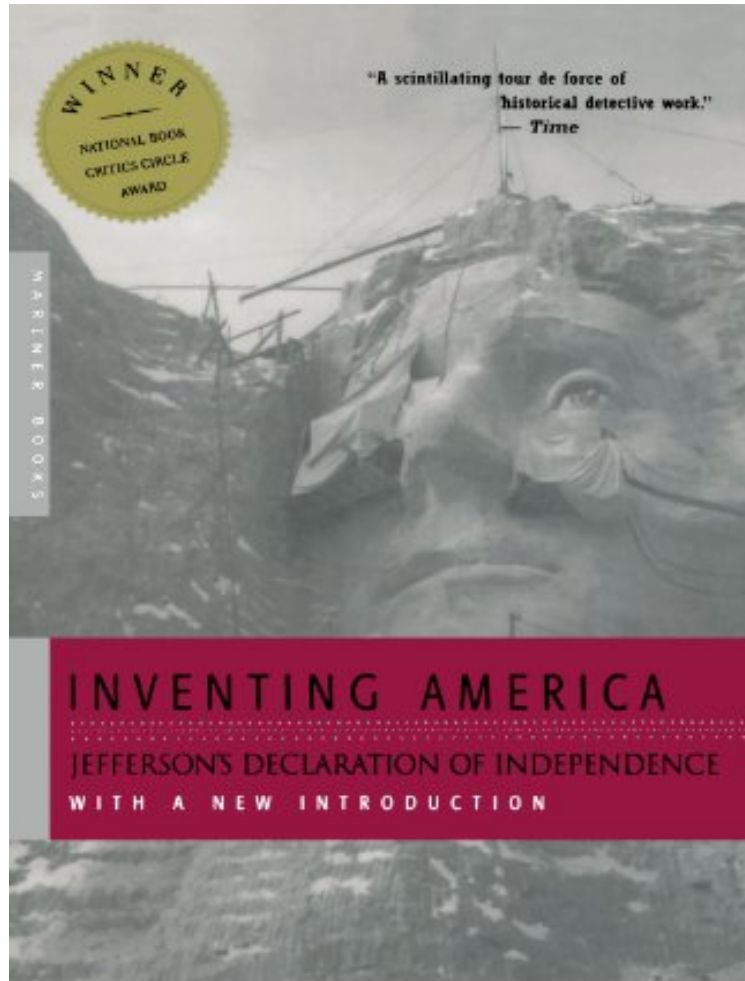


(Read free ebook) *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*

Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence

Garry Wills

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Garry Wills : Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Scholarly but imminently readable By Ricardo Mio Before *American Sphinx* by Joseph Ellis (1996), and *American Scripture* by Pauline Maier (1997), there was *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*, by Garry Wills. Published in 1978, Wills was the first popular book to closely examine the vast storehouse of Enlightenment literature that influenced the writing of the Declaration of

Independence, while at the same time revealing Thomas Jefferson as brilliant but somewhat quirky. While Ellis and Maier are well-versed in early American history and are exceptionally fine writers, they lack the sheer intellectual gravitas and commanding writing style of Wills. Ellis seems to relish exposing Jefferson's many weaknesses, while Maier takes the high road. She examines the various European philosophers that Jefferson drew upon, and how the Declaration's ideas influenced future generations of Americans, notably Abraham Lincoln. Wills, on the other hand, takes the issue of Jefferson and the Declaration to an entirely different level. In Wills' narrative, the Founding Fathers are high-minded but human after all. They're well-read on Enlightenment ideals that, in turn, they employed to justify breaking free of the arbitrary rule of kings and then applied to creating a nation based on the rule of law. Unlike several U.S. historians (Dumas Malone, Ralph Ketchum and Forest McDonald come to mind), Wills does not take sides. For example, he is neither a Jeffersonian nor a Hamiltonian. Wills is a world of ideas and how they shaped U.S. history, and second a world of political players. Indeed, he takes exception with historians who, for example, raise up Jefferson at the expense of tearing down Hamilton, and vice versa. English philosopher John Locke has gotten much of the credit as Jefferson's source material for composing the first draft of the Declaration. Wills, however, makes a compelling case for the influence of Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson as Jefferson's primary source. For example, the phrase, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is purely Hutchesonian. Why has Hutcheson's influence been overlooked until now? Because, says Wills, Jefferson's first library burned to the ground, thereby destroying evidence of the Virginian having read Hutcheson in his formative years. How can Wills be certain of the Scots influence? Because Jefferson's tutor William Small was a Scot and an ardent reader of Hutcheson, who no doubt influenced young Jefferson while he was being schooled in Williamsburg. Hutcheson was the father of the Scottish Enlightenment, and therefore a man widely read by America's intelligentsia. Equally compelling, he was against slavery on purely moral grounds, which is evident in Jefferson's initial draft that included a call for the abolition of slavery, a call stricken out by the Continental Congress at large. As far as Locke goes, the most traceable influence he had on Jefferson was in the area of religious tolerance. Elsewhere, when Jefferson refers to Locke, it is to his role in the major Enlightenment trinity (of Bacon, Newton, and Locke), where the contribution was epistemological. Wills discusses the evidence on Jefferson of other Scottish philosophers as well, including Lord Kames and Thomas Reid. Also interesting is Wills' take on the revolution itself. The revolution was more evolution than revolution, not an overthrow of the existing order, but a redress of grievances that resulted in separation from the mother country. There was no overturn of a central government in the American Revolution, writes Wills, no decapitated king in Paris, no basement execution of a czar. The accepted word for violent withdrawal from allegiance was revolt, not revolution, he says. Americans were willing to call their actions a revolution precisely because it was an orderly and legal procedure. The strength of Wills' account is that he examines every issue from several points of view, like an attorney arguing a case, point by point, pro and con, until evidence is more than sufficient to draw a compelling conclusion. Wills' account is scholarly but imminently readable. Five stars. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Hutchesonian Principles. By JLW It took me a YEAR to read this book; no lie. A YEAR. I am largely self-educated (I have degrees, but the time I spent overseas and in other places out of traditional school I used to read books, unlike most everyone else), and this book challenged me in ways no other book had before or since. It has to do with the origin of benevolence. I was raised strict religious: very strict, cult-like, separated from the secular world; this environment was a one-way street: I put forth into it, it gave me nothing back. This book changed my mind. I had to, in examining the principles of the origin of benevolence, change my soul. And I did. This book changed my life. The introduction, to me, of Hutchesonian ideas, was worth the slog. I have not believed in Locke since, and that was more than 30 years ago. Ask yourself: "Where does 'Love/Benevolence' come from?" Family? Transitory and mortal: it's what most people believe in. Church? A building: the inhabitants are all human. A belief in 'God'? A fiction. Witness of Nature, as the evidence of God? It's what came through in the ideas of the US Declaration of Independence. I did, actually, after reading this book, decide to continue believing in a 'God', a creator and father-figure, knowing it is a total fiction. But it calms my mind, and makes me a functional, and positive human, social being. This book did, very much, change the direction of my life; and for that, it is an amazing work. I won't say it's a fun read; it's not. But for those who need it, it's what is needed. I needed it, and it did the job. I have owned a copy of this book since I was 18 years old, now almost 30 years, and will never be without one. 16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Some bases and realities of the Declaration of Independence By J. Grattan Wills' "Inventing America" is a good, though somewhat mixed, effort in deconstructing the Declaration of Independence. The language and meaning of the Declaration are analyzed in the context of the times, which were at the height of the Enlightenment. In addition, some factual basics of the Declaration are reexamined. The book is equal parts the Declaration and the thinking of Thomas Jefferson and others. Contrary to the view of many in the 20th century that Jefferson was a Lockean individualist who stressed private property rights, the author shows that Scottish moral philosophers, the leading intellectuals and teachers of the mid 18th century, exerted by far the most influence on Jefferson. An essential aspect of their thinking was that man had an innate moral sense which resulted in the exercise of "benevolence" towards their fellow men. It was a distinctly social orientation. The author is rather convincing in demonstrating that the Declaration gains meaning only when understood as reflecting that thinking. Jefferson's original effort, which he much preferred, is contrasted

with the final version, edited by the whole Congress, throughout the book and reinforces the author's insights. There are any number of other clarifications. Petitioning the King or Parliament to seek redress for wrongs was a well-established tradition. The Continental Congress in 1774-75 did just that. Those petitions were enumerated in the Declaration. The American Revolution was viewed as similar to the Glorious Revolution in England in 1688, where an oppressive king was dethroned. The American Revolution was not considered to be a rebellion or a revolt, but an exercise of the rights of Englishmen. The Declaration of Independence was a restatement of the actual independence that was declared by vote by the Continental Congress on July 2, not the Fourth. Furthermore, the signing of the Declaration by most, but not all of the attendees of the Congress, occurred on August 2, not the Fourth. Interestingly, the Declaration during the Revolutionary period was not the exalted document that it has become. In many ways it was regarded as basically necessary to secure a treaty with France to support the colonies' war effort; it was a means to an end, not the end. There is much to learn in this book, but it is not without its problems. The chronology and the discussion of important documents surrounding the Declaration during the time of the Congress in the mid-1770s are deficient. The new science of the era, especially all of the observing and cataloguing of details, receives far too much emphasis. The author is continually taking a detour here and there to explore some thought of the times with the yield often not worth the detour. A subject not broached whatsoever, is the legitimacy of the Scottish views of innate moral sensibilities. Those along with natural rights thinking would be considered by many to be no more than ungrounded optimistic faith, hardly anything to base fundamental understandings on. Despite its deficiencies, the book is worthwhile.

From one of America's foremost historians, *Inventing America* compares Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence with the final, accepted version, thereby challenging many long-cherished assumptions about both the man and the document. Although Jefferson has long been idealized as a champion of individual rights, Wills argues that in fact his vision was one in which interdependence, not self-interest, lay at the foundation of society. "No one has offered so drastic a revision or so close or convincing an analysis as Wills has . . . The results are little short of astonishing" (Edmund S. Morgan *New York Review of Books*).

No one has offered so drastic a revision or so close or convincing an analysis as Wills has. . . . The results are little short of astonishing. Edmund S. Morgan, *The New York Times Book* The best and most thorough analysis of the Declaration ever written. David Brion Davis, *The New York Times Book* A scintillating tour de force of historical detective work. *Time* From the Publisher "No one has offered so drastic a revision or so close or convincing an analysis as Wills has...The results are little short of astonishing."-- Edmund S. Morgan *The New York Times Book* "The best and most thorough analysis of the Declaration ever written."--David Brion Davis, *The New York Times Book* About the Author GARRY WILLS, a distinguished historian and critic, is the author of numerous books, including the Pulitzer Prizewinning *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, *Saint Augustine*, and the best-selling *Why I Am a Catholic*. A regular contributor to the *New York Times Book Review*, he has won many awards, among them two National Book Critics Circle Awards and the 1998 National Medal for the Humanities. He is a history professor emeritus at Northwestern University.