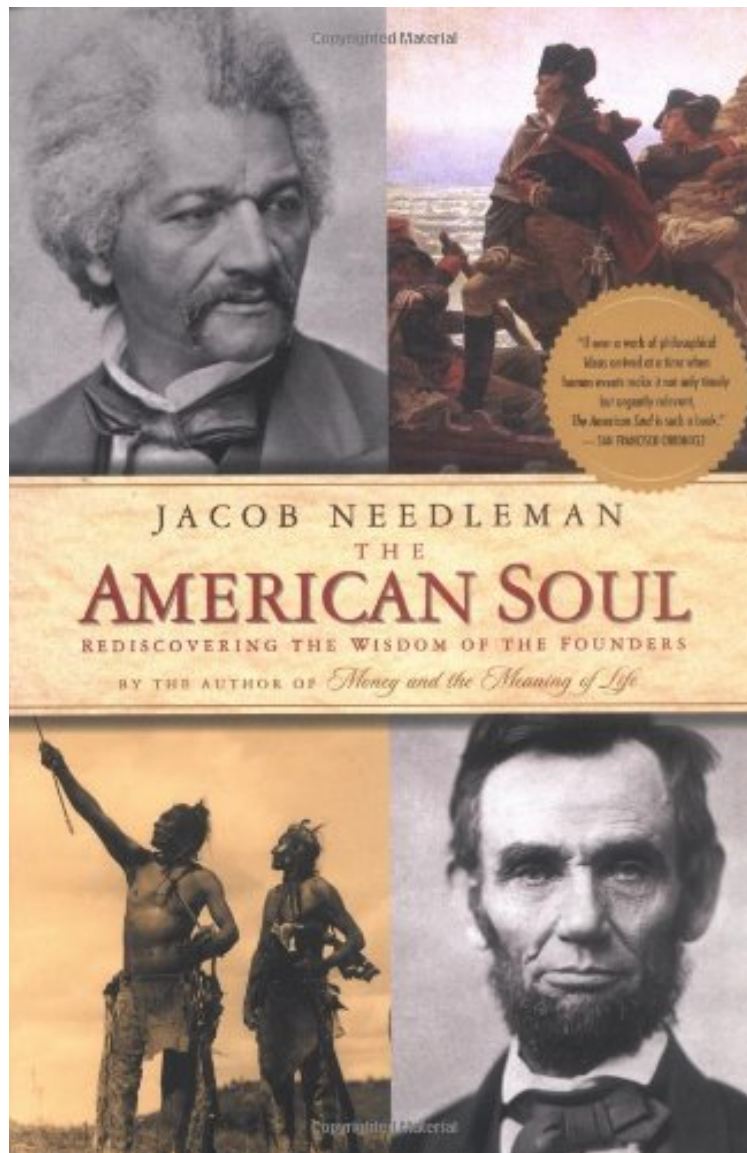


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The American Soul: Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Founders

Jacob Needleman

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Jacob Needleman : The American Soul: Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Founders before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The American Soul: Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Founders:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Contains great points, but they become somewhat lost in the extensive discussion By Jim Richmond Really 3 1/2 stars. I oscillated repeatedly between considering this to be a 3 star or 4 star book. There are grand points that are made, but the way the material is presented makes it hard to find them

and celebrate them. And since most reviews are 5 stars, I lowered it to 3 to bring the ranking closer to where I consider it be. I have enormous respect for the author, Jacob Needleman. He's a deep-thinker, a philosopher, and a nice guy. I have another of his books (Time and the Soul) which I rated higher than this book. He doesn't hit the reader over the head (in a preachy or sermonizing way), nor use negativity, to support his material. It's presented in a kind and grandfatherly way. The book is laid out in a no-nonsensical and uncluttered way. There are no pictures or graphics, so it's a very text-heavy book (something I generally prefer and appreciate). But it is also sort of a rambling flow of talk without any pause and consideration. The book would have benefitted from some stop and reflection device (a picture, a side note, a side bar, some modern parallel to bring the material into the present, etc.) It's almost a bit 'stream-of-consciousness' in approach. There are quotes from prominent American figures, and they are often the most interesting sources of material in the book. One wonders how much better the book would be if it mostly just focused on quotes, rather than Needleman explaining what the quotes mean. There's a bit too much of hand-holding by him, telling us what the passages meant and what we are to think of them. This got on my nerves after awhile; I'm capable of thinking on my own, and drawing my own conclusions. There is also a building up of concepts, and the author walking us through the themes. It seemed that more time was spent sculpting his ideas than just presenting material, and letting that prove the point. This would be a much greater book if it were more concise and to the point. Each chapter covered good points, but continued on unnecessarily after the points were made. He could have covered more topics and themes too, even while slimming down and refining the content. At times while reading this book, there were 'deja vu' moments of reading Robert Bly's "Iron John" book. Undoubtedly, the author must have read Bly's material and jump onboard the "mythology" bandwagon. Just as Bly stated that we need to "re-mythologize" masculinity and manhood, Needleman argues that we need to "re-mythologize" American themes. When Americans are to grasp deep and strong ways of thought that truly existed in the developing years of our country, it doesn't help any to encourage people to then resort to mythology and fantasy. That was the strangest element I came across in the book. It almost trivialized the stronger material in the book. Good themes and a great idea for a book. This aimed high, and deserves merit for its attempt. It's a shame thought that the delivery wasn't as grand as the concepts. Books should be put together in a manner complimentary to their focus and theme. Then we would have a 5-star book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Yes..."America needs to recover its mythic dimension." By DarlaWow! I know that's a mundane word for a book that combines philosophy and spirituality in such an eloquent flow, but, hey, that's been my constant response while reading this book. This is one of those books that, if it were within my power to do so, I would have as required reading for all Americans. Profoundly moving and deeply edifying, this book speaks to all that I have been pondering recently. Needleman says that: "The hope of America lies and has consisted in the fact that its political ideals and forms of government, its iconic actions and archetypal heroes, reflect in two directions at once--toward the external good of a life of liberty and equality and the reasonable search for a normal life of community and creative aspiration; and at the same time inwardly toward the search for inner development, the life of conscience and reason that defines the true nature of humanity and gives life its ultimate meaning. America needs to recover its mythic dimension. If not, if it begins to live only in its first history, only in the outer dimension, it will have lost all that really nourishes the life of a nation or an individual." The author talks of "The American Virtues and Their Shadows" and of so much more that the scope often leaves me breathless!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A deeply spiritual book about the deeply spiritual roots of the USA By Will Roberts This is a deeply spiritual book about the deeply spiritual heritage of the United States of America. Not only Americans but lovers of democracy the world over will benefit from studying this work.

Looking at the lives of America's founders-including Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin-scholar and bestselling author Jacob Needleman explores their core of inner beliefs; their religious and spiritual sensibilities; and their individual conception of the purpose of life. The founders, Needleman argues, conceived of an "inner democracy": a continual pursuit of wisdom and self-improvement that would undergird the outer democracy in which we live today. Any understanding of America as a nation of spiritual values will in the years ahead require Needleman's work as a point of reference.

From Publishers Weekly San Francisco State philosophy professor and author Needleman (Money and the Meaning of Life) invites readers to contemplate the deeper spiritual meaning of the American legacy of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Finding a deep resonance between the founding principles of this country and the ancient spiritual quest for an inner liberation, Needleman proceeds to examine and "re-mythologize" the founders and some of their great deeds. Subjective rather than academic, at times lyrical, provocative, and profound, Needleman's new work infuses contemplation with a child's sense (a sense that most of us share) of boundless faith in a place "that accepted one's true inner self, one's inner good will, one's real wish to serve..." The reader is asked to consider Franklin's courageous experimentation ("...the man played and worked with lightning!"), Washington's restraint retiring from the army and later from the presidency rather than exploiting his matchless popularity and political power, Jefferson's brilliant articulation of the value of community, and the sheer gravity and awareness in Lincoln's face. Each man is

presented as embodying a different facet of the inner freedom and integrity that is achieved only as one learns to live in accord with conscience that is, with a deeper self that is, Needleman says, allowed to develop in this country. While Needleman clearly finds much to love about America, he balances our light with our darkness, our genuine good will and spirituality with our great crimes of slavery and the genocidal abuse of the American Indian. Decidedly not for strict materialists or historical literalists, Needleman's latest work gives open-minded readers a new set of spiritual role models and much valuable food for thought at a crucial moment. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal An eclectic mixture of autobiography, U.S. intellectual history, philosophical inquiry, and spiritual wonderment, this extended meditative essay examines "America as an Idea" by uncovering the latent wisdom of many of its shining lights Benjamin Franklin, William Penn, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Walt Whitman. Needleman, a philosophy professor and author of *Money and the Meaning of Life*, reinterprets the lives of each of these leaders in the context of their strong spiritual beliefs and their contributions to unifying a deeply divided body politic. The author liberally quotes classical philosophers, historians, biographers, and the subjects themselves, and he often interjects his own life experiences and spiritual beliefs into his loosely structured narrative. Needleman also tackles what he considers to be America's two most grievous historical blemishes the murder of Native American culture and slavery and suggests how America should confront these wrongs. Though repetitive and sometimes overly dramatic, this unique look at the spiritual meaning of America should resonate with scholars and lay readers alike, especially during this time of national crisis. For academic and larger public libraries. Jack Forman, San Diego Mesa Coll. Lib., CA Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Booklist The origins of most Western nations are shrouded in the mists of time. Who knows when or why Roman Gaul evolved into France? But the U.S. can point not only to a specific founding date but also to a set of guiding principles that engendered that founding. Cynics can rightly point out the hypocrisy of a slave-holding nation proclaiming allegiance to human liberty, but the principles enshrined in the Declaration remain as a beacon of hope for both Americans and people across the world. Needleman, a professor of philosophy at San Francisco State University, is acutely aware of both the promise and the failings of the U.S., but he views it as a nation blessed by the wisdom of a select group of men. In this beautifully written and moving examination of the lives and contributions of some of our founding icons, Needleman informs, inspires, and provides great food for thought. This is an important book that should cause us to continuously reexamine our past and nurture our hopes for the future. Jay Freeman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved