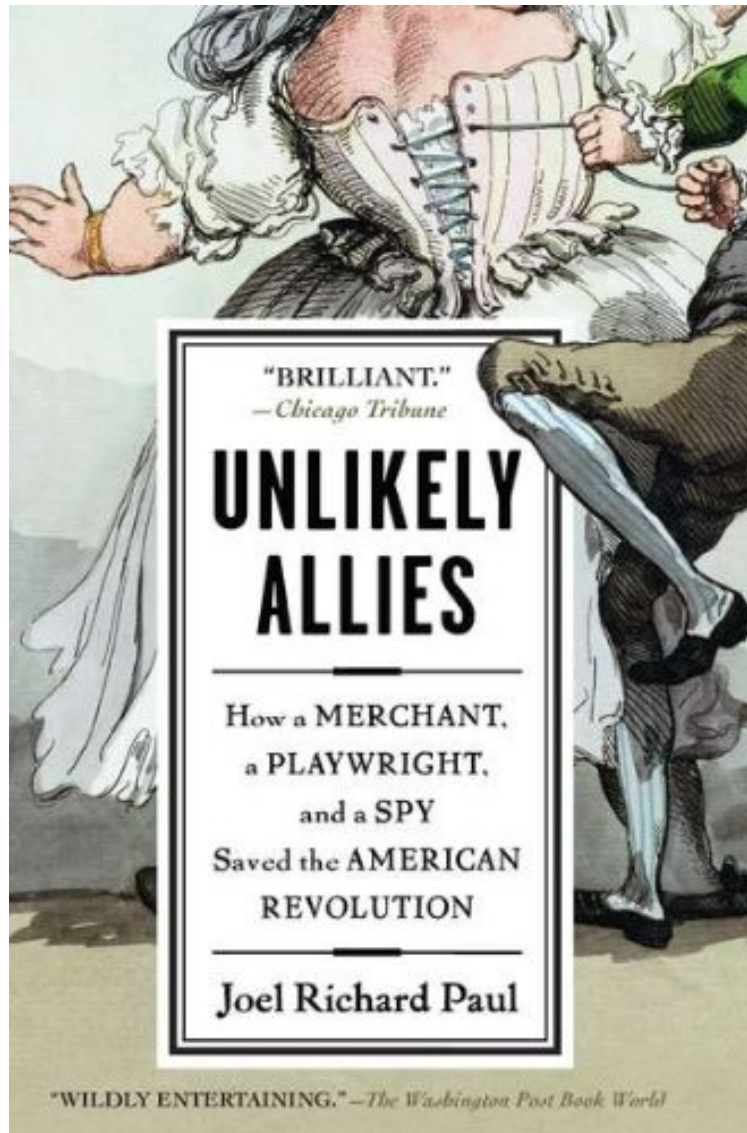


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# Unlikely Allies: How a Merchant, a Playwright, and a Spy Saved the American Revolution

Joel Richard Paul

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**Joel Richard Paul : Unlikely Allies: How a Merchant, a Playwright, and a Spy Saved the American Revolution** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unlikely Allies: How a Merchant, a Playwright, and a Spy Saved the American Revolution:

38 of 38 people found the following review helpful. Very Enlightening for the Lay HistorianBy James B. CreightonI,

too, thoroughly enjoyed "Unlikely Allies," by Professor Joel Paul. I agree with some of the other reviewers in that this book DOES read like a thriller yet the careful reader can confirm, by the Professor's endnotes, that this book is vigorously well-researched. Moreover, Professor Paul begins his book in a way that I truly appreciate: he devotes a beginning chapter to each of these three "unlikely allies,": the merchant, Silas Deane, the playwright, Caron de Beaumarchais, and the cross-dressing Frenchman/Frenchwoman, the Chevalier d'Eon, a captain of the dragoons. I found this technique very helpful in that it provides the reader with a backdrop against which to (begin to) understand the motivations, passions, expectancies, and internal conflicts that each of these important personages faced during his/her respective lives, especially during the ever so critical years of our country's infancy. Professor Paul's writing is crisp and to the point. Yet, at the same time, in each chapter he manages to provide the reader with the flavor, indeed a bona fide SENSATION, of the particular moment in our history that is being covered. It is true that much of our (typically taught) American History is framed by the righteousness and virtue of our "founding fathers." I had always been taught that men like Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin were superior beings, almost godlike in their perfection. However, Professor Paul's book adds some perspective and depth to those history lessons that were spoon-fed to us so long ago. Professor Paul, while paying much respect to these and other important players in our commonly taught history reveals that these men were, indeed, quite human, and were just as imperfect as we all are. None of us is above reproach, nor were our founding fathers. With the possible exception of Silas Deane, none of us gives unconditionally of our time, resources, and energy. We all want or need something for ourselves in return for our efforts, even our efforts on behalf of our country or on behalf of the "greater good." I am thankful to Professor Paul for introducing me to Silas Deane, to Beaumarchais, and to the Chevalier d'Eon. His well-written account will, I believe, withstand the examinations of time, and continue to delight students of American History in the years to come.

Overall, a very good read! 10 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Written by a Law School Professor and administrator, there ...

By kjWritten by a Law School Professor and administrator, there are some shortcomings in this work as a historical narrative. Several British ministers are credited with responsibilities they did not hold or held at other times than the period under consideration. Vergennes is extolled at the expense of Choiseul with regard to the rebuilding of the French Navy following the disasters of the Seven Years War. Even the date of Lexington and Concord are stated incorrectly. Joel Richard Paul is not a careful historian. That said, the story remained engaging. Revolving around the lives of three individuals involved in the financial and diplomatic maneuvering leading to French support for the American War of Independence, it is a tale of political intrigue. The curious events surrounding two of the principal figures - Beaumarchais and D'Eon - also raise issues of gender identity and sexual orientation that are sometimes portrayed as modern social constructs. The reminder that these issues are not modern inventions is a reminder, as Harry Truman observed, that "... [t]he only new thing in the world is the history you don't know ...". While I usually find books containing serious errors of fact to be of limited value, the facts surrounding the central figures did seem to be accurate, if occasionally presented from a particular perspective. Silas Deane's portrait is largely drawn from his own papers. In spite of these issues, Unusual Allies is a well-crafted and enjoyable read. The prose flows and the short chapters divide the material into discreet elements that facilitate the consideration of each issue raised. If, at times, the book takes on a bit more of an air of advocacy for the three principals, perhaps it should be unsurprising from the Dean of a Law School.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. A great read and a rich perspective.

By PaulJoel Paul's Unlikely Allies is a fascinating account of a crucial episode during the Revolutionary War. It focuses on the intersection of the lives of Silas Deane, America's emissary to the French before Benjamin Franklin, Caron de Beaumarchais, better known to opera lovers than to historians, and the Cavalier d'Eon, a fascinating French aristocrat who was a cross-dressing diplomat, spy and blackmailer. It emphatically makes the point that the success of the Revolution was no sure thing, that the motives of the revolutionaries were mixed, that the politics of the day were every bit as inglorious as our own, and that the American-French connection has deep and complex roots. All this might be known already to a serious student of the American revolution, but for this lay reader the story was enlightening as well as a great entertainment. Law professors as a whole are not known for their vivid writing (I speak as a law professor as well as a friend of Joel's) but this book manages to be great fun and wonderfully written without compromising its intellectual integrity.

Look out for Joel Paul's new book, Without Precedent: Chief Justice John Marshall and His Times. Silas Deane, a Connecticut merchant and member of the Continental Congress, went to France to persuade the king to support the colonists in their struggle with Britain. Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais was a playwright who had access to the arms and ammunition that Deane needed. And the Chevalier d'On was a diplomat and sometime spy for the French king who ignited a crisis that persuaded the French to arm the Americans. This is the true story of how three remarkable people lied, cheated, stole, and cross-dressed across Europe to gain France's aid as the War of American Independence hung in the balance.

From Publishers Weekly In this debut, lawyer and academic Paul examines three critical but forgotten characters of the American Revolution. The merchant is American Silas Deane, a Connecticut man sent to France by Congress to

broker an alliance and arms treaty for the Continental Army. The playwright is a Frenchman named Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, author of *The Barber of Seville*, who saw the Revolution as an opportunity for profit. The spy is the colorful Chevalier d'Eon, who worked for Louis XV, and threatened to provoke war with England after Louis XVI came to power, using old letters that outlined a plan to invade London. Beaumarchais was tasked with retrieving those letters from the Chevalier before Louis XVI would provide funds to arm the Americans. Once secured, Beaumarchais worked with Deane to import arms, and other trade goods, without raising the suspicions of the British. Paul's 18th century is highly detailed, but most striking is how little war profiteering has changed in 200-plus years, complete with Congressional infighting among honest lawmakers and those using the system for personal gain. Examining the Revolutionary War through three disparate figures, Paul reveals just how close the wealthiest colonists came to replacing one oppressive aristocracy with another. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "[A] keen, intriguing assessment of how personal politics might play out on the international stage." ---Kirkus "Rollicking and surprising, this is history as it really happened - as it was made by all-too-human actors. Unlikely Allies is a lively read and an important counterpoint to Founder hagiography." -Evan Thomas, bestselling author of *John Paul Jones* "An engaging and entertaining account of three of the most colorful characters involved in the American Revolution. It is hard to believe that their story is true, but it is." -Gordon S. Wood, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* "Unlikely Allies is an amazing story compellingly told. I kept turning the pages in eagerness to find out what would happen next. Conspiracies abounded, and hardly anyone was what he or she seemed. If the eighteenth century in Europe was an era of Enlightenment, it was also an Age of Deception. Yet thanks to Joel Paul's sympathetic portrayal, Silas Deane emerges as an unsung hero of the American Revolution." -Robert A. Gross, Bancroft Prize-winning author of *The Minutemen and Their World* "Ever tire of worshipful accounts of the Founding Fathers' wisdom and fortitude? Then try this wonderful book about how an American businessman and two Frenchmen, a dramatist and a spy, came to their aid. A rollicking romp as well as a serious history, it reminds us of the role of duplicity, hypocrisy and corruption, and of human frailty and chance, in safeguarding the American revolution." -William Taubman, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*