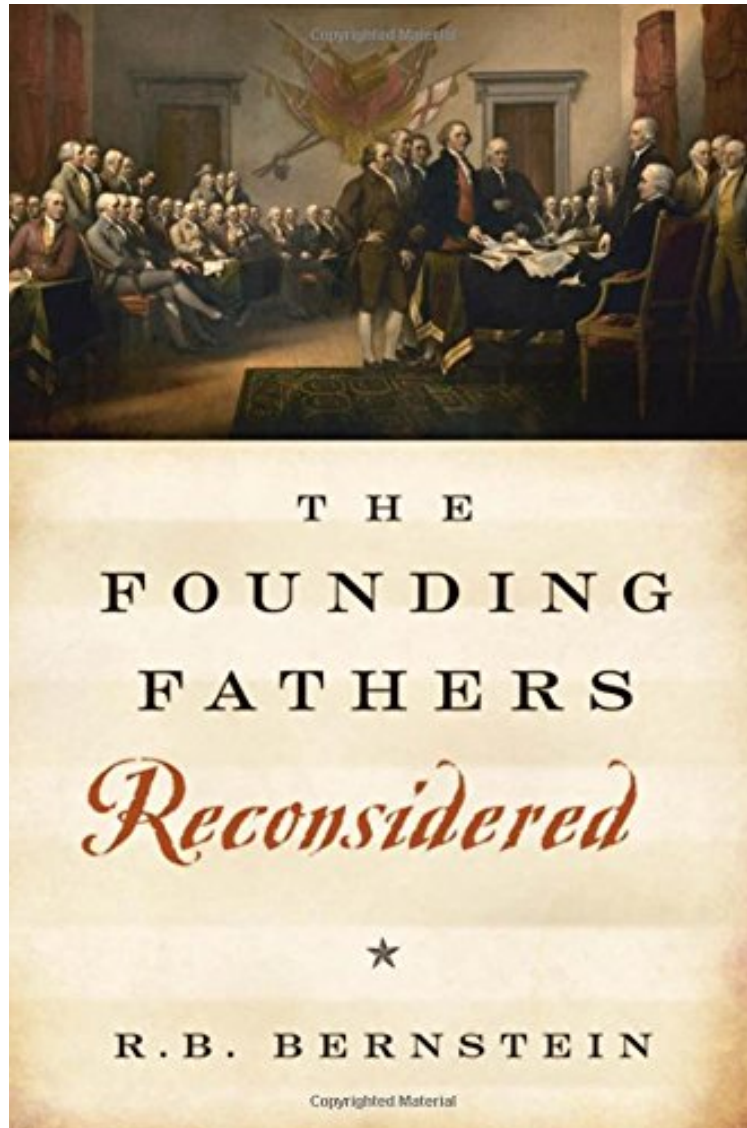


The Founding Fathers Reconsidered

R. B. Bernstein

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R. B. Bernstein : The Founding Fathers Reconsidered before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Founding Fathers Reconsidered:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Thinking right about the Founding Fathers By J.B. Hughes I studied history in college and even though I had classes in American history it was not my emphasis. I was always puzzled at American historians because in world history we are so far removed from our subject matter that we find it easier to be clinical in our assessment. In American history classes there was a lot of heat, bias, and and low sense of objectivity. It

seemed that once we reached 1776 every one was fair game. The irony is that outside of the university there is a strange kind of worship concerning the founding fathers, and Americans are often unwilling to come to terms with these men and their actual accomplishments. I think that we do not often know who the founding fathers actually are. If one is in doubt then he/she should consider the internet, which is rife with "founding fathers" comments that are either taken out of context or entirely made up. Somewhere between saint and demon there is a proper view of the founders of the American Republic. In this book Dr. Bernstein sets out on a journey to untangle the complex set of views we have about our fathers and to help the reader to honestly evaluate the lives of these America's powerhouses. Dr. Bernstein does a great job and here are some of the reasons why this book is helpful. A great number of history books that one reads in college are written in such pretentious and haughty way that its only audience will be other historians. As a history teacher, I think that the goal of history books should be to engage people who may not be well-versed in history; I believe that history is for everyone. Dr. Bernstein makes this goal clear from the onset of the book and I was able to see him execute that goal very precisely. This book is not "dumbed down" but it is not so high and mighty that it will be off-putting to non-historians. He is an excellent storyteller and he has easy way that gradually pulls the reader into the center of the events he is describing. The characters that he is introducing (or perhaps re-introducing) are brought out in an authentic way that helps the reader to grasp the basic qualities that define this individual and their role in the creation of the American experience in democracy. His points are clear and concise which makes the book easy to navigate; I always knew what he meant and what point he wanted to make and that is an excellent quality that many writers do not possess. The book was well-researched as is evident by his bibliography and the litany of primary as well as secondary sources that he used. The primary sources are important because he is trying to make some basic points about the founders that must be corroborated because they are not the common views. There is often a perspective that the founding fathers were in agreement about the kind of nation that they hoped to create. There is narrative that he calls "founders chic" which places the fathers as uniform and resolute about the America they hoped to leave us; it is this view that is often promoted in modern politics. He seems to essentially argue that the America that we are living in IS the America that the founding fathers left us. The debates we are having are the ones that we have been having since the Constitutional Convention as the founders did not leave us with a singular vision of America, but with multiple visions of America. We don't agree today in part because they could not agree then. Hamilton's bustling national power vs. Jefferson's agrarian nation is still at the heart of the issues that we face. One of my own professors would say that we are living in "Hamilton's America with Jefferson values." In other words, we are not living in an aberrant America, but in the one that they left for us. I think the issues we face today are of course much more complicated because a lot of political thought has been developed since the 18th-19th centuries. I love his review of how the founding fathers have risen and fallen in the perception of the American public. Jefferson and Hamilton seem to take turns being revered or vilified by historians and the people; although, I think that Hamilton drew the short-end of the stick. Washington is typically unscathed and not so much because he is so ethical (although he was a good man) but because he is enshrouded in American origins myth. Adams has been virtually ignored or painted in a negative light till David McCullough attempted to salvage his image. One thing I was uncertain about was how Dr. Bernstein viewed Dr. McCullough. It is clear that he thinks McCullough feeds into the "founders chic," but it is not clear whether he considers him to be a valuable contributor to historical thought. I happen to like Dr. McCullough and although I see Dr. Bernstein's point, I think Dr. McCullough is someone that cannot be dismissed. I don't think that Dr. Bernstein would suggest doing so. Madison and Jay are two of the founders who have the least analysis and remain unexplored; especially Jay. Franklin like Washington is protected and revered to the point that he is more myth than man. All in all, I was happy with this book even though much of the information was more of a brush-up for me. I appreciate that he discussed the weaknesses, indecision, and indiscretions of the founders without completely obliterating their contributions to world history. This is truly a view from a moderate position and because of that I can respect Dr. Bernstein. I have often compared American history to the view that a boy has about his father. When a boy is young he often idolizes his father in a very naive way. As he grows independent he can find himself in contrast to his father as he sees him as a man with flaws and he attempts to set up an identity that may be different from his Dad's. In time, the boy will often come back knowing that his father isn't perfect but wanting to be like him anyway. I think America has been in the first stage for some time. In recent years America has taken a hard look at the founders and sometimes came up disappointed. I hope that as nation we come back to the view of a mature individual who appreciates the good and discards the other. I think that is what Dr. Bernstein accomplishes here and I hope that his tribe will increase in the future. 1 star = Readability. 1 star = Objectivity. 1 star = Bibliography. 1 star = Good Research. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Puzzling Personalities By VA Duck This book is brief history of the US founding period told through anecdotes of the principle events of the time, involving the principal actors i.e. Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison Jay, Franklin etc. Author R.B. Bernstein weaves the anecdotes of achievements into the fabric of the story of the founding. Bernstein flies through history at a pace that allows for a telling of the deeds, but rarely the underlying motivations, or character of his cast. What is missing, or at the very least uncertain, is the achievement of his stated objective. In the Preface, Bernstein concludes that there are three stereotypical perceptions of the Founders that prevail: 1) saintly, or 2) selfish, or 3) inscrutable. All three

perspectives are deemed "caricatures" and the author proposes instead a better understanding of the Founders to be had through the presentation of a blend, or "synthesis" of the work of modern historical colleagues. Following a synopsis of the founding period, Bernstein presents in Chapter 4, a very interesting explanation of the ebb flood of popular opinion as it concerns the Founders and the phases of historical thinking and writing that presage and influence public opinion. In the end we see when and why opinion changes, but are still on our own to determine the motivations of the Founders. Correcting character myths and misunderstandings will take more than a retelling of historic events - even if the retelling is an accurate portrayal. Either a more heavy-handed, or more deeply analytic approach was probably needed to convince adherents to any of the three errant caricatures! Without the promised "perception adjustment", the book is mostly a fast walk through the founding period, punctuated at its end with a tutorial on the historiography of the period. In the end, in all probability, those same character misperceptions are likely to prevail in the mind of the readers so inclined. The best understanding of the founders will probably still have to be had the hard way - through reading of multiple accounts from multiple perspectives. An example book that DOES succeed in portraying the thoughts and motivations of its character is the late Clinton L. Rossiter's book, *Alexander Hamilton and the Constitution*. It succeeds by taking-on one man and one event. Or see Walter Isaacson's book, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* which successfully probes the character of its subject. Joseph Ellis' book, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* also focuses on the objective laid out in Bernstein's book. Maybe this book is a reasonable first in a much longer bibliography.-----kindle edition-----1) typos, NO; 2) page numbers YES (always appreciated); 3) hyper linked table of contents, YES; 4) GoTo menu integrated TOC, YES; 5) swipe up/down chapter change, YES; 6) integrate w/dictionary, YES; 7) hyperlinked index, NO, but at least the page number can be used; 8) photos maps, NONE; 9) linked notes/citations YES; 10) bibliography, YES. e-Book publication quality by Oxford University Press good but missing index hyperlinks..4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Good quick review of the Founders of our Country By William J. Moore As always I can disagree with some of this authors statements, but I believe that he gave a fair review of those men who were instrumental in taking the big chance of founding a new and different form of government for people who were interested in a new and different way fo life. A way that relied on people developing their own government rather than being dictated to by a government that really had no interest in anyone in the colonies, except as a way of making there life in England better. Because these people were not perfect they sometimes get castigated for various reasons. It is amazing to me how people can do a great job of Monday morning quarterbacking on all kinds of situations including the founding of our country. Most of the faults that occur with our country are due to exigencies that happened then and were part of the total society and had to be accepted or nothing would have happened. Since then the growth of government and other activities have created situations that have made it worse. It is still the greatest country on earth, mainly due to their foresight.

Here is a vividly written and compact overview of the brilliant, flawed, and quarrelsome group of lawyers, politicians, merchants, military men, and clergy known as the "Founding Fathers"--who got as close to the ideal of the Platonic "philosopher-kings" as American or world history has ever seen. In *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, R. B. Bernstein reveals Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, and the other founders not as shining demigods but as imperfect human beings--people much like us--who nevertheless achieved political greatness. They emerge here as men who sought to transcend their intellectual world even as they were bound by its limits, men who strove to lead the new nation even as they had to defer to the great body of the people and learn with them the possibilities and limitations of politics. Bernstein deftly traces the dynamic forces that molded these men and their contemporaries as British colonists in North America and as intellectual citizens of the Atlantic civilization's Age of Enlightenment. He analyzes the American Revolution, the framing and adoption of state and federal constitutions, and the key concepts and problems--among them independence, federalism, equality, slavery, and the separation of church and state--that both shaped and circumscribed the founders' achievements as the United States sought its place in the world.

"Read Bernstein's book if you can. It's both a reminder of how fallible the Founding Fathers were--and yet how good they still look to us nearly a quarter of a millennium later."--Andrew Cohen, *The Atlantic*"*The Founding Fathers Reconsidered* brims with insights and revelations, and the jargon-free prose is a genuine pleasure to read."--*Journal of American History* "Prolific historian Bernstein (adjunct, New York Law Sch.) follows up the brief biography *Thomas Jefferson* with another accessible work of popular history on a weighty topic...Recommended for general readers seeking an introduction to the legacies, political careers, and disparate roles of these men in the creation and early leadership of a new nation."--*Library Journal*"A logical and easily read examination of the history that made the Founders, the history they made, and what history has made of their handiwork."--*Kansas Free Press*"Unsurpassed in his knowledge of the vast literature on the subject, Bernstein is admirably suited to the task. He is also an efficient retailer, having packed a great deal of informed exposition and wise commentary into a small, compact book of just over 250 pages."--*New England Quarterly*"Bernstein's erudite and marvelously accessible take on the Founding Fathers is a gem. With masterful economy, wit, insight, and expertise, he makes a familiar story come newly alive in his portraits of the men who made the American Revolution and the early republic. This book should be on the shelf of

anyone interested in America's founding era."--Annette Gordon-Reed, author of *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* and *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*"Even in the wake of innumerable learned commentaries on the subject, Bernstein manages to shed new light on the work of the men who framed the Constitution....The brief sketches of the various framers are likewise masterful and, Bernstein's focus on how their disagreements continued to play out in constitutional showdowns for decades to come--indeed down to the present--lends depth often lacking in treatments of the era."--Virginia Quarterly "Bernstein offers his readers an engaging and erudite account of the men who carried the colonies down the path to Revolution and then took up the task of creating a new nation. In the process, he provides a history of how the founding fathers came to be both idealized and debunked and the role historians and historical events of the 19th and 20th centuries played in shaping the reputations of men like Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton. This is a book with something important to say both to those new to the story of the nation's founding philosophy and those who have long been students of American politics and culture."--Carol Berkin, Presidential Professor of History, Baruch College The Graduate Center, CUNY, and author of *A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution*"A masterly volume brimming with apt description and insightful analysis, *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered* respectfully brings America's most cherished heroes firmly down to earth."--History Book Club"This is a sparkling book. The endnotes alone the product of decades of serious study and thoughtful reflection...are worth the volume's price. Scholars and thoughtful lay readers alike will find *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered* a rich and rewarding work."--Claremont of Books"Bernstein has something quite helpful to offer--a succinct and engaging discussion of the founders that contextualizes them both in their time and ours and shows how their actions and legacies have been interpreted in the popular and scholarly discourse....In little more than 150 pages, he manages to draw out some of the most interesting and pivotal moments of the founding, describe them in ways that will make them accessible to students, and then show how the ideas they represented are still relevant today. The breadth of scholarly and mainstream topics and ideas Bernstein invokes to illustrate his points is truly impressive."--Jane E. Calvert, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*"Bernstein eloquently discusses the contributions, struggles, flaws and virtues of the seven key founders throughout the book...a thoughtful, accessible read that will appeal to broad audiences looking for an introduction to the founding era...and the basis for the enduring debates that shape our understanding of the founding era and constitutional controversy."--Mark Rush, *Law Politics Book* "Clearly written and with general readers in mind, Bernstein's account synthesizes much recent scholarship as he traces the history of the term 'Founding Fathers,' offers definitions of what it has meant over the years, and discusses those it has included and even those it ought to include...Recommended."--CHOICE"This book's great strength is in accomplishing what its author set out for it to be: a graceful, manageable introduction to some of the best recent scholarship on the Founding Fathers and the issues that surround them."--*American Nineteenth Century History*"R.B. Bernstein provides a succinct and fair-minded overview of the controversies....Bernstein's excellent overview will prove a helpful and impressive guide for the interested general reader."--*Journal of Southern History*"A lucidly written and capably argued accomplishment...likely to satisfy the curiosity of readers looking for a brief and lively review of the Revolutionary Pantheon."--*The Journal of Law and History* "Bernstein is a winning writer with style to burn."--*The Historian*About the AuthorR. B. Bernstein, Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law at New York Law School, has written, edited, or co-edited nineteen books on American constitutional and legal history, including *Thomas Jefferson*.