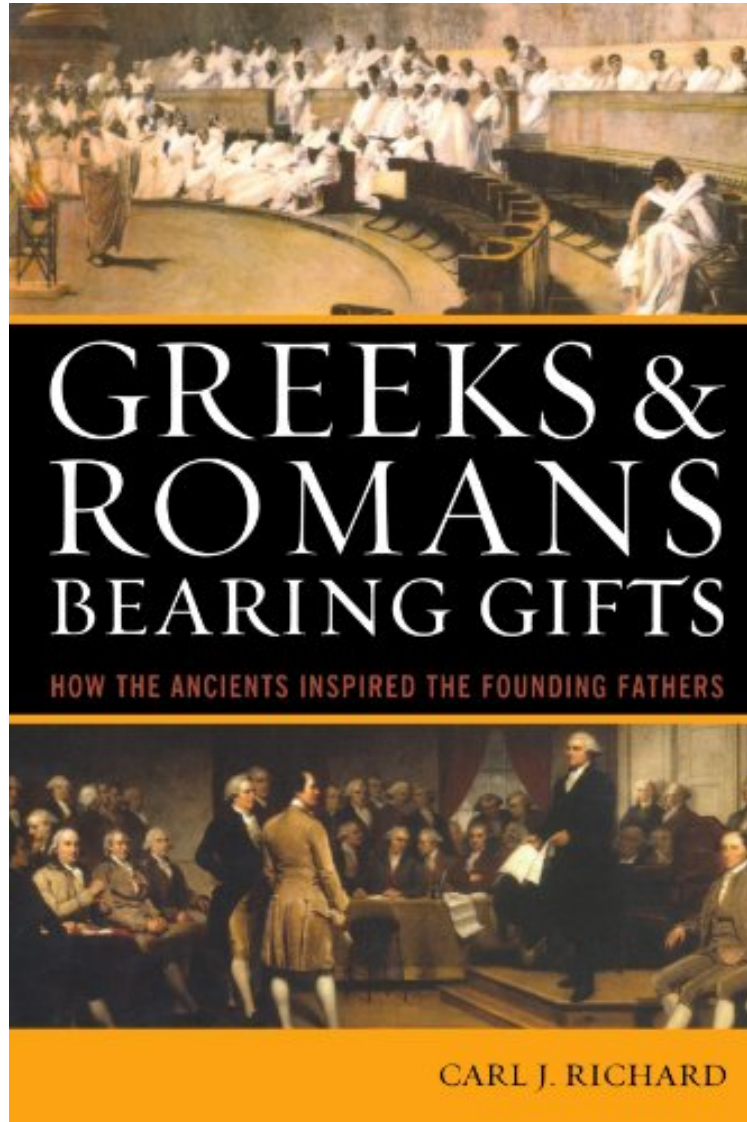


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Greeks Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers

Carl J. Richard

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Carl J. Richard : Greeks Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Greeks Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Literate argument--but overstatedBy Steven PetersonThe author begins by saying (Page ix): ". . .[T]he tales of Greece and Rome. . .were the tales that inspired the founders to rebel

against the mother country and establish a republic they hoped would one day rival those of Greece and Rome." That is the thesis of this book: That Greek and Roman practice with democracy was a major influence on the Founders of the American Republic. The presentation is literate and the arguments make sense. But the story is overstated considerably. To claim, as in the opening sentence of this review, that the Greek and Roman experiences inspired the founders to rebel, is way overstated. There were so many other factors--the experience of the colonies in self-government, the radical Whigs' critique of the English government, continental thinkers (Enlightenment thinkers, for example; Montesquieu; others).Lutz reports on the different sources cited in pamphlets and other publications in his research. Certainly, there were references to the Greeks and Romans, but it was not most referred to.The thesis here is that Greece showed the problem of too much democracy; Rome showed the problem of not being diligent in the protection of a republic. The arguments here are nicely supported with concrete examples.Overall, very readable. An interesting thesis. But, in the end, overstated. . . .18 of 18 people found the following review helpful. An interesting concept, but probably too basic for fans on ancient historyBy ArnoldGreeks Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers is the book I wish I had read several years ago while in college. It is a very short and easy read, but shows the importance of ancient history to America's Founding Fathers. It is essentially a "dumbed down" and popularized version of Carl Richard's The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment, a longer and more academic work.Greeks Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers proceeds to tell the story of the ancient world, from the Grecco-Persian War to the Roman Empire. Each chapter deals with a different period of history. Richard ends the chapter with a brief discussion of the "lessons" the American Founding Fathers drew from this history. He provides copious examples of the American Founding Fathers drawing inspiration from the ancient sources and debating the meaning of history. For example, they saw in Plato's writings and the Roman Republic as the ideal form of mixed government, combining the rule of the one leader (Consuls), rule of the aristocrats (Senate), and the rule of the people (Tribunes). They believed this system accounted for the Roman Republic's success by not going to the extremes of tyranny (one-man despotism), oligarchy (corrupt rule by the wealthy), and ochlocracy (mob rule). This became the foundation for our separation of powers in the form of the president (the one), the Senate (the aristocrats), and House of Representatives (the people). As a lawyer interested in constitutional law, I enjoyed this discussion immensely.So why do I wish I had read Richard's Greeks Romans Bearing Gifts earlier in my life? Because over the years, I've read several books about ancient Greek and Roman history, to the point where Richard's book seems a bit too shallow or simplistic. Admittedly, his audience is the general public who, unfortunately, do not know anything about Grecco-Roman civilization. However, some of his depictions of ancient history struck me as too simplified. For example, he seems to accept at face value that Cataline was actually planning a coup in 63 B.C., whereas the historical evidence is mixed.Ironically, I also thought the way Richard organized the chapters could make Greeks Romans Bearing Gifts confusing to readers with absolutely no knowledge about the ancient world. In each chapter, Richard begins with the historical account as told by ancient historians. Only later does he point out the potential biases and flaws in those accounts. On the one hand, the American Founding Fathers received most of their information about Greece and Rome from the ancient historians, so Richard is portraying history as they would have understood it. On the other hand, it might be confusing for some readers to keep the facts straight. For example, the ancient historians often blamed the collapse of the Roman Republic on the "Punic Curse," the corrupting love of luxury, and the ambition of a few men like Caesar. The Founding Fathers accepted those theories, as can be seen in their wariness of modern Caesars. However, as Richard later explains, many modern historians attribute the fall of the Roman Republic to other causes, including increased reliance on slaves (which squeezed lower-income farmers out of business and into the army), a lesson that the Founding Fathers certainly did not learn (only the Civil War would teach America about the corroding influence of slavery). As such, readers should be careful in reading the book to distinguish between mythologized history and actual history.I would recommend this book to the reader who had a basic high school or college education about the classics, but hadn't read much about ancient history since then. It's too basic for ancient history aficionados, but it would also be useful to have at least a bit of background because Richard does tell this history quickly. Fortunately, if you're in that category, you'll probably enjoy the book and seeing how our Constitution was so shaped and inspired by events over 2,000 years ago.If after reading Greeks Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers you want to read more about these periods of history, I recommend Tom Holland's Persian Fire: The First World Empire and the Battle for the West, Donald Kagan's The Peloponnesian War, and Neil Faulkner's Rome: Empire of the Eagles, 753 BC - AD 476.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Those fine gentlemen were certainly not alone in Philadelphia in 1787By THOMAS JENSENDr. Richard masterly delivers classical Greek and Roman history, while combining the significant epochs and their impact, in lesson format, to our Founding Fathers. Those fine gentlemen were certainly not alone in Philadelphia in 1787. They had the instruction of the ancients, with their mistakes, to guide them towards forming our great Republic. This is a vital, "must have" edition to any classical library.Although, as a primer, I would also suggest Dr. Richard's background offering: "The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment".

This lively and engaging book is the only popular work to explore the profound impact of Ancient Greece and Rome on the Founding Fathers. The classical education they imbibed as young students inspired them to undertake the American Revolution and influenced their approach to a host of constitutional and practical issues crucial to the shaping of the new American republic. Recounting the stirring stories the founders encountered in their favorite histories of Greece and Rome, renowned scholar Carl J. Richard explores what they learned from these vivid tales and how they applied these lessons to their own heroic quest to win American independence and establish a durable republic. Richard explains how the founders learned the importance of individual rights from the absence of those rights in Sparta, the superiority of republican government to monarchy from the Greek victory over the Persians, the perils of democracy from the instability of Athens, the need for a strong central government from the fall of Greece to Macedon and Rome, the importance of virtue to the success of a republic from early Rome, the need for eternal vigilance against ambitious individuals from the fall of the Roman republic, and the preciousness of liberty from its destruction by the Roman emperors. Crucial to the decisions that shaped the United States, these lessons remain invaluable today for every citizen concerned with America's future course.