Marcus Rediker, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017. 212 pp. (Cloth US\$ 26.95)

Marcus Rediker packs a scathing critique of the dominant historiography into this small biography, arguing that historians have suffered from a collective blind spot by failing to recognize Benjamin Lay's pivotal role in the rise of American antislavery. While rarely appearing in histories of abolition, this seemingly impoverished, self-educated outsider is identified by Rediker as the instigator of Quaker abolitionism. But unlike later Quakers who used antislavery as a vehicle for passing into respectable society, Lay was a "throwback" to belligerent and disruptive "primitive" Quakerism (p. 28). His unconventional use of the written word, penchant for startling "guerilla theater," and readiness to condemn emerging market values attracted the attention and the ire of his Pennsylvanian contemporaries. Despite his renown among eighteenth-century Quakers, his antimodernist philosophy failed to fit the traditional bourgeois histories of antislavery *progress*, thus leaving him all but forgotten in today's standard narratives on abolitionist thought. Rediker strikes a revisionist chord by arguing that this diminutive Quaker is one of America's foundational heroes.

Instead of simple hagiography, however, Rediker unpacks Lay's inner-most thoughts through an analysis of his surviving personal library and the marginalia therein. Based on these sources as well as Lay's unconventional antislavery pamphlet, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates* (1738), he argues that Lay was inspired by the civil disobedience of seventeenth-century Quakers such as James Naylor, as well as by the ancient cynics, who similarly took satisfaction in flouting social convention. Armed with these historical examples, Lay reveled in disrupting the social order and making the comfortable uncomfortable, even when his actions triggered opposition by his Quaker coreligionists. But more important than simply recounting Lay's very public stance against slavery, Rediker puts forth a multifaceted explanation for the origins of his abolitionism. It was the legacy of early Quaker commitment to spiritual equality and his first-hand exposure to the rough treatment endured by common sailors that sensitized him to the social injustice associated with the Anglophone Atlantic's commercial ethos. After quitting seafaring and briefly working as a petty trader in Barbados, Lay would come to conclude that New World slavery represented the most egregious form of worker abuse. Carrying these prolaborer sentiments to Pennsylvania, he would prove to be an eccentric whose values and style clashed with those who prospered, both directly and indirectly, from the wider Atlantic slave economy.

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The central claim of this book is that conventional histories have ignored the fact that the remarkable Lay lurks behind the writings of the much better-known early abolitionists, such as John Woolman and Anthony Benezet. In his unconventional confrontational style, Lay publicly condemned individual slaveholders and slave traders while attacking the larger exploitative mentality of mercantile capitalism. "Conduct[ing] his life in full keeping with his evolving democratic, egalitarian, and antinomian principles," he aspired to live a "life in agreement with nature" (p. 115), refusing to waste or exploit any of God's blessings while abstaining from any form of violence. To this end, he lived a simple life that stood in stark contrast to the comfort enjoyed by an emerging Pennsylvania elite. Abstaining from eating meat, refusing to buy slave-grown commodities, and sustaining himself from his small kitchen garden, Lay ensured that his personal actions would not trigger any form of exploitation. Thus, while David Brion Davis describes the Quaker elite as the "first modern capitalists to recognize ... the social consequences of economic action" (see "The Quaker Ethic and the Antislavery International" in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* [1975]), it appears that their teacher was none other than the anticapitalist Benjamin Lay.

Rediker portrays Lay as "the last radical of the English Revolution" and he asserts that it was "through him ... [that] democratic and egalitarian principles [survived] into the modern age" (p. 144). Lay bucked the increasingly conservative, property-rights trajectory of Anglophone society by maintaining an uncompromising commitment to freedom. For Rediker, he is nothing less than a national hero who embodies the "values of democracy, diversity, and equality" far better than slaveholding Virginians such as Thomas Jefferson (p. 152). Lay should be forever memorialized for his uncompromising immediatism and his spirited defense of laborers against the power of America's moneyed men.

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