



Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation

By Joseph J. Ellis

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An illuminating study of the intertwined lives of the founders of the American republic--John Adams, Aaron Burr, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington.

During the 1790s, which Ellis calls the most decisive decade in our nation's history, the greatest statesmen of their generation--and perhaps any--came together to define the new republic and direct its course for the coming centuries. Ellis focuses on six discrete moments that exemplify the most crucial issues facing the fragile new nation: Burr and Hamilton's deadly duel, and what may have really happened; Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison's secret dinner, during which the seat of the permanent capital was determined in exchange for passage of Hamilton's financial plan; Franklin's petition to end the "peculiar institution" of slavery--his last public act--and Madison's efforts to quash it; Washington's precedent-setting Farewell Address, announcing his retirement from public office and offering his country some final advice; Adams's difficult term as Washington's successor and his alleged scheme to pass the presidency on to his son; and finally, Adams and Jefferson's renewed correspondence at the end of their lives, in which they compared their different views of the Revolution and its legacy.

In a lively and engaging narrative, Ellis recounts the sometimes collaborative, sometimes archly antagonistic interactions between these men, and shows us the private characters behind the public personas: Adams, the ever-combative iconoclast, whose closest political collaborator was his wife, Abigail; Burr, crafty, smooth, and one of the most despised public figures of his time; Hamilton, whose audacious manner and deep economic savvy masked his humble origins; Jefferson, renowned for his eloquence, but so reclusive and taciturn that he rarely spoke more than a few sentences in public; Madison, small, sickly, and paralyzingly shy, yet one of the most effective debaters of his generation; and the stiffly formal Washington, the ultimate realist, larger-than-life, and America's only truly indispensable figure.

Ellis argues that the checks and balances that permitted the infant American republic to endure were not primarily legal, constitutional, or institutional, but

intensely personal, rooted in the dynamic interaction of leaders with quite different visions and values. Revisiting the old-fashioned idea that character matters, **Founding Brothers** informs our understanding of American politics--then and now--and gives us a new perspective on the unpredictable forces that shape history.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In retrospect, it seems as if the American Revolution was inevitable. But was it? In *Founding Brothers*, Joseph J. Ellis reveals that many of those truths we hold to be self-evident were actually fiercely contested in the early days of the republic.

Ellis focuses on six crucial moments in the life of the new nation, including a secret dinner at which the seat of the nation's capital was determined--in exchange for support of Hamilton's financial plan; Washington's precedent-setting Farewell Address; and the Hamilton and Burr duel. Most interesting, perhaps, is the debate (still dividing scholars today) over the *meaning* of the Revolution. In a fascinating chapter on the renewed friendship between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson at the end of their lives, Ellis points out the fundamental differences between the Republicans, who saw the Revolution as a liberating act and hold the Declaration of Independence most sacred, and the Federalists, who saw the revolution as a step in the building of American nationhood and hold the Constitution most dear. Throughout the text, Ellis explains the personal, face-to-face nature of early American politics--and notes that the members of the revolutionary generation were conscious of the fact that they were establishing precedents on which future generations would rely.

In *Founding Brothers*, Ellis (whose *American Sphinx* won the National Book Award for nonfiction in 1997) has written an elegant and engaging narrative, sure to become a classic. Highly recommended. --*Sunny Delaney*

From Library Journal

Having considered Thomas Jefferson in his National Book Award winner, *American Sphinx*, Ellis expands his horizons to include Jefferson's "brothers," e.g., Washington, Madison, and Burr.
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From [Booklist](#)

An outstanding biographer of Jefferson (*American Sphinx*, 1997), Ellis takes up new lines in this exploration of the "gestative" 1790s. He tailors six stories about political episodes that highlight a founder's character, convictions, and actions. Ellis' purpose in this storytelling is to underscore how vulnerable to dissolution the founders felt their creation to be, thereby explaining the controversies (such as the compromises with slavery) that to this day excite not just scholarly but general debate about what the Declaration and Constitution achieved. For example, Ben Franklin's last public act, signing a ban-the-slave-trade petition to the First Congress in 1790, provoked a floor argument so fierce about abolition it raised the spectre of disunion; Washington expressed relief with Congress' resolution to do nothing and debate no more about the matter. Ellis recounts equally fluidly and astutely such episodes as Hamilton's death; the bargain that sited the capital on the Potomac; Washington's Farewell Address; and the germination of parties. Palpably steeped in a career's worth of immersion in the early republic, Ellis' essays are angled, fascinating, and perfect for general-interest readers. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive right now, people have to do something to make themselves survive, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice by surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated it for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a guide your ability to survive enhance then having chance to remain than other is high. For you who want to start reading a book, we give you this Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation book as beginning and daily reading publication. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

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Morris Sampson:

Precisely why? Because this Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation is an unordinary book that the inside of the book waiting for you to snap that but latter it will distress you with the secret this inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who all write the book in such incredible way makes the content inside of easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book possess such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking means. So , still want to hold up having that book? If I were you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

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