

The Celebrated Marquis

Also by John D. Bessler

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The Celebrated Marquis

*An Italian Noble and the
Making of the Modern World*

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For human rights advocates and defenders everywhere



Engraving of Cesare Beccaria by Carlo Faucci, 1766

“Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794) was an Italian nobleman of Jesuit schooling whose theories were embraced by many leaders of the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ besides Thomas Jefferson. Beccaria’s 1764 *On Crimes and Punishments* (*Dei delitti e delle pene*) was revolutionary in its time, so much so that he originally published it anonymously.”

—Barbara Esposito & Lee Wood,
Prison Slavery (1982)

“‘In every human society,’ says the celebrated Marquis Beccaria, ‘there is an effort continually tending to confer on one part the height of power and happiness, and to reduce the other to the extreme of weakness and misery. The intent of good laws is to oppose this effort, and to diffuse their influence universally and equally.’”

—Letter of the Continental Congress to the
Inhabitants of Quebec (1774), quoting
Cesare Beccaria’s *On Crimes and Punishments*

“Leopold has established a commission for the reform of the criminal code in Austrian Lombardy, and to the honour of his judgment and liberality, let it be mentioned, that he has named, as one of the members of that commission, the celebrated marquis Beccaria, so well known in the literary and political world...”

—*The American Museum* (1791)

“In the course of the last century, a very general sensation was created throughout Europe against the severity and injustice of its criminal law. In exciting this feeling, Montesquieu and Voltaire led the way with distinguished ability and success; but it was in a small state and under a despotic government, that this subject was opened to its full extent, in the celebrated work of the Marquis Beccaria.”

—William Roscoe, *Observations on
Penal Jurisprudence, and the
Reformation of Criminals* (1819)

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
About the Author	xiii
Introduction	3
Chapter 1 · A Young Nobleman	25
Chapter 2 · The Runaway Bestseller	67
Chapter 3 · Monarchs and <i>Philosophes</i>	105
Chapter 4 · Pride and Privilege—and Political Economy	139
Chapter 5 · The Revolutionaries	185
Chapter 6 · The Celebrated Marquis	233
Conclusion	285
Notes	329
Index	453

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About the Author

John D. Bessler teaches at the University of Baltimore School of Law and the Georgetown University Law Center. He is also of counsel at the Minneapolis law firm of Berens & Miller, P.A., which handles complex, commercial litigation. A two-time Minnesota Book Award finalist and the winner of an *Independent Publisher* Book Award, he is the author of multiple books on the subject of capital punishment. His 2014 book about Cesare Beccaria, *The Birth of American Law: An Italian Philosopher and the American Revolution*, was the gold winner of the IndieFab Book of the Year Award for history and received the first prize in the 2015 American Association for Italian Studies Book Award contest for a work of history focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *The Birth of American Law* also won the Scribes Book Award, an annual award given out since 1961 by the American Society of Legal Writers for “the best work of legal scholarship published during the previous year.” He has also taught at the University of Minnesota Law School, The George Washington University Law School, Rutgers School of Law, and the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. In 2018 he will be a visiting scholar at the Human Rights Center of the University of Minnesota Law School.

