American institution of higher education, and the first of those chapters is an especially successful attempt to put a colonial institution into its English context. But having focused on the colonies’ oldest and premier educational institution, Hoeveler also pays attention to the several colleges that were established late in the colonial period. His is the first sustained effort to weave the stories of Rutgers, Brown, and Dartmouth into late colonial political and intellectual history.

A book this ambitious and this brief inevitably will be less successful in some parts than in others. Most important, Hoeveler simply does not have the space to demonstrate that a distinctly American intellectual culture grew out of the colonial colleges and then fundamentally directed the course of the American Revolution and the creation of the republic. Those epochal developments grew out of an entire cultural milieu, not simply the colonial colleges. Hoeveler himself seems to understand the final weakness of the argument. The book is part of a series on “American Intellectual Culture,” and some of its problems may result from the author’s wish to shape his interpretive narrative to the needs of that larger publishing project. Finally, Hoeveler writes in a field that received considerable scholarly attention in the 1970s and early 1980s, but he fails to cite several works from that period that might have been useful. Melvin Yazawa’s The Forming of a Republican Identity: Politics and Education in Revolutionary America (Ph.D. dissertation: Johns Hopkins University, 1976), David Robson’s Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750–1800 (1985), and my own The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education, 1707–1837 (1976) all address some of the issues that Hoeveler investigates, especially the relationship between the collegiate curriculum and the formation of republican identity. That being said, however, Hoeveler’s study of the colonial colleges demonstrates that a work need not succeed completely on its own terms to be accounted, nevertheless, a significant and worthwhile achievement.

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Avihu Zakai adds to the continuing superlative scholarship on Jonathan Edwards, turning our gaze away from recent works on the life of Edwards (George M. Marsden, Jonathan Edwards: A Life [2003]) and Edwards’s view of the Bible (Robert E. Brown, Jonathan Edwards and the Bible [2002]) to focus on Edwards the philosopher of history. Zakai argues that to appreciate fully Edwards’s writings, and particularly the “History of the Work of Redemption,” one has to place them in the context of Edwards’s response to the Enlightenment. Edwards was perhaps the first American to understand the lethal threat that the rational English Enlightenment posed to traditional Christian belief and more importantly, he was the first to offer a comprehensive intellectual response to this movement’s dethronement of God. According to Zakai, the overarching goal of Edwards’s theological agenda was the “reenthronement of God as the sole author and Lord of history” (p. 5).

Zakai asserts that Edwards’s conversion in 1721 “radically reshaped his whole experience and existence” (p. 51), for it “bestowed on him an awesome vision of God in his absolute sovereignty and glory” (p. 81) and thus provided “an essential connection” (p. 219) to his formulation of a theology of nature and history. Throughout the 1720s, Edwards devised a natural philosophy as an alternative to the ascendant mechanical philosophy that explained the workings of nature within a closed system of secondary causes. Drawing from the writings of the European scientists (Giordano Bruno and Pierre Gassendi) and philosophers (George Berkeley and Nicolas de Malebranche), Edwards affirmed an idealism wherein all of nature is dependent upon God’s continuous sustaining power for its existence.

After the “little revival” in Northampton in 1734–1735, there occurred “a clear shift in Edwards’s historical consciousness” (p. 132). Increasingly Edwards turned his attention to the nature of time and the meaning of history. In response to Enlightenment views of history that eliminated divine agency as a factor in historical explanation, Edwards concluded that the work of redemption is the great design of God in history, concretely expressed in the outpourings of the work of the Spirit in revivals and awakenings. Unlike previous ecclesiastical histories (e.g., those by Eusebius, Augustine, Protestant reformers, and the Puritans) that focused on dramatic social or political or religious changes as indicators of God’s providential purposes, Edwards proposed a history “from the perspective of the mind of an omniscient God.” Moreover, Miscellany 702, an entry penned in 1736, “signified a major turning point in Edwards’s construction of time and history” (p. 217), because for the first time Edwards viewed creation itself within the larger redemptive purposes of God.

Edwards followed up with a more systematic presentation of this conclusion in “History of the Work of Redemption,” a series of thirty sermons delivered to his Northampton congregation in 1739. Zakai observes that previous scholars, whether critical or appreciative of this work, overlook the degree to which these sermons represent a striking alternative to Enlightenment narratives of history. “In the face of the Enlightenment concept of history Edwards construed history as a special dimension of sacred time formed from eternity by God’s providence for the execution of his plan of redemption for fallen humanity” (p. 232). When the Great Awakening ensued, Edwards witnessed his philosophy of history unfold before his very
eyes. His well-known writings in defense of the Awakening, including his infamous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” were not merely theological treatises defending the imminent judgment of God and the veracity of the work of the Spirit. Rather, avers Zakai, they reflect Edwards’s appeal to history, namely, that revivals and their resulting conversions manifest divine agency in the order of history.

Zakai covers much territory familiar to students of Edwards, but his meticulous reading of Edwards’s writings elevates the pastor-theologian above his provincial surroundings to that of an international philosopher engaged in the most pressing intellectual issues of his day. In Zakai’s rendition of Edwards (made more feasible by the recent publication of the Yale edition of Edwards’s Miscellanies) we encounter a thinker with a far more coherent theological and philosophical agenda than previously recognized. Although this work is marred somewhat by redundancy (e.g. Zakai quotes three times from C. C. Goen that Edwards "struggled unremittingly to retrieve the halcyon days when Northampton was ‘a city on a hill,’” [pp. 183, 211, 276]), his treatment of Edwards as a major church historian in the same league as Eusebius and Augustine stands as a signal contribution in the ongoing rehabilitation of colonial America’s greatest mind.

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This volume introduces the reader to the surprisingly densely populated world of the electrically inclined in eighteenth-century Europe and North America. Michael Brian Schiffer, a prolific author who has been a leader in the field of behavioral archeology (the theoretical framework for this book), draws on his considerable knowledge of electrical science and technology to “study how technologies, as artifacts [relate] to the lives of the people who made and used them, seeking meaningful behavioral patterns in the human-made world” (p. 3, author’s italics). He examines those patterns by classifying who was interested in electrical phenomena and devices into eight communities of investigators and practitioners, examining each community in turn. Schiffer is engrossed in the telling of who chose to take up the pursuit of electrical phenomena and to what end.

The most valuable result of this approach is that it connects those natural philosophers, such as Benjamin Franklin, who were primarily interested in acquiring rational knowledge of certain observed phenomena in the physical world, and those who had a material interest in public acceptance of man-made electricity as a curiosity, as a subject of instruction, and as a potential aid to health. Through Schiffer’s and his collaborators’ voracious reading of eighteenth century works, the author is able to reconstruct a world in which elegant experiments demonstrating electrical phenomena and leading to effective new theories were enough to make an international celebrity of Franklin, and in which certain physicians prospered by treating patients with electric baths, or by administering an astounding array of shocks to various parts of the body. The reader encounters a considerable range of individuals, with their complementary electrical devices, who often required substantial patronage to carry out their investigations. Schiffer gives considerable attention to the controversy regarding the development of the lightning rod, which he describes (as others have done) as one of the first practical results of the scientific revolution. This part of the book is actually the only one in which Franklin occupies center stage.

Even for those relatively aware of the powerful role that the development of electrical knowledge played in the Enlightenment, or of the prehistory of the commercial electrical products of the nineteenth century, Schiffer’s approach will be refreshing as well as challenging. Readers will find here the stories of dead ends, failures, and error treated as important as stories of apparent achievement and success. Indeed, in this volume the inventor—a staple of much technology storytelling—is relatively unimportant. Historians of the Industrial Revolution may be surprised to read that “the independent inventor . . . lacked a viable role in eighteenth-century societies” (p. 227).

Perhaps. No doubt that the inventor myth, with all of its images of the lonely, misunderstood, but persevering genius, needs to be countered by an author like Schiffer who can demonstrate that ideas and devices emerge from communities as much as from individual imagination. But Schiffer appears to be unaware that he has entered a historiographic battleground. This is, in fact, the main fault of this book from a scholarly perspective. Well written, engaging, and well researched, it is marked by either disinterest in or disdain for other scholarship. Although at the outset Schiffer acknowledges that “the electrical literature of the eighteenth century is rather fertile ground for historians of science and technology” (p. xii), the rest of the book hardly recognizes that anyone else has explored the territory or organized it conceptually. The final chapter, “Technology Transfer: A Behavioral Framework,” takes a quick swipe at diffusion theory, then states that existing “theories in history and in the social sciences cannot convincingly handle large-scale processes of technological change in a behaviorally sound manner” (p. 257). So, “in view of the dearth of relevant theory” (p. 257), Schiffer constructs his own. But what he describes as his “major premise . . . that as a technology passes from one community to another, members of recipient communities invent new functional variants, differing in performance characteristics, that are more suitable for participating in their activities” (p. 258) hardly seems new. His exposition of