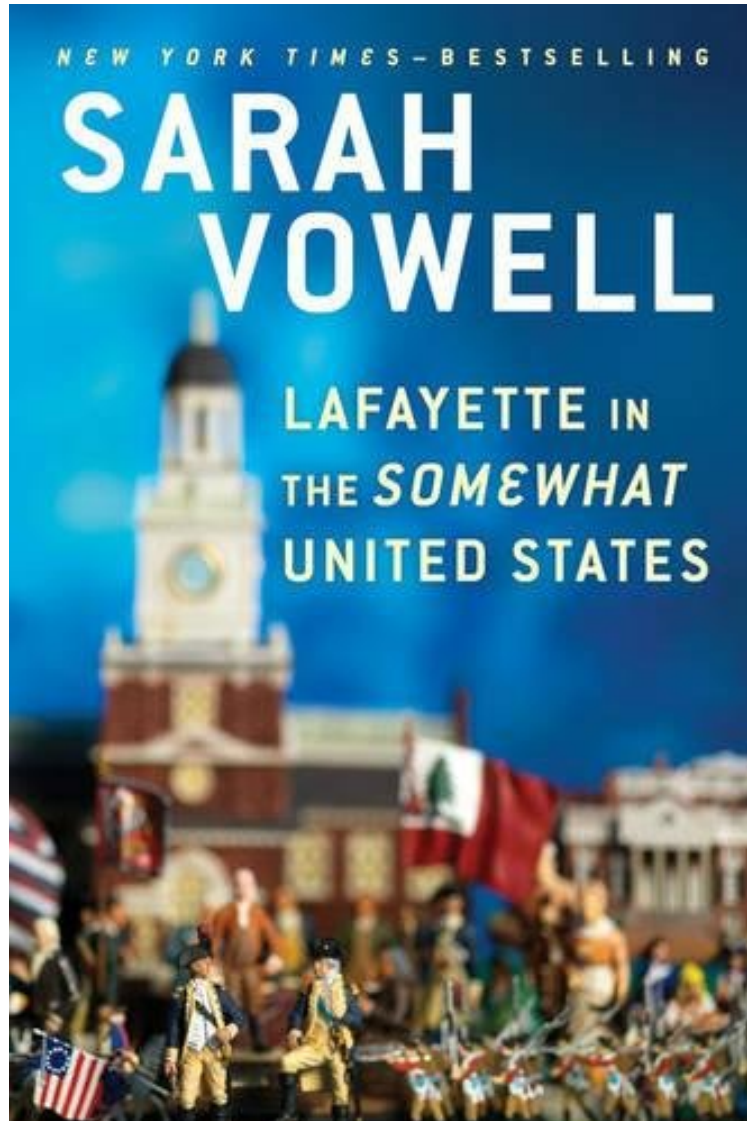


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## Lafayette in the Somewhat United States

*Sarah Vowell*

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#30298 in Books Sarah Vowell 2016-10-04 2016-10-04 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.21 x .74 x 5.50l, .58 #File Name: 0399573100288 pages Lafayette in the Somewhat United States | File size: 23.Mb

**Sarah Vowell : Lafayette in the Somewhat United States** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lafayette in the Somewhat United States:

86 of 88 people found the following review helpful. Sharply humorous, insightful, and stirring By Jaylia Sarah Vowell's acerbic, insightful wit comes through loud and clear in this fascinating account of French General Lafayette and his role in the American Revolution, but it took me a while to adjust to her irreverent banter in print--as well as being an author Vowell is also known for her radio pieces on This American Life. This book runs almost 270 pages without any chapter breaks, and reads like the long-winded but mesmerizing stand-up routine of a highly knowledgeable, history

obsessed comedian who knows how to use humor to make a point. Lafayette was still a teenager when he left his young bride behind and snuck out of France to join the American Revolution against the wishes of his family, but he ended up becoming such a key figure in the winning of the war that cities all over the country are named for him. Vowell has a special knack for revealing the personalities of the many historical figures she writes about, their foibles, revealing quirks, and strengths. Since Lafayette had a close relationship with George Washington he features prominently in the book and I really appreciated getting a clearer picture of the man behind the myth. Vowell even manages to make battles and military strategy interesting, in part by keeping her focus on the people involved, and in part by not overlooking the missteps or ironies of the situations. Vowell finds plenty of opportunities to relate the struggles of the Revolutionary period to American politics today, pointing out that many current ideological divisions and tendencies have an origin, or at least an analog, dating back to the founding of the country. The book also covers the aftereffects of the Revolutionary War in France and Britain, and the America of 1824, which was when John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson competed in a notorious presidential election and the then elderly Lafayette made a return trip to the country that was still so besotted with him that two thirds of the population of New York City welcomed him ashore. While researching the book Vowell visited historic sites in America and France and she takes readers along on those trips too, giving us her impressions of tourist destinations like Williamsburg and Valley Forge while relating what happened there in the past. In this book Vowell manages the neat trick of being both funny and stirring. She clearly loves history, and she makes it very easy to join her in that passion. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Weird But Good History By Robert B. Lamm I'd heard about Sarah Vowell, but I was never interested in reading any of her books until I heard her being interviewed about this one. Something about what she said intrigued me, so I got it. It won't be the last book of hers that I read -- in fact, I've got another one on order already. She reminds me of Bill Bryson, though I've only read one of his books, in that she provides lots of history combined with contemporary wit and humor and a sense of the uncanny connections between historical events separated by generations. For example, she discusses a connection between the story of Lafayette and Herman Melville that I found intriguing, but there are quite a few other examples. She also makes some American icons (and their British counterparts) come alive in ways that traditional (i.e., often bland) history does not. I have only one criticism of the book, really: the story of Lafayette recedes in the background (sometimes out of the picture entirely) in favor of her retelling of key episodes in the Revolutionary War; I didn't really expect a history of the War and was disappointed that Lafayette vanishes at times. However, she does a very good job in describing the weird coincidences and serendipity that resulted in the defeat of the British. I also have a second complaint, but not against Ms. Vowell (well, not really). There was one instance where she talks about a soldier named Stephen in one place and a few pages later he becomes Stephens (or maybe it was Steven and Stevens; I can't recall). As I often ask, where were the editors? If I caught this on a casual read, why didn't someone else catch it? Maybe having to do an index would have helped. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Funny and informative By Theresa Alan I thought I knew American history, but it turns out that there was a whole lot of stuff I didn't know, and this book helped fill in some gaps. Vowell is always funny, but some of the material in here is dense, so you have to love history and nonfiction to enjoy this book. Vowell wrote part of this during the 2013 temper tantrum in Washington that shut down all nonessential government services and cost our country \$24 BILLION. (So much for fiscal responsibility.) The fact that our country is constantly fractured is a theme throughout the book. One of the things I hadn't realized was the importance of the French helping secure American independence, specifically Marquis de Lafayette, who was only 19 when he came over to fight on the side of the Americans against the British during the Revolutionary war. I also never realized that George Washington was fighting with an untrained army of hungry (sometimes to the point of starvation) troops who often didn't have boots for the feet to fight in NEW ENGLAND (which, of course, gets a bit nippy in winter). This quote illustrates Vowell's writing style: The newly dubbed General Lafayette was only 19 years old. Considering Independence Hall was also where the founders calculated that a slave equals three-fifths a person and cooked up an electoral college that lets Florida and Ohio pick our presidents, making an adolescent who barely spoke English a major general at an age I got hired to run the cash register at a Portland pizza joint was not the worst decision ever made there. The best quote of the book, however, is when she talks about Lafayette Square across from the capitol in DC, where innumerable protests have taken place over the years. In reference to a Klan rally held there she writes, Freedom of expression truly exists only when a society's most repugnant nitwits are allowed to spew their nonsense in public. If only we could get rid of the electoral college and preposterous gerrymandering and we might actually get something resembling a functional congress.

From the bestselling author of *Assassination Vacation* and *The Partly Cloudy Patriot*, an insightful and unconventional account of George Washington's trusted officer and friend, that swashbuckling teenage French aristocrat the Marquis de Lafayette. Chronicling General Lafayette's years in Washington's army, Vowell reflects on the ideals of the American Revolution versus the reality of the Revolutionary War. Riding shotgun with Lafayette, Vowell swerves from the high-minded debates of Independence Hall to the frozen wasteland of Valley Forge, from bloody battlefields to the Palace of Versailles, bumping into John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Lord Cornwallis, Benjamin Franklin, Marie

Antoinette and various kings, Quakers and redcoats along the way. Drawn to the patriots war out of a lust for glory, Enlightenment ideas and the traditional French hatred for the British, young Lafayette crossed the Atlantic expecting to join forces with an undivided people, encountering instead fault lines between the Continental Congress and the Continental Army, rebel and loyalist inhabitants, and a conspiracy to fire George Washington, the one man holding together the rickety, seemingly doomed patriot cause. While Vowell's yarn is full of the bickering and infighting that marks the American past, her telling of the Revolution is just as much a story of friendship: between Washington and Lafayette, between the Americans and their French allies and, most of all between Lafayette and the American people. Coinciding with one of the most contentious presidential elections in American history, Vowell lingers over the elderly Lafayettes sentimental return tour of America in 1824, when three fourths of the population of New York City turned out to welcome him ashore. As a Frenchman and the last surviving general of the Continental Army, Lafayette belonged to neither North nor South, to no political party or faction. He was a walking, talking reminder of the sacrifices and bravery of the revolutionary generation and what the founders hoped this country could be. His return was not just a reunion with his beloved Americans it was a reunion for Americans with their own astonishing, singular past. Vowell's narrative look at our somewhat united states is humorous, irreverent and wholly original. From the Hardcover edition.

.com An Best Book of October 2015: The Marquis de Lafayette, a.k.a. one of George Washington's best buds, is the subject of Sarah Vowell's latest offering, *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States*. So, why would a young French aristocrat venture to our shores to join Washington's army and fight in the Revolutionary War? He came for the glory! He came because he believed in American ideals! He came to escape his in-laws! But, mainly it was for the Enlightenment ideas that were unevenly embraced by many of his fellow comrades. Ideas that impacted how the war played out. I have seen eyes glaze over when I talk about this sort of thing, but anyone familiar with Vowell's oeuvre knows what a knack she has for making the (seemingly) mundane fascinating. She also draws some oddly comforting parallels between that time and our own (turns out that politicians have been butting heads, acting like idiots, and sporting terrible comb-overs since the birth of our great nation). There is rarely a description of Vowell that doesn't include the term acerbic, and her signature snark, strategically employed, is one of the things that makes *Lafayette* a fun (and yes, educational) read. But the other quality that shines through is her optimism. You will be smarter and less cynical after reading it. Erin Kodicek "[A] freewheeling history of the Revolutionary War... Vowell points out that Lafayette was for a time 'a national obsession.'" *The New Yorker* Vowell wanders through the history of the American Revolution and its immediate aftermath, using Lafayette's involvement in the war as a map, and bringing us all along in her perambulations. Her prose sparkles. *The New York Times* Book [Vowell] takes an open and observant 'Hey, that's nuts' stance toward past and present, which results in a book that's informative, funny and insightful. *TIME* Gilded with snark, buoyant on charm, Vowell's brand of history categorically refuses to take itself or any of its subjects too seriously. At once light-footed and light-hearted, her histories are dare I say it fun. And Lafayette is no different. Even amid defeats... Vowell emerges from the Revolutionary War with an unabashed smile on her face. I'd be surprised if her reader doesn't, too. NPR "[Vowell] turns the dusty chronicle of American history into a lively mash up and then, playing the history nerd, delivers her stories in her flat funny voice. The National Book Award Sarah Vowell turns her keen eye and droll wit to the American Revolution in her latest historical venture, *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States*. Vowell, of course, doesn't just give us the highlights; she offers a portrait of [Lafayette] and his older contemporaries, with whom he found friendship, glory, and endless bickering. *Cosmopolitan* You can't beat Sarah Vowell for quirky chronicles of American history's dark side. *Chicago Reader* Vowell takes on American history as only she can, this time with the story of Frenchman the Marquis de Lafayette, a Revolutionary War hero. *USA Today* To impress the history buff at the table, read Vowell's (ever the expert in, really, everything) in-depth and irreverent account of George Washington's decorated general Lafayette, which also looks to our own political climate for context. *Marie Claire* Nobody recounts American history the way Sarah Vowell does, with irreverence and humor and quirky details history and facts, but also entertainment. [*Lafayette in the Somewhat United States*] is about the friendship between George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette, but in Vowell's inimitable style it is also firmly grounded in the present. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* Here's one historian who is a born storyteller. *Philadelphia Inquirer* Vowell's rollicking, sly humor is the perfect spoonful of sugar to down with her intensive research and historical insight. *Huffington Post* If you ever wanted an insightful and entertaining look at the friendship between George Washington and his French aristocrat general Marquis de Lafayette, this book by Sarah Vowell should be on your list." *Kansas City Star* Vowell's sort of the Quentin Tarantino of popular history: She weaves pop culture and real life into her narrative, breaking down the barriers that keep history buried in the past." *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* Vowell is especially skilled at making detours seem natural and relevant, including in this case a swing by the boyhood home of Bruce Springsteen, which was in the neighborhood of a battle site and, hey, a historical landmark in its own right (plus, she adds, one of the Boss's relatives was a Revolutionary soldier) An intoxicating blend of humor and emotional weight. *The AV Club* What so funny about American History? A lot, when it's Sarah Vowell telling the story. *Omnivore*icious Lafayette is lucky he has Sarah Vowell in his court. *New Republic* "With laugh-out-loud humor

and her characteristic snark, Vowell makes this walk through history a walk in the park."The Washington Post"A whopping canvas as choreographed as a graphic novel. Vowell brings a learned, wiseacre hand to this work, full of its own brio and dash, and with that legerdemain that finds you embracing history."BN Sarah Vowell books are equal parts incisive and laugh-out-loud funny.Inside Higher Ed[Vowell] is wonderful at showing the way history can be a conversation between the past and present.Sophisticated Dorkiness"An engaging reminder that America has never been anything but a (somewhat) dysfunctional country." Washington Monthly Sarah Vowell is that hip high-school history teacher everyone wanted to have She has a gift for the kind of description that seals an image in the readers imagination.Columbus DispatchWhen it comes to weird basic facts, all you have to do is turn on a presidential debate to remind yourself of the irreconcilable paradoxes and contemptuous rifts at the highest levels of American public life. [This] is one of those books that reminds us things have been this way since the beginning.The StrangerAuthor Sarah Vowell has a unique voice both in reality and in her reality Vowell takes a rather wry look at history under any circumstance, applying her modern and political perspectives to her topics.Gabbing Geek Vowell has mined American history for surprising and amusing insights into the heart of the nation.Slate Like her previous books, Lafayette strikes witty blows against the stodgy sorts of U.S. history taught in classrooms.The Smithsonian"The enjoyment Vowell seems to derive from poking around in Americas obscure corners is part of what makes her historical narratives vital. In tracing historys circuitous path, she demonstrates how we got where we are todayand sheds light on where we might be heading next.BookPage"[Vowell is]as good at giving facts as she is at making sure youll retain them by telling the story in the most fascinating way possible.PasteFrom the Hardcover edition.About the AuthorSarah Vowell is the bestselling author of Lafayette in the Somewhat United States,Unfamiliar Fishes,The Wordy Shipmates,Assassination Vacation, andThe Partly Cloudy Patriot.From the Hardcover edition.