



NEWSLETTER

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LIBERTY AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

“Liberty and the American Revolution,” the upcoming exhibition in the Main Gallery at Firestone Library, celebrates 50 years of book collecting by Sid Lapidus ’59, as well as the 50th reunion of his class.

The exhibition features 157 important books, pamphlets, and prints exemplary of the major themes of Lapidus’s collecting: the intellectual origins of the American Revolution, the Revolution itself, the early years of the Republic, the spread of democratic ideas in the Atlantic world, and the concomitant effort to abolish the slave trade in both Great Britain and the United States. These items, presented as gifts to the Library on the occasion of the exhibition, were selected from more than 2,500 books in the Lapidus collection because each offers a distinctive voice in telling the story of expanding liberty. The books range in date from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth. Their authors vary widely: young and old, male and female, black and white, learned and self-taught. Yet, through them all, one can hear these voices returning to themes still very much with us today, such as the characteristics of a just society and respect for the equality of fellow human beings.

A 200-page illustrated catalogue will provide a permanent record of the exhibition. In the foreword, Lapidus reflects on why he focused on the eighteenth century. “I’m not clear in my own mind,” he writes, “but it just seemed that it was the seminal time for the development of the ideas and the unfolding of the events that so interested me.” An introductory essay by Sean Wilentz, the Sidney and Ruth Lapidus Professor in the American Revolutionary Era, insightfully places the books in the context of their revolutionary times, and the entry for each book provides a descriptive note plus a substantial, representative quotation (see next page).

The Friends of the Library are invited to attend a celebration for exhibition on Friday, June 5. Professor Wilentz will present a lecture, “‘The Cause of All Mankind’: Liberty and the American Revolution,” at 4 p.m. at 101 McCormick, followed by a reception in the Main Gallery at Firestone Library. “Liberty and the American Revolution” will be on view from May 28, 2009, to January 3, 2010.

—*Stephen Ferguson*
Curator of Rare Books



C. N. Cochin (1715–1790). Benjamin Franklin. [Augsburg, 1777]. Mezzotint by Johann Martin Will (1727–1806).