

By Joseph J Ellis Founding Brothers The Revolutionary Generation

The introduction, discussion questions, suggestions for further reading, and author biography that follow are intended to enhance your reading group's discussion of Joseph Ellis's *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*. We hope they will enrich your experience of this Pulitzer Prize-winning 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.

A culminating work on the American Founding by one of its leading historians, *The Cause* rethinks the American Revolution as we have known it. George Washington claimed that anyone who attempted to provide an accurate account of the war for independence would be accused of writing fiction. At the time, no one called it the "American Revolution": former colonists still regarded themselves as Virginians or Pennsylvanians, not Americans, while John Adams insisted that the British were the real revolutionaries, for attempting to impose radical change without their colonists' consent. With *The Cause*, Ellis takes a fresh look at the events between 1773 and 1783, recovering a war more brutal than any in American history save the Civil War and discovering a strange breed of "prudent" revolutionaries, whose prudence proved wise yet tragic when it came to slavery, the original sin that still haunts our land. Written with flair and drama, *The Cause* brings together a cast of familiar and forgotten characters who, taken together, challenge the story we have long told ourselves about our origins as a people and a nation.

From the first shots fired at Lexington to the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the negotiations for the Louisiana Purchase, Joseph J. Ellis guides us through the decisive issues of the nation's founding, and illuminates the emerging philosophies, shifting alliances, and personal and political foibles of our now iconic leaders--Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, and Adams. He casts an incisive eye on the founders' achievements, arguing that the American Revolution was, paradoxically, an evolution--and that part of what made it so extraordinary was the gradual pace at which it occurred. He explains how the idea of a strong federal government was eventually embraced by the American people, and details the emergence of the two-party system, which stands as the founders' most enduring legacy. Ellis is equally incisive about their failures, and he makes clear how their inability to abolish slavery and to reach a just settlement with the Native Americans has played an equally important role in shaping our national character. With eloquence and insight, Ellis strips the mythic veneer of the revolutionary generation to reveal men both human and inspired, possessed of both brilliance and blindness. *American Creation* is an audiobook that delineates an era of flawed greatness, at a time when understanding our origins is more important than ever.

"Impassioned and erudite....A captivating portrait of this Massachusetts native as a wonderfully contrary genius possessed of an uncommon moral intelligence and farsighted political wisdom." —Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times* A fresh look at this astute, likably quirky statesman, by the author of the Pulitzer Award-winning *Founding Brothers* and the National Book Award winning *American Sphinx*. "The most lovable and most laughable, the warmest and possibly the wisest of the founding fathers, John Adams knew himself as few men do and preserved his knowledge in a voluminous correspondence that still vibrates. Ellis has used it with great skill and perception not only to bring us the man, warts and all, but more importantly to reveal his extraordinary insights into the problems confronting the founders that resonate today in the republic they created." —Edmund S. Morgan, Sterling Professor of History Emeritus, Yale University

Winner of the Bancroft Prize *The New York Times Book Review*, Editor's Choice *American*

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Heritage, Best of 2009 In this vivid new biography of Abigail Adams, the most illustrious woman of the founding era, Bancroft Award–winning historian Woody Holton offers a sweeping reinterpretation of Adams’s life story and of women’s roles in the creation of the republic. Using previously overlooked documents from numerous archives, Abigail Adams shows that the wife of the second president of the United States was far more charismatic and influential than historians have realized. One of the finest writers of her age, Adams passionately campaigned for women’s education, denounced sex discrimination, and matched wits not only with her brilliant husband, John, but with Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. When male Patriots ignored her famous appeal to "Remember the Ladies," she accomplished her own personal declaration of independence: Defying centuries of legislation that assigned married women’s property to their husbands, she amassed a fortune in her own name.

Adams’s life story encapsulates the history of the founding era, for she defined herself in relation to the people she loved or hated (she was never neutral), a cast of characters that included her mother and sisters; Benjamin Franklin and James Lovell, her husband’s bawdy congressional colleagues; Phoebe Abdee, her father’s former slave; her financially naïve husband; and her son John Quincy. At once epic and intimate, Abigail Adams, sheds light on a complicated, fascinating woman, one of the most beloved figures of American history.

WINNER • 2021 PULITZER PRIZE IN HISTORY The “stunning” (David W. Blight) untold history of how fast food became one of the greatest generators of black wealth in America. Just as *The Color of Law* provided a vital understanding of redlining and racial segregation, Marcia Chatelain’s *Franchise* investigates the complex interrelationship between black communities and America’s largest, most popular fast food chain. Taking us from the first McDonald’s drive-in in San Bernardino to the franchise on Florissant Avenue in Ferguson, Missouri, in the summer of 2014, Chatelain shows how fast food is a source of both power—economic and political—and despair for African Americans. As she contends, fast food is, more than ever before, a key battlefield in the fight for racial justice.

Draws on the Washington papers from archives at the University of Virginia to chronicle George Washington’s military career and presidential years, discussing his struggle to keep an emerging America united and other accomplishments.

Explores the founding fathers’ more radical contemporaries, who advocated for true liberty for all at the United States’ inception, including the abolition of slavery and equality despite race, class, or gender.

The definitive biography of a larger-than-life president who defied norms, divided a nation, and changed Washington forever Andrew Jackson, his intimate circle of friends, and his tumultuous times are at the heart of this remarkable book about the man who rose from nothing to create the modern presidency. Beloved and hated, venerated and reviled, Andrew Jackson was an orphan who fought his way to the pinnacle of power, bending the nation to his will in the cause of democracy. Jackson’s election in 1828 ushered in a new and lasting era in which the people, not distant elites, were the guiding force in American politics.

Democracy made its stand in the Jackson years, and he gave voice to the hopes and the fears of a restless, changing nation facing challenging times at home and threats abroad. To tell the saga of Jackson’s presidency, acclaimed author Jon Meacham goes inside the Jackson White House. Drawing on newly discovered family letters and papers, he details the human drama—the family, the women, and the inner circle of advisers— that shaped Jackson’s private world through years of storm and victory. One of our most significant yet dimly recalled

presidents, Jackson was a battle-hardened warrior, the founder of the Democratic Party, and the architect of the presidency as we know it. His story is one of violence, sex, courage, and tragedy. With his powerful persona, his evident bravery, and his mystical connection to the people, Jackson moved the White House from the periphery of government to the center of national action, articulating a vision of change that challenged entrenched interests to heed the popular will— or face his formidable wrath. The greatest of the presidents who have followed Jackson in the White House—from Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt to FDR to Truman—have found inspiration in his example, and virtue in his vision. Jackson was the most contradictory of men. The architect of the removal of Indians from their native lands, he was warmly sentimental and risked everything to give more power to ordinary citizens. He was, in short, a lot like his country: alternately kind and vicious, brilliant and blind; and a man who fought a lifelong war to keep the republic safe—no matter what it took.

A colorful, enlightening account of how Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, and the road to July 4: a selection from Joseph J. Ellis's *American Sphinx*, winner of the National Book Award. How did the newest and youngest member of Virginia's delegation to the Constitutional Congress come to write the founding document of the American project? In "Writing the Declaration of Independence," Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Joseph J. Ellis outlines the life of the document and the road to its adoption on July 4. From Jefferson's arrival in Philadelphia in 1775 in an ornate carriage along with four horses and three slaves, to a fascinating guided tour of the drafts and discussions (including the importance of a good speaking voice, the theatricality of Patrick Henry, and Jefferson's tortured, ultimately discarded section blaming the king for American slavery), this is the true history of Independence Day.

"The prizewinning author of *Founding Brothers* and *American Sphinx* now gives us the unexpected story of why the thirteen colonies, having just fought off the imposition of a distant centralized governing power, would decide to subordinate themselves anew. *The Quartet* is the story of this second American founding and of the men responsible-- some familiar, such as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, and some less so, such as Robert Morris and Gouverneur Morris. It was these men who shaped the contours of American history by diagnosing the systemic dysfunctions created by the Articles of Confederation, manipulating the political process to force a calling of the Constitutional Convention, conspiring to set the agenda in Philadelphia, orchestrating the debate in the state ratifying conventions, and, finally, drafting the Bill of Rights to assure state compliance with the constitutional settlement"-- The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Founding Brothers* shares historical insights into America's post-Revolution efforts for independence, citing key debates over the creations of the Articles of Confederation and the Bill of Rights.

In this brilliantly illuminating group portrait of the men who came to be known as the Founding Fathers, the incomparable Gordon Wood has written a book that

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seriously asks, "What made these men great?" and shows us, among many other things, just how much character did in fact matter. The life of each—Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Franklin, Hamilton, Madison, Paine—is presented individually as well as collectively, but the thread that binds these portraits together is the idea of character as a lived reality. They were members of the first generation in history that was self-consciously self-made men who understood that the arc of lives, as of nations, is one of moral progress.

The Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning author of *First Family* presents a revelatory account of America's declaration of independence and the political and military responses on both sides throughout the summer of 1776 that influenced key decisions and outcomes.

Presents a collection of important speeches, letters, and writings by George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, capturing their words on government and political institutions, religion, education, love, the pursuit of happiness, and more. Reprint.

Disputes the conventional wisdom that the birth of the United States was a relatively painless and unexceptional one. The author tells the story of how the euphoria surrounding Washington's inauguration quickly soured and the nation almost collapsed.

The unforgettable saga of one enslaved woman's fight for justice--and reparations Born into slavery, Henrietta Wood was taken to Cincinnati and legally freed in 1848. In 1853, a Kentucky deputy sheriff named Zebulon Ward colluded with Wood's employer, abducted her, and sold her back into bondage. She remained enslaved throughout the Civil War, giving birth to a son in Mississippi and never forgetting who had put her in this position. By 1869, Wood had obtained her freedom for a second time and returned to Cincinnati, where she sued Ward for damages in 1870. Astonishingly, after eight years of litigation, Wood won her case: in 1878, a Federal jury awarded her \$2,500. The decision stuck on appeal. More important than the amount, though the largest ever awarded by an American court in restitution for slavery, was the fact that any money was awarded at all. By the time the case was decided, Ward had become a wealthy businessman and a pioneer of convict leasing in the South. Wood's son later became a prominent Chicago lawyer, and she went on to live until 1912. McDaniel's book is an epic tale of a black woman who survived slavery twice and who achieved more than merely a moral victory over one of her oppressors. Above all, *Sweet Taste of Liberty* is a portrait of an extraordinary individual as well as a searing reminder of the lessons of her story, which establish beyond question the connections between slavery and the prison system that rose in its place.

Portraits of Charles Willson Peale, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, William Dunlap, and Noah Webster provide a perspective on the role of culture in post-Revolutionary America, both its high expectations and its frustrations.

SuperSummary, a modern alternative to SparkNotes and CliffsNotes, offers high-

quality study guides for challenging works of literature. This 54-page guide for "Founding Brothers" by Joseph J. Ellis includes detailed chapter summaries and analysis covering 6 chapters, as well as several more in-depth sections of expert-written literary analysis. Featured content includes commentary on major characters, 25 important quotes, essay topics, and key themes like The Great Improvisation and Securing the Union and the Problem of Slavery.

Offers a reassessment of the life, image, and career of Thomas Jefferson, examining his complex personality, controversies about the man and his beliefs, and his accomplishments

George Washington claimed that anyone who attempted to provide an accurate account of the war for independence would be accused of writing fiction. At the time, no one called it the "American Revolution" former colonists still regarded themselves as Virginians or Pennsylvanians, not Americans, while John Adams insisted that the British were the real revolutionaries, for attempting to impose radical change without their colonists' consent. With *The Cause*, Ellis takes a fresh look at the events between 1773 and 1783, recovering a war more brutal than any in American history save the Civil War and discovering a strange breed of "prudent" revolutionaries, whose prudence proved wise yet tragic when it came to slavery, the original sin that still haunts our land. Written with flair and drama, *The Cause* brings together a cast of familiar and forgotten characters who, taken together, challenge the story we have long told ourselves about our origins as a people and a nation.

A masterful examination of the early years of the American Republic analyzes the eventful last quarter of the eighteenth century, the accomplishments of the American founders, and the triumphs and failures that shaped the early nation and the American character. Reprint. 175,000 first printing.

Offers a concise biographical dictionary of important early American statesmen and leaders, from "Abigail Adams" to "George Wythe," with additional entries on key issues and events relevant to the formation of the United States.

A spellbinding history of the epic rivalry that shaped our republic: Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and their competing visions for America.

The author of the bestselling *The Founding Brothers* and *The Quartet* now gives a deeply insightful examination of the relevance of Jefferson's, Madison's, and Adams's views to some of the most divisive issues in American politics and society today.

By the author of the acclaimed *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution*, a gripping narrative that tells the story of the second and final war of independence that secured the nation's independence from Europe and established its claim to the entire continent. The War of 1812 has been ignored or misunderstood.

Union 1812 thrillingly illustrates why it must take its place as one of the defining moments in American history.

In this landmark work of history and winner of the Pulitzer Prize, Joseph J. Ellis explores how a group of greatly gifted but deeply flawed individuals—Hamilton, Burr, Jefferson, Franklin, Washington, Adams, and Madison—confronted the overwhelming challenges before them to set the course for our nation. The United States was more a

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fragile hope than a reality in 1790. During the decade that followed, the Founding Fathers—re-examined here as Founding Brothers—combined the ideals of the Declaration of Independence with the content of the Constitution to create the practical workings of our government. Through an analysis of six fascinating episodes—Hamilton and Burr's deadly duel, Washington's precedent-setting Farewell Address, Adams' administration and political partnership with his wife, the debate about where to place the capital, Franklin's attempt to force Congress to confront the issue of slavery and Madison's attempts to block him, and Jefferson and Adams' famous correspondence—Founding Brothers brings to life the vital issues and personalities from the most important decade in our nation's history.

"This book deals with important issues of constitutionalism in the American Revolution. It ranges from the imperial debate that led to the Declaration of Independence to the revolutionary state constitution making in 1776 and the creation of the Federal Constitution in 1787. It includes a discussion of slavery and constitutionalism, the emergence of the judiciary as one of the major tripartite institutions of government, and the demarcation between public and private that was a consequence of the government"--

Presents a narrative profile of the second president and his wife that traces their more than fifty-year partnership in such areas as civic and foreign affairs.

Setting the World Ablaze is the story of the American Revolution and of the three Founders who played crucial roles in winning the War of Independence and creating a new nation: George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. Braiding three strands into one rich narrative, John Ferling brings these American icons down from their pedestals to show them as men of flesh and blood, and in doing so gives us a new understanding of the passion and uncertainty of the struggle to form a new nation. A leading historian of the Revolutionary era, Ferling draws upon an unsurpassed command of the primary sources and a talent for swiftly moving narrative to give us intimate views of each of these men. He shows us both the overarching historical picture of the era and a gripping sense of how these men encountered the challenges that faced them. We see Washington, containing a profound anger at British injustice within an austere demeanor; Adams, far from home, struggling with severe illness and French duplicity in his crucial negotiations in Paris; and Jefferson, distracted and indecisive, confronting uncertainties about his future in politics. John Adams, in particular, emerges from the narrative as the most under-appreciated hero of the Revolution, while Jefferson is revealed as the most overrated, yet most eloquent, of the Founders. Setting the World Ablaze shows in dramatic detail how these conservative men--successful members of the colonial elite--were transformed into radical revolutionaries.

Following Thomas Jefferson from the drafting of the Declaration of Independence to his retirement in Monticello, Joseph J. Ellis unravels the contradictions of the Jeffersonian character. He gives us the slaveholding libertarian who was capable of decrying miscegenation while maintaining an intimate relationship with his slave, Sally Hemmings; the enemy of government power who exercised it audaciously as president; the visionary who remained curiously blind to the inconsistencies in his nature. American Sphinx is a marvel of scholarship, a delight to read, and an essential gloss on the Jeffersonian legacy.

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The Pulitzer Prize–winning, best-selling author of *Founding Brothers* and *His Excellency* brings America’s preeminent first couple to life in a moving and illuminating narrative that sweeps through the American Revolution and the republic’s tenuous early years. John and Abigail Adams left an indelible and remarkably preserved portrait of their lives together in their personal correspondence: both Adamses were prolific letter writers (although John conceded that Abigail was clearly the more gifted of the two), and over the years they exchanged more than twelve hundred letters. Joseph J. Ellis distills this unprecedented and unsurpassed record to give us an account both intimate and panoramic; part biography, part political history, and part love story. Ellis describes the first meeting between the two as inauspicious—John was twenty-four, Abigail just fifteen, and each was entirely unimpressed with the other. But they soon began a passionate correspondence that resulted in their marriage five years later. Over the next decades, the couple were separated nearly as much as they were together. John’s political career took him first to Philadelphia, where he became the boldest advocate for the measures that would lead to the Declaration of Independence. Yet in order to attend the Second Continental Congress, he left his wife and children in the middle of the war zone that had by then engulfed Massachusetts. Later he was sent to Paris, where he served as a minister to the court of France alongside Benjamin Franklin. These years apart stressed the Adamses’ union almost beyond what it could bear: Abigail grew lonely, while the Adams children suffered from their father’s absence. John was elected the nation’s first vice president, but by the time of his reelection, Abigail’s health prevented her from joining him in Philadelphia, the interim capital. She no doubt had further reservations about moving to the swamp on the Potomac when John became president, although this time he persuaded her. President Adams inherited a weak and bitterly divided country from George Washington. The political situation was perilous at best, and he needed his closest advisor by his side: “I can do nothing,” John told Abigail after his election, “without you.” In Ellis’s rich and striking new history, John and Abigail’s relationship unfolds in the context of America’s birth as a nation.

Americans tend to think of the Revolution as a Massachusetts-based event orchestrated by Virginians, but in fact the war took place mostly in the Middle Colonies—in New York and New Jersey and the parts of Pennsylvania that on a clear day you can almost see from the Empire State Building. In *My American Revolution*, Robert Sullivan delves into this first Middle America, digging for a glorious, heroic part of the past in the urban, suburban, and sometimes even rural landscape of today. And there are great adventures along the way: Sullivan investigates the true history of the crossing of the Delaware, its down-home reenactment each year for the past half a century, and—toward the end of a personal odyssey that involves camping in New Jersey backyards, hiking through lost “mountains,” and eventually some physical therapy—he evacuates illegally from Brooklyn to Manhattan by handmade boat. He recounts a Brooklyn historian’s failed attempt to memorialize a colonial Maryland regiment; a tattoo artist’s more successful use of a colonial submarine, which resulted in his 2007 arrest by the New York City police and the FBI; and the life of Philip Freneau, the first (and not great) poet of American independence, who died in a swamp in the snow. Last but not least, along New York harbor, Sullivan re-creates an ancient signal beacon. Like an almanac, *My American Revolution* moves through the calendar of American independence, considering the weather and the tides, the harbor and the estuary and the yearly return of the stars as salient factors in the war for independence. In this fiercely individual and often hilarious journey to make our revolution his, he shows us how alive our own history is, right under our noses.

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Through portraits of four figures—Charles Willson Peale, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, William Dunlap, and Noah Webster—Joseph Ellis provides a unique perspective on the role of culture in post-Revolutionary America, both its high expectations and its frustrations. Each life is fascinating in its own right, and each is used to brightly illuminate the historical context. The award-winning author of *Founding Brothers* and *The Quartet* now gives us a deeply insightful examination of the relevance of the views of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams to some of the most divisive issues in America today. The story of history is a ceaseless conversation between past and present, and in *American Dialogue* Joseph J. Ellis focuses the conversation on the often-asked question "What would the Founding Fathers think?" He examines four of our most seminal historical figures through the prism of particular topics, using the perspective of the present to shed light on their views and, in turn, to make clear how their now centuries-old ideas illuminate the disturbing impasse of today's political conflicts. He discusses Jefferson and the issue of racism, Adams and the specter of economic inequality, Washington and American imperialism, Madison and the doctrine of original intent. Through these juxtapositions--and in his hallmark dramatic and compelling narrative voice--Ellis illuminates the obstacles and pitfalls paralyzing contemporary discussions of these fundamentally important issues.

****Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in History**** "Extraordinary...a great American biography" (The New Yorker) of the most important African-American of the nineteenth century: Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave who became the greatest orator of his day and one of the leading abolitionists and writers of the era. As a young man Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) escaped from slavery in Baltimore, Maryland. He was fortunate to have been taught to read by his slave owner mistress, and he would go on to become one of the major literary figures of his time. His very existence gave the lie to slave owners: with dignity and great intelligence he bore witness to the brutality of slavery. Initially mentored by William Lloyd Garrison, Douglass spoke widely, using his own story to condemn slavery. By the Civil War, Douglass had become the most famed and widely travelled orator in the nation. In his unique and eloquent voice, written and spoken, Douglass was a fierce critic of the United States as well as a radical patriot. After the war he sometimes argued politically with younger African Americans, but he never forsook either the Republican party or the cause of black civil and political rights. In this "cinematic and deeply engaging" (The New York Times Book Review) biography, David Blight has drawn on new information held in a private collection that few other historians have consulted, as well as recently discovered issues of Douglass's newspapers. "Absorbing and even moving...a brilliant book that speaks to our own time as well as Douglass's" (The Wall Street Journal), Blight's biography tells the fascinating story of Douglass's two marriages and his complex extended family. "David Blight has written the definitive biography of Frederick Douglass...a powerful portrait of one of the most important American voices of the nineteenth century" (The Boston Globe). In addition to the Pulitzer Prize, Frederick Douglass won the Bancroft, Parkman, Los Angeles Times (biography), Lincoln, Plutarch, and Christopher awards and was named one of the Best Books of 2018 by The New York Times Book Review, The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, The San Francisco Chronicle, and Time.

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