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Ken Miller, *Dangerous Guests: Enemy Captives and Revolutionary Communities during the War for Independence*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2014. Pp. ix, 247. ISBN 978-0-8014-5055-6.

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In *Dangerous Guests*,<sup>1</sup> Ken Miller (George Washington College) has produced a clearly written little book that packs a big punch. This history of the experiences of British and German POWs and their captors in the American Revolution sheds much new light not only on the prisoners, but also the Continental government's policy towards them and colonial and revolutionary Pennsylvania more broadly. It also clarifies the complexities of the formation of a fledgling American identity during the war and its aftermath. The setting of the story—colonial Lancaster, Pennsylvania—was typical of other locations where British and German POWs (those “dangerous guests”) were held, including Carlisle, Lebanon, and Reading in Pennsylvania; Charlottesville and Winchester in Virginia; and Frederick in Maryland. More importantly, the experiences of Lancaster's citizens illustrate the truly tenuous nature of American nationalism in the early republic.

Mid-eighteenth-century Lancaster was a place of contradictions and divisions. Situated in the interior of British North America, it was remote from yet also near urban centers. It had strong economic ties to the bustling seaports of Philadelphia and Baltimore, both about two day's distant. On the eve of the Revolution, the town appeared to outside observers to be a very diverse but surprisingly harmonious community. Miller stresses, however, that it was more diverse and more divided than most visitors knew. The main fissures were linguistic and ethnic—people identified themselves as either English speakers (including Scots-Irish) or German speakers. The Germans came from several western German principalities with distinct dialects. The two groups were identified and separated by their religions. Indeed, the denizens of Lancaster espoused at least eight different faiths. Moreover, some Christians were professed pacifists, while others believed it was right to take up arms when necessary.

In terms of political affiliation and the exercise of political power, some Lancastrians supported continued proprietary rule in Pennsylvania, others the establishment of a royal government. Some townspeople—predominantly the English—wielded power in the provincial and/or local governments; others were prevented from voting, chose not to run for political office, or, like the growing German majority, were kept from positions of authority. The town was a collection of island communities with multiple identities that often forged alliances of convenience (like so many intersecting Venn diagrams). But all were British subjects ruled by a seemingly benevolent royal government across the Atlantic. The collision of British imperial interests and parochial colonial concerns and the ensuing armed conflict posed daunting challenges for this hodgepodge community.

Miller explains that the Revolutionary War both exacerbated existing divisions and created new ones in Lancaster. The main new factions were loyalists on the one hand, and Whigs, insurgents, and revolutionaries on the other. But the latter had further distinctions: some identified as moderates, others as radicals pushing for greater political change. At the same time, Miller writes, the conflict eventually fostered a new degree of unity, as the people of Lancaster “interacted in new ways.... [The] English and German speakers mobilized ... as American insurgents armed against British and German invaders in defense of their shared rights and liberties” (56). Still, Lancaster's role as the primary destination of the vast majority of British and Hessian POWs hastened the pace of change in its inhabitants' identities.

As an interior crossroads town distant from the theaters of war, with large barracks that had housed British troops during the French and Indian War (1754–63), Lancaster was an ideal place for the Continental

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1. Orig. diss., UC Davis, 2006.

Congress to locate prisoners. Miller notes that the Congress initially hoped that friendly treatment (e.g., minimal confinement) of British POWs might win some hearts and minds, but most of the soldiers haughtily resisted such overtures. Indeed, the kindness shown them bred contempt and bad behavior (public drunkenness, verbal abuse, theft, surreptitious contact with loyalists, and escapes) among the British troops. This conduct only provoked greater animosity among the locals and changes in the care and management of the captives.

While Anglophone captives proved to be difficult charges, the so-called “Hessians” were much less problematic. Even though King George III’s German auxiliaries hailed from six principalities in the central part of the Holy Roman Empire, they appear to have felt a connection with the Rhenish and Swiss Germans of Lancaster. This and the lack of common cause with the British made the dreaded Hessians model POWs. Together with changes in Continental and state regulations, their good conduct earned them better treatment in detention. Many German prisoners volunteered their trade skills or muscle-power to fill positions vacated by local men now away fighting. According to Miller, some even worked in jobs that made items for the American war effort. The relationship between the German POWs and their hosts was not without occasional discord, but, after the conflict, “thousands of German auxiliaries eagerly joined America’s new experiment, enticed by promises of civil and religious freedom or, more often, by its fertile, abundant lands. By surrendering their arms, renouncing their Old World commitments, and affirming revolutionary ideals, erstwhile enemies could become welcome members of the American fold and wager their futures on the new republic” (185).

As Congress, the Continental Army, and the state government grappled with making policies regarding the disposition, status, and treatment of captured enemy soldiers, the residents of Lancaster got to see and regularly interact with the detainees. This resulted in both friction and cooperation, but the presence of so many people identified as adversaries and outsiders led to the creation of a nascent American identity.

With the fates of cause and community inextricably linked, the contest gradually bound Lancaster’s diverse insurgents into a common enterprise as battle and ideological lines overrode familiar patterns of association and allegiance. Immersed in an ongoing exchange with their revolutionary brethren and in a continuing dialogue with Continental developments, local Whigs gave tentative expression to an emerging national consciousness. In ritual and rhetoric, Lancaster’s revolutionaries affirmed themselves and marginalized their enemies through an aggressively defiant patriotism.... [Finally,] after eight years of warfare, [the revolutionaries] had won their independence and forged a new nation. The Whigs’ dealings with their enemies, at home and on the field, had contributed to the formation of a distinct revolutionary identity by nurturing a new conception of citizenship rooted in shared republican commitment. Within the new United States, American citizenship provided diverse Americans with a common if continually contested identity that could potentially subsume or temporarily supersede the more parochial ethnic and regional identities that had long divided the peoples of prerevolutionary America. (151, 185)

Miller asserts, however, that, after the POWs departed, “Without the threats that had nurtured locals’ patriotic bonds, Lancaster’s postwar divisions emerged in sharp relief” (187). Fourth of July celebrations were raucous occasions for British and German residents to recall efforts to vanquish a common foe. And town fathers of both ethnicities worked together to establish an interdenominational institution of higher learning (Franklin College). But real unity proved elusive and ephemeral: “Although the war had reinforced what they held in common, Lancaster’s revolutionaries never shed their diverse ethnic identities, remaining fully conscious of their differences” (188).

For all its rich and captivating detail, *Dangerous Guests* has some noticeable gaps, especially regarding the German prisoners. Some of these men arrived with wives and children. Did American officials try to keep the families together or did the men live in barracks and wives and children among the townspeople? Though many POWs worked during their detention, Miller does say how they spent their wages. Surely their trade had an impact on the town’s merchants and shopkeepers. One would like, too, more information about the prisoners’ employers. Were the Hessians more often hired by the British or Germans, by the wealthy of the community or middle-class artisans? Did the rich hire them as a way to flaunt their

wealth and status but also to parade their patriotism? How did the experiences of the POWs in Lancaster compare with those of men housed elsewhere in Pennsylvania or in Maryland and Virginia?

To showcase the tension between unity and faction among the people of Lancaster after the war, the author tells the story of the town's 1791 Fourth of July celebration, where President George Washington was the guest of honor. We may surmise, too, that ethnic divisions played a role in the debate on the ratification of the Constitution in 1787. Lancaster County voted to approve the creation of a new, stronger national government to unite the states. What does that tell us about the fleeting nature of American identity and nationalism? How did the Constitution fare in the other towns and counties that hosted the British prisoners?

These flaws do not seriously detract from the value of a meticulously researched,<sup>2</sup> thoughtful, and well crafted work. *Dangerous Guests* will delight and inform all students of the Revolutionary War.

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2. While there are copious endnotes for the curious and the scholarly, the lack of a bibliography is odd.