Lee’s profound love and respect for dogs, which was frequently noted by contemporaries, compensated for his inability to form lasting relationships with people.5

Contemporary impressions of Lee revealed a provincial misunderstanding, for he was the epitome of a middle-class English gentleman. Although his outward appearance and behavior did not meet any of the standards that an American would think genteel, in his background, upbringing, financial independence, and classical education, Lee was a gentleman. Lee was also perhaps the most cosmopolitan of the revolutionaries. No other American revolutionary, except maybe Benjamin Franklin, was as worldly as Lee. He seemed to move comfortably—almost effortlessly—between different social and political circles. He socialized with European monarchs, such as Frederick II of Prussia, Stanislaus II Augustus Poniatowski of Poland, and Joseph II of Austria; was accepted into the salons of Britain’s leading intellectuals; and hobnobbed with America’s republican revolutionaries.

Yet scholars have treated Lee no better than his contemporaries. They have accepted the biased view that he was little more than an eccentric, egomaniacal professional soldier and have interpreted his strategic and philosophical disagreements with Washington as a plot against the commander-in-chief and a betrayal of the Revolution. In the process, they have ignored the complexity of Lee’s character and given little recognition to his intellect, his varied and extensive military expertise, the radicalism of his political and military ideals, and his modern sensibilities about religion and pet ownership. Historians have missed the opportunity to contrast Lee’s fire-breathing, inflexible, more traditional top-down leadership style (which contradicted his pronouncements concerning democracy) and his inability
to effectively negotiate between civilian and military interests to that of Washington’s more diplomatic, confident, and trustworthy managerial style of leadership. Washington’s reputation for integrity, his willingness to listen to the advice of others—whether from his senior military officers or civilian authorities—and his ability to accept responsibility for his decisions were hallmarks of his leadership and were admired by his contemporaries. Lee, who was appointed a major general in the Continental Army by Congress in June 1775 and who became Washington’s second-in-command fourteen months later, has been the focus of few studies. As a result, a full and fair evaluation of his life and his contributions to the American Revolution are largely absent from the historiography of the war.

It is now time to reassess Lee’s life and ideas on their own merits and in the larger context of the Revolutionary era. “General Lee . . . is the first Officer in Military knowledge and experience we have in the whole Army,” confessed Washington to his brother John Augustine. In September 1776, Washington renamed Fort Constitution on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River Fort Lee in a symbolic gesture that acknowledged the military expertise that Lee brought to the revolutionary cause. Lee saw extensive action in America during the French and Indian War and later in Europe after the conflict expanded into the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763). In America, he experienced firsthand the value of stealth, ambush, and psychological warfare as tactics against well-trained regulars. During the postwar years, Lee served as aide-de-camp to Poland’s King Stanislaus. In this capacity, Lee enjoyed the splendor of court life in Eastern Europe yet was simultaneously appalled by the absolute power the nobility held over the region’s peasants. Lee was commissioned a major general in the Polish army and eventually earned a post in the Russian military of Empress Catherine II during the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774). Lee also witnessed the brutality of civil war in Poland as bands of partisans conducted guerrilla operations that brought havoc and excessive violence on civilian populations and regular armies. It was during this time that Lee became a harsh critic of hereditary monarchy and joined many British radical Whigs in denouncing the rule of George III and his ministers. He warned that the policies pursued by the king and the ministry, especially those aimed at the American colonists, were tyrannical and would lead Britain to absolutism. Disillusioned by the political atmosphere in Britain, Lee relocated to America in 1773, arriving at a critical juncture in Anglo-American affairs.
Although Lee’s military service made him the most experienced officer in the Continental Army, his social and political views made him far more radical than most of his fellow revolutionaries in the military leadership. He had read more broadly and deeply in literature, history, politics, memoir, philosophy, and the art of war than most of his contemporaries. The self-assured John Adams, who rarely paid anyone an easy compliment, praised Lee’s attainments as “the soldier and the scholar” but thought him “a queer creature.” However, because of his respect for Lee, Adams told his wife Abigail: “You must . . . forgive a thousand whims.” Adams claimed that he “had read as much on the military Art and much more of the History of War than any American Officer” but Lee. Lee’s learning had prompted him to form strong commitments to democracy and republicanism, individual liberty, freedom of conscience, the education of women, natural rights, and the democratizing potential of a citizen army.

More than any other officer in the Continental Army, Lee believed that military service should be an obligation of citizenship. He defined the “state” in terms of its citizens and contended that the army should be the representative and defender of the citizenry. Lee took his cues from several historical and philosophical sources: the idea of the public-spirited citizen-soldier existed in ancient Greece and Rome, where a citizen—that is, a person who owned inheritable land—could hold office and was responsible for contributing to national defense. The sixteenth-century Florentine political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli asserted that the cure for what ailed the corrupt republics of Italy was a return to the military organizations of the ancients. This meant the abolition of a professional soldiery and a return to citizen-soldier militias. Machiavelli viewed the militia as essential to the survival of a virtuous republic. Later political theorists echoed Machiavelli, but historian Saul Cornell writes that although there were always “considerable disagreements over how much virtue was necessary for the survival of a republic, at a very minimum there was a broad consensus that a republic had to possess enough virtue to ensure that its citizens would take up arms when necessary to meet internal and external threats.” In his *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), seventeenth-century Whig writer James Harrington connected military duty in defense of the state to citizenship, and eighteenth-century French Enlightenment thinkers Charles–Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau exclaimed the virtues of the citizen-soldier who sacrificed his personal interest for
the public good. Rousseau maintained that a state’s “true defenders are its members” and that “each citizen should be a soldier by duty, none by profession.” As scholar Everett C. Dolman notes, these and other theoretical arguments for the benefits of a citizen-soldier militia laid “the groundwork for democracy . . . through an understanding and manipulation of military organization.”

Lee argued that the citizen-soldier was the military bedrock of democracy. He insisted that in a democracy citizens must actively share the burden of military responsibility equally; they must be willing to fight a war in which their private interests are sacrificed to the common good. National conscription was also an important element in Lee’s conception of war and the defense of democratic society. A similar notion that linked citizenship to military obligation and to sacrifice in defense of the nation was adopted by the French revolutionary Lazare Carnot, whose call to arms in defense of the French state, which was known as the levée en masse, swelled the ranks of the revolutionary armies during the early campaigns of the wars of the French Revolution in the 1790s. In America, some colonial militia laws involved selective drafts for service in particular military campaigns, but national conscription was not enacted until the Civil War.

Lee’s military views distinguished him from many of his contemporaries. It was Charles Lee the professional soldier and not George Washington the former militia officer who held a high opinion of America’s militia as an institution and as an instrument of democracy. Indeed, Washington demonstrated contempt for the citizen-soldiers of the militia, bemoaning the short term nature of militia service, the militiamen’s indifference to military discipline, and their unreliability in battle. Historian Michael S. Neiberg notes that “American experiences after Bunker Hill proved this point” to Washington. The American victory at Bunker Hill in 1775 and the outpouring of patriotic rhetoric after the war had solidified the militia’s place in national folklore, but the debacle at the Battle of Long Island in August 1776 convinced Washington that the troops available to him could not repeat their successful performance at Bunker Hill. The British were no longer inclined toward reckless frontal assaults against entrenched defensive earthworks; instead, they preferred to turn the Continental flanks in a strategy of feint and maneuver. Washington and his protégés argued that the ability to counter the intricate complexities of this British strategy necessitated administrative efficiency, long-term enlistments, the training
of a professional soldiery, and the creation of a system of rigid discipline and deference to authority. From this perspective, the militia could not be relied upon as the main line of defense; instead, national security had to become the responsibility of a well-trained regular army.

During the first two years of the American Revolution, Washington tried to fashion his troops into a regular army. He called on the Continental Congress to implement reforms that would transform the American militia into professional soldiers. His efforts faced political and ideological opposition, however, and the independent will of the American people. Lee demonstrated the utmost confidence in the abilities of the militia. He believed that the Americans' natural independent spirit would preclude the creation of a professional regular army capable of confronting the British in a conventional war. Lee adhered to the notion that militias comprised of free citizens who were motivated by a desire to fight to preserve their liberty and defend their property and families rather than rewards (financial or honorific) made better soldiers than men who were held to long-term service, paid a wage, and trained to fight from a drill manual. He touted the martial virtues of America's citizen-soldiers and was confident that their cultural acquaintance with firearms, their natural skills as marksmen, and their love of liberty would enable them to defeat Britain. Lee's views were in keeping with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century radical Whig tradition, which condemned the dissolution of Britain's militia system under the Stuart monarchy in favor of a professional army of long-term enlistments and conventional tactics.

For Lee, then, the movement to create a professional army in America smacked dangerously of a European-style military establishment—one that was tied to absolute authority, monarchy, and European corruption and was at odds with the national character, liberties, and military traditions of the Americans. Lee warned that an army of professional soldiers who were paid by the state was invariably dangerous to liberty and civic virtue because it had the potential to become an instrument of tyranny should it come under the control of morally corrupt leaders concerned only with the protection of personal interests. He argued that the creation of a professional soldiery threatened the very essence of the American Revolution—that is, free citizens fighting for their natural rights and liberties and in defense of their families and their property. Professional armies were obedient to the interests of the state alone, not to the interests of the citizenry of a free
society. He feared that a professional regular army could be turned against the Revolution and used for the suppression of the same natural rights and liberties that the war aimed to protect. The plot by several Continental Army officers at Newburgh, New York, in 1783 to challenge the Congress of the Confederation and wrest power away from the civilian authorities because of the government’s alleged indifference to their financial problems proved that this was not the wild fantasy of an eccentric soldier.

If he was out of step with Washington, Lee was not alone among the revolutionaries in his belief that professional standing armies posed a major threat to liberty. Samuel Adams insisted that “a standing Army . . . is always dangerous to the Liberties of the People.” The Virginia Declaration of Rights, which George Mason drafted in 1776, declared militias “the proper, natural and safe defense of a free state” and argued that “in all cases, the military should be under strict subordination to, and governed by, the civil power,” while “Standing Armies . . . should be avoided as dangerous to liberty.” Among the litany of grievances in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, Mason’s protégé, condemned George III for keeping “among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the consent of our Legislatures,” for rendering “the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power,” and for “quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops” among the citizens of America. Jefferson also denounced the king’s negotiations to import foreign mercenaries to be used for the American war. He implied that George III sought to use Britain’s professional army and foreign auxiliaries to crush the colonists’ assertions of their natural rights and liberties. These grievances justified the Americans’ decision to sever all allegiance to the British Crown and to establish “free and independent states.”

To win the war and America’s independence, Lee urged the revolutionaries to adopt a petite guerre strategy that would avoid massing the Continental Army for conventional pitched battles against the British. Instead, he advocated forming the army along the lines of a national militia, dividing it into several small detachments that were trained in highly mobile light-infantry tactics, a practice that was consistent with the colonial military experience. The officers of these detachments could integrate their operations with the activities of roving bands of local partisans who were proficient guerrilla fighters. Lee believed that dividing the army into smaller units would improve its mobility and help logistically to supply the troops. Lee reasoned that smaller detachments could move quickly through
the countryside, subsist more easily off the land, and effectively harass the
British until they were exhausted. He also suggested that the Americans
move their main military operations to the rugged terrain west of the
Susquehanna River, in central Pennsylvania. They would stretch out the
enemy’s already thin supply lines, which relied heavily on the Royal Navy to
transport provisions from Britain, creating a financial and logistical burden
for officials in London. Furthermore, the smaller, more mobile American
units could effectively carry out movements aimed at harassing the British
flanks, cutting their outstretched lines of supply and communication, and
ambushing isolated patrols and outposts. Local partisans could be used
to administer and enforce test oaths, draw neutrals into the revolutionary
cause, and intimidate and retaliate against Loyalists.

Although Lee’s proposed strategy would expose large areas of the eastern
seaboard to enemy occupation, he argued that forcing the British to hold
these areas would limit their strategic options. He also maintained that
taking military operations into the hinterland would force the British and
their Hessian and Hanoverian allies to confront an unconventional enemy
deep within unfamiliar territory. Geography would be the Americans’ ally;
this was their home and they knew its contours. The extreme mobility of
the American forces and their detailed knowledge of the terrain would
make it possible for them to outmaneuver and to surprise the larger and
better-equipped British Army. Lee was confident that this strategy would
cause chaos and confusion in the ranks of the conventional forces of Britain
and her German allies, causing them to abandon their preferred methodi-
cal, linear strategic movements in favor of improvised and reactive tactics
that they were wholly unprepared to implement. He also felt it would
negate any Loyalist support. Lee’s goal was to keep the enemy constantly
off balance, to inflict as many casualties on their forces as possible, and to
leave them demoralized. The defeat of the British army commanded by
John Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777 and the success of Generals Nathanael
Greene and Daniel Morgan against the army of British general Charles
Cornwallis in the crucial second southern campaign of 1780–1781, when the
revolutionary cause seemed close to collapse, was the result of the applica-
tion of a similar strategy.

The defeat of the British military was not the only objective in Lee’s
strategy, however. Lee’s scheme, which was reminiscent of Fabian strategy,19
sought to wear down the political will of the British people to continue
the war. In this way, Lee hoped that the loss of popular support in Britain for the conflict would force George III, his ministers, and Parliament to give up their attempt to subjugate the Americans. The realization of Lee’s proposed strategy—one that blurred the lines between soldier and civilian—meant fighting a wholly different war than that envisioned by Washington and other American officers who were continental in their thinking. For these officers, the key to winning American independence was national political unity and the key to national political unity was forging the Continental Army into a national army under a unified command structure that would be subordinate to the civil authority of the Continental Congress. Washington viewed the Continental Army as the key to the survival of the Revolution and did his best to keep it together. “Success for Washington was not in battlefield victory alone,” writes historian Caroline Cox, “but also in simply keeping the army together. No matter what disappointments the army faced in the field, as long as it continued to exist, the Revolution was alive.” Washington developed his own version of the Fabian strategy that concentrated the army just beyond the reach of the enemy and avoided large-scale battles in favor of smaller conventional operations against isolated British outposts and peripheral detachments before withdrawing his forces from the field. Washington carried out this strategy with perfection at Trenton and at Princeton in the winter of 1776–1777. The longer the Continental Army lived to fight another day, “the more secure Congress and the new nation became, the more other nations accepted the legitimacy of the new government, and the more disgruntled and war weary the British became,” writes Cox. In Washington’s strategy, the militia was used to screen the Continental Army and to undertake local defense, gather intelligence, and conduct operations that would limit British maneuvers, harass their flanks, and deny them resources. In this scheme, militias played a supporting role to the Continental Army; they did not become a substitute for it.

Washington’s vision for the Continental Army required European-style organization and training, the opposite of Lee’s ideas. During the winter of 1777–1778, former Prussian military officer Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben joined Washington’s staff at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, and was put to work training the Continental troops in the close-order drill system, in the discipline of the parade ground, and in the linear tactics that were familiar to eighteenth-century European armies. Furthermore, France’s
entry into the conflict in February 1778 all but guaranteed that the war would be fought according to what Lee called the “European Plan.”

In his opponents’ view, Lee’s proposed strategy would undermine national unity since it had the potential to exacerbate the localism and provincialism that was a significant characteristic of American society in the colonial period; the fear was that this would cause the conflict to devolve into a war of reprisals and counter-reprisals. Historian John Shy writes that those Americans who opposed Lee’s strategy “felt a need to be seen as cultivated, honorable, respectable men, not savages leading savages in a howling wilderness.” They argued that a reliance on guerrilla tactics and terrorism carried out by organized militias or roving bands of local partisans or both would lead to the political fragmentation of the Revolution and to a full-scale civil war directed by local juntas. When one looks at the partisan violence that occurred in the areas around British-occupied New York City and in the southern backcountry during the American Revolution or the Jacobin Terror of the French Revolution or, on a larger scale, the recent situations in Iraq and in Afghanistan, where local sectarian militias and death squads have slowed or in some cases have undermined the political process, one can see the merit of this critique.

Washington’s idea for the army ultimately proved correct, both politically and militarily. But his rejection of localism and his lackluster opinion of the American militia hampered the debate over local democracy and popular political participation in America. Washington’s rejection of Lee’s strategy and the rejection of many of his contemporaries do not justify its trivialization by historians as the irrelevant musings of an eccentric. Nor should Lee’s contributions to the American Revolution be dismissed. He was one of the leading voices for American liberty and an early advocate for independence, and he worked tirelessly to strengthen the Continental lines outside Boston and to put Newport, Rhode Island; New York City; and Charleston, South Carolina, into the best defensible position against a British attack.

Lee reached his zenith as a revolutionary and as a hero of American liberty between June 1775 and September 1776. During that fifteen-month time span, he served as Congress’s main military troubleshooter, assigned to wherever the need for his military expertise seemed most critical. It would have served Lee’s reputation better had he been killed in battle early in the war. He would have been universally hailed by contemporaries and...
remembered to this day as an ardent revolutionary and perhaps the nation’s first true soldier-scholar. But Lee’s proclivity for self-destructive behavior, which was demonstrated by the way he demeaned the decisions of his superiors and civilian authorities throughout his military career, by his suspect actions while he was in British custody from December 1776 to April 1778, by the allegations of incompetence against him at the Battle of Monmouth in June of 1778, and by his subsequent court-martial and removal from the Continental service have left his historical reputation in tatters.

This study draws a new portrait of Charles Lee, replacing a simple “oddity” with a complex, fascinating person who made important contributions to the Revolutionary era as a propagandist and as a soldier. Lee had confidence that a popular war of mass resistance that was fought using a strategy of petite guerre would effectively stymie the British war machine and neutralize local Loyalists. To a degree often not admitted and possibly not realized by Washington and his coterie of military officers, the Revolution proved Lee correct. The use of militia and roving bands of local partisans and unconventional hit-and-run attacks to defeat the British army at Saratoga in 1777 and in the South in 1780–1781 vindicated Lee’s strategy. The idea of a popular war of mass resistance that relied on guerrilla tactics was later echoed in struggles in France and Haiti during the eighteenth century; in Greece and Latin America during the nineteenth century; in the Philippines, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Northern Ireland during the twentieth century; and in Syria and other conflicts around the globe in our time. Thus it could be claimed that Lee was a harbinger of certain aspects of modern revolutionary military strategy.

The American nation was born in war. And, reflecting Lee’s arguments, this war shaped the kind of nation that emerged from it. Lee recognized that a strategic choice existed for the revolutionaries: they could try to preserve society by massing troops to fight conventional battles against the British at the risk of losing the war or they could risk that society by fighting a guerrilla-style insurgency that would prolong the war but give them their best chance to defeat the British and gain their independence. According to military historian Don Higginbotham, “a guerrilla war of independence had no appeal to the Americans.” They were too prosperous and still very close to their British heritage to consider Lee’s alternative. “It is impossible to imagine the Americans as terrorists in the modern sense,”
writes Higginbotham, “for terrorists hate their opponents and all they stand for. Terrorism spawns guerrilla warfare, which in turn produces more terrorism; terrorism rips apart the vitals of the community.” Many Americans did not hate the British nor did they want to risk tearing asunder their society and undermining their prosperity in an effort to fight a guerrilla war.23

Lee’s ideas were at the center of a debate among the American revolutionaries over the definition of a successful military strategy—one that would win America’s independence from Britain while remaining true to the democratic aims of the war and guaranteeing a stable postwar political situation. As they decided this issue, the revolutionaries confronted a real dilemma: create a national army of full-time professional soldiers and use the militia solely for local defense or avoid the creation of a national army and use the militia as the basis for several independent armies that would coordinate operations with local bands of partisans in a guerrilla-style insurgency. This was not simply a strategic concern; it also raised the question of where the military stood in the system of political power—that is, who should have a claim on the loyalty of the military: the states or the national government. This same issue would reemerge in political form over the next two centuries in America, most immediately in the debates over the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution.24

This, then, is the story of one of the most complex and controversial figures of the American Revolution and the debates and discussions regarding military strategy and democracy to which he contributed. At first glance Charles Lee was not impressive. He was tall, gangly, and awkward in appearance, dress, and manners and in no way fit the eighteenth-century American vision of an English gentleman. From such a portrait one can understand why contemporaries and historians have dismissed him. But a study of Lee’s life, his ideas, and his leadership style sheds new light on the way the Americans waged war against Britain during the Revolution and on the debate over the proper military organization in a democracy. By doing so, it addresses two critical questions: What kinds of institutions knit together a nation? and What is the price of creating those institutions?