Lafayette and Washington: How the Marquis de Lafayette was Integral in the Growth of George Washington’s Legend

BY GREGG GIEGEL
Central Thesis: The Marquis de Lafayette, more than any other wartime comrade of George Washington, possessed a personal charisma, social status, and close relationship with Washington that uniquely positioned him to speak about Washington to a wide audience.
So who stands as the best competition for Lafayette?

- Civilian Friends and acquaintances: Thomas Jefferson, Gouverneur Morris, and James Madison among others.
- Fellow Ranking Officers and Prominent Soldiers: Horatio Gates, Charles Lee, Thomas Conway or men like Daniel Morgan and Francis Marion
Why the Marquis de Lafayette?

- Closest Competitors:
  - Henry Knox
  - Nathanael Greene
  - Alexander Hamilton
Why Lafayette cont’d

- Unique combination of competence, access, personal and long-standing relationship with Washington beyond the professional, and a copious amount of literature composed by him, all with the added benefit of personal status as a war hero in his own right and a natural charisma that won him friends almost everywhere.
- His background as a handsome, young, and foreign aristocrat come from abroad to fight for the American cause lent him a certain romantic air as well.
- That background as a foreign aristocrat also allowed him to speak to an extremely wide audience, including members of the high nobility and royal court in France.
Now the small matter of proof

- Relationship and length + strength of friendship
- Position and access
- More ephemeral issues of charisma and prolificacy of writing
- Wide range of contacts
Structure of the Source

- First section composed of a narrative of the first years of the Revolution + a few other fragmentary abortive memoir attempts
- Second section being a compilation of letters, notes, and other documents composed by Lafayette or sent to him in the period of 1777-1781 (Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, Memoirs, Correspondence, and Manuscripts of General Lafayette. i-iv)
The Friendship

“M. de Lafayette accompanied him in his examination of the fortification. Invited by the General to establish himself in his house, he looked upon it from that moment as his own, with this perfect ease and simplicity was formed the tie that united two friends. (du Motier, Memoirs, 18)

“…he [Washington] who uniting all that is good to all that is great, is even more sublime from his virtues than from his talents…Nature, whilst creating him expressly for that revolution, conferred an honour upon herself.” (du Motier, Memoirs, 65)

“Allow me, Sir, on this occasion to be its [humanity's] organ; and to entreat that he may be permitted to come to this country, on such conditions as your majesty may think it expedient to prescribe.” (Washington, Memoirs of General Lafayette with an Account of His Visit to America, and of His Reception by the People of the United States; from His Arrival, August 15th, to the Celebration at Yorktown, October 19th, 1824. Location 958)
“My desire of deserving your satisfaction is stronger than ever...I am now fixed to your fate, and I shall follow it and sustain it by my sword as well as by all means in my power. You will pardon my importunity...Youth and friendship make me, perhaps, too warm... (du Motier, Memoirs. 138-139) (December 30th, 1777)

“Our General is a man formed, in truth, for this revolution, which could not have been accomplished without him. I see him more intimately than any other man, and I see that he is worthy of the adoration of his country.” (du Motier, Memoirs, 130-131) (December 16th, 1777)
Bibliography

Bibliography (Primary Sources)
- du Motier, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert. Memoirs of General Lafayette with an Account of His Visit to America, and of His Reception by the People of the United States; from His Arrival, August 15th, to the Celebration at Yorktown, October 19th, 1824. Boston E.G. House, 1824.

Bibliography (Secondary Sources) (Incomplete)
Images Used

- http://mrnussbaum.com/images/nathaniel%20greene.jpg
- https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a1/Alexander_Hamilton_By_William_J_Weaver.jpg/220px-Alexander_Hamilton_By_William_J_Weaver.jpg