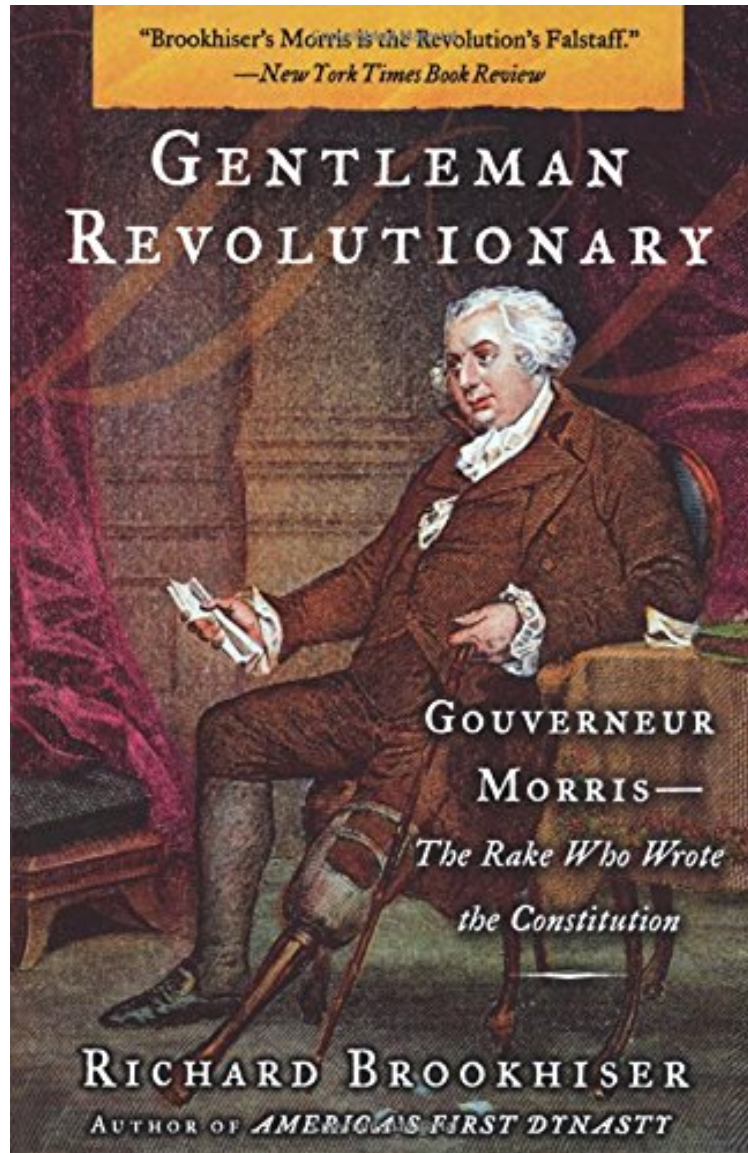


Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, the Rake Who Wrote the Constitution

Richard Brookhiser

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Richard Brookhiser : Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, the Rake Who Wrote the Constitution before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, the Rake Who Wrote the Constitution:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An Interesting LifeBy P. R. SmithI had previously read a book about

Robert Morris and it made numerous mentions of Gouverneur Morris, so this was a book that I couldn't over look. This had to be a difficult story to tell. Gouverneur Morris did many good things in his life and made lasting contributions to the American founding, but really did only one thing that was great, and that was to make our constitution a concise document with lasting value. Yes, he participated in writing the first New York state constitution, was a member of the Continental Congress, an Ambassador to France, a U.S. Senator, and a member of the Erie Canal commission. His participation in these activities is something that only a handful of Americans could have done, but these were not monumental in the greater scheme of the Founders. This was really a story of Morris' life, and it is a tale of accomplishment and intrigue with other men's wives. A story of adventure and travel throughout Europe. A story of experiencing two revolutions. Somewhere in the course of all this, Morris became a wealthy man and I found myself asking how since he practiced law but for a short time in New York and Philadelphia. I wish the author would have explained Morris' accumulation of wealth in more detail, if in fact there is a historical record of it. Also, the book mentions that Morris spoke more times than anyone else during the Constitutional Convention, but there is little detail about what he said. Finally, there is but short mention of Morris' participation in the five member committee that drafted the constitution. To the author's credit, he addressed Morris' achievements as well as his poor choices, such as encouraging officers of the Revolutionary Army to challenge the government and supporting the New England separatist movement during the War of 1812. It is also clear that Morris was an aristocrat who looked down on commoners as incapable of self government, a misguided judgement that today looks undemocratic but at the time was not all that uncommon. I am glad I read this book as it was informative and interesting, but I am still looking for answers to those events in Morris' life that were not answered in this book.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The founder I never knew about

By M. Heiss I've been reading biographies of the founders and histories of early America as a pet project for a couple of years. It's so funny -- most of my family knows I've been reading these biographies, so they'll ask me who I'm "doing" currently. Answering "Gouverneur Morris" has led to some vaguely nodded heads. It's ok -- I didn't know who the fellow was, either. I picked the book up because Brookhiser is dependably good. This biography is no exception. The charms of the book are: Brevity. Good use of quoted letters and diaries. Entertaining anecdotes. Good-humored and inspiring portraiture. Brookhiser calls a spade a spade -- he lauds Morris's strengths and deplores his weaknesses, showing the reader both without flinching. And the result is an honest and engaging portrait of a person that I would wish to know.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Brookhiser at his best

By ecotraveler Brookhiser does his usual excellent job of not only providing a portrait of an individual but puts him in the context of his time and contemporaries. A largely overlooked Founder gets his due. Recommended for those who appreciate the effort it took to birth a nation unlike any before.

Since 1996, Richard Brookhiser has devoted himself to recovering the Founding for modern Americans. The creators of our democracy had both the temptations and the shortcomings of all men, combined with the talents and idealism of the truly great. Among them, no Founding Father demonstrates the combination of temptations and talents quite so vividly as the least known of the greats, Gouverneur Morris. His story is one that should be known by every American -- after all, he drafted the Constitution, and his hand lies behind many of its most important phrases. Yet he has been lost in the shadows of the Founders who became presidents and faces on our currency. As Brookhiser shows in this sparkling narrative, Morris's story is not only crucial to the Founding, it is also one of the most entertaining and instructive of all. Gouverneur Morris, more than Washington, Jefferson, or even Franklin, is the Founding Father whose story can most readily touch our hearts, and whose character is most sorely needed today. He was a witty, peg-legged ladies' man. He was an eyewitness to two revolutions (American and French) who joked with George Washington, shared a mistress with Talleyrand, and lost friends to the guillotine. In his spare time he gave New York City its street grid and New York State the Erie Canal. His keen mind and his light, sure touch helped make our Constitution the most enduring fundamental set of laws in the world. In his private life, he suited himself; pleased the ladies until, at age fifty-seven, he settled down with one lady (and pleased her); and lived the life of a gentleman, for whom grace and humanity were as important as birth. He kept his good humor through war, mobs, arson, death, and two accidents that burned the flesh from one of his arms and cut off one of his legs below the knee. Above all, he had the gift of a sunny disposition that allowed him to keep his head in any troubles. We have much to learn from him, and much pleasure to take in his company.

From Publishers Weekly This biography ought to rehabilitate an appealing, major if second-ranking figure of the early nation. Gouverneur Morris has been overlooked, surmises Brookhiser (*America's First Dynasty: The Adamses, 1735-1918*), because he was among "the solid rather than the glittering." If so, Morris had a more penetrating mind, a more buoyant disposition and a more lusty character than most of his contemporaries. He may have been a rake, but he appears to have been a lovable and admirable one—a thoughtful lover (greatly loved in return by women, including Talleyrand's mistress, whom he shared with the Frenchman), a keen observer of history, an early opponent of slavery, and an optimistic and unembittered man despite grievous bodily injuries. More important, he played key roles in the nation's first years. We owe the Constitution's great preamble, as well as many of the document's key phrases and all

of its style, to Morris's pen. Observing the French Revolution up close in Paris and serving as ambassador to France at the height of the Terror, he recorded what he saw in a classic diary. The author's characteristic strengths are on display here, no doubt because he's writing of another of the founding generation's conservative figures, his longtime subjects. Sometimes letting facts suffice for interpretation, Brookhiser, a senior editor for the National and a columnist for the New York Observer, leaves a reader unsure of where to place Morris, how to understand his significance. But no one will fail to be charmed by this man of fortitude and achievement who "savored life." Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist

Acclaimed historian Brookhiser provides an absolutely delightful biography of America's least renowned Founding Father. Revisiting the life and times of Gouverneur Morris, he has also added a new chapter to the history of the Constitution. Born to an aristocratic New York family, Morris was exposed to the politics of both the loyalists and the revolutionaries at an early age. Opting to throw his weight behind the cause of liberty, he became a member of the Constitutional Convention, reshaped and reworded the proposed Constitution, and penned the celebrated Preamble. Equally as interesting as his political contributions was his colorful private life. An inveterate womanizer, the witty, fashionably attired, one-legged Mr. Morris entertained a string of mistresses across two continents. The third installment in Brookhiser's series of tributes to the Founding Fathers (Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington, 1996; Alexander Hamilton, American, 1999) offers another fascinating portrait of a man at the crossroads of American history. Margaret Flanagan Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved

About the Author Richard Brookhiser is the author of What Would the Founders Do? Founding Father, Alexander Hamilton, American, and America's First Dynasty. Writer and host of the critically acclaimed PBS documentary Rediscovering George Washington, he is a columnist for Time magazine and a senior editor of National . Richard lives in New York City.