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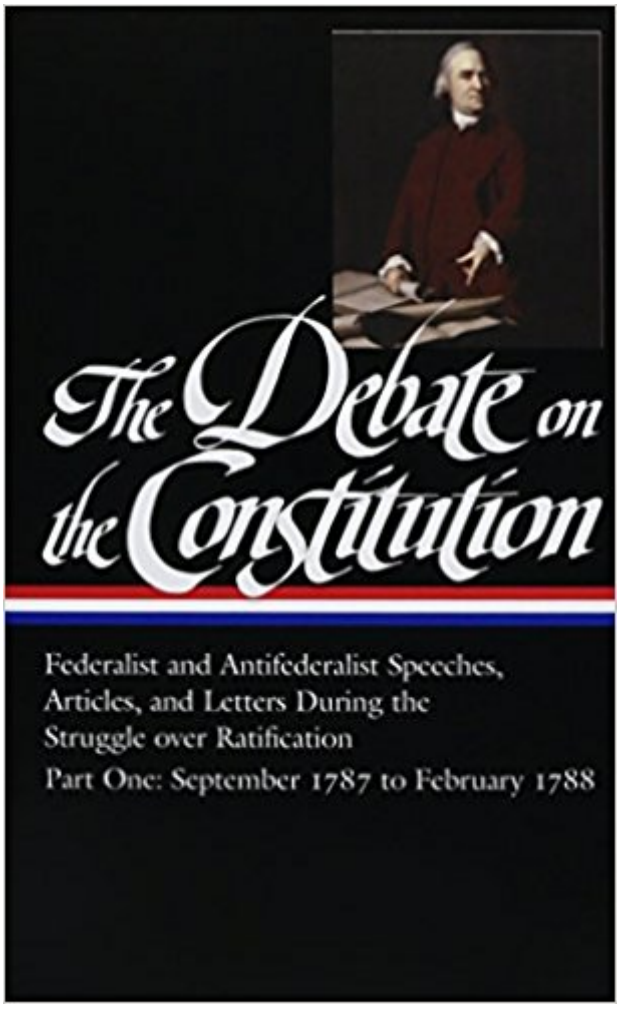

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Synopsis

Here, on a scale unmatched by any previous collection, is the extraordinary energy and eloquence of our first national political campaign: During the secret proceedings of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, the framers created a fundamentally new national plan to replace the Articles of Confederation and then submitted it to conventions in each state for ratification. Immediately, a fierce storm of argument broke. Federalist supporters, Antifederalist opponents, and seekers of a middle ground strove to balance public order and personal liberty as they praised, condemned, challenged, and analyzed the new Constitution Gathering hundreds of original texts by Franklin, Madison, Jefferson, Washington, and Patrick HenryÃ¢â ¬â •as well as many others less well known todayÃ¢â ¬â •this unrivaled collection allows readers to experience firsthand the intense year-long struggle that created what remains the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s oldest working national charter.Assembled here in chronological order are hundreds of newspaper articles, pamphlets, speeches, and private letters written or delivered in the aftermath of the Constitutional Convention. Along with familiar figures like Franklin, Madison, Patrick Henry, Jefferson, and Washington, scores of less famous citizens are represented, all speaking clearly and passionately about government. The most famous writings of the ratification struggle Ã¢â ¬â • the Federalist essays of Hamilton and Madison Ã¢â ¬â • are placed in their original context, alongside the arguments of able antagonists, such as "Brutus" and the "Federal Farmer."Part One includes press polemics and private commentaries from September1787 to January 1788. That autumn, powerful arguments were made against the new charter by Virginian George Mason and the still-unidentified "Federal Farmer," while in New York newspapers, the Federalist essays initiated a brilliant defense. Dozens of speeches from the state ratifying conventions show how the "draft of a plan, nothing but a dead letter," in Madison's words, had "life and validity...breathed into it by the voice of the people." Included are the conventions in Pennsylvania, where James Wilson confronted the democratic skepticism of those representing the western frontier, and in Massachusetts, where John Hancock and Samuel Adams forged a crucial compromise that saved the country from years of political convulsion.Informative notes, biographical profiles of all writers, speakers, and recipients, and a detailed chronology of relevant events from 1774 to 1804 provide fascinating background. A general index allows readers to follow specific topics, and an appendix includes the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution (with all amendments).

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Customer Reviews

"The best resource for understanding the morning headlines I've seen in a long time." Ã¢â ¬â • Bill Moyers"An easily accessible set of sacred writings for America's civil religion, these two books are composed of the very stuff of history." Ã¢â ¬â • The Chicago Tribune"Not only is it wonderful writing, it is wonderful thinking." Ã¢â ¬â • Nina Totenberg, NPR

BERNARD BAILYN is Adams University Professor and James Duncan Phillips Professor of Early American History, emeritus, at Harvard University. He is the author many acclaimed works, including The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution and Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution.

Put together by Bernard Bailyn, this splendid collection of writings, thoughts, and passionate assertions are not merely the result of today's historians putting together their "takes" (however valuable) on the subject of something so immense as the formation of the American Constituion; they are made vastly more precious to those of us - the posterity they speak of - because these intense words come to us out of the centuries past direct from the people who were living it. And, through these pages, it's still alive; and reborn to those of us who seek the collective wisdom behind how it came to be. These are the feelings and thoughts of those who were there, before the fact, trying to make sure that everything that could be thought of beforehand was also thought "through" with regards to the serious ramifications of their actions. They were the poster children for "the

ounce of prevention being the pound of cure". Liberty and it's preservation was fresh in their minds. Today, we take it for granted; a danger; and they knew that would happen too unless something stood between us and the danger zone. It had to be done right the first time because it was likely going to be impossible to go back and do it again.Danger was all around them. There was danger in the Federalist proposals, danger in the anti-Federalist counter-arguments. On one hand, after reading these epistles, we can plainly understand the pitfalls feared, because we see the results today. But we also can visualize the need to unite in one central nucleus or risk it all through fragmentation and self-interests of the independent states, under full sovereignty. The old saying "United we Stand, Divided we might Fall" rings true as we absorb. It was indeed, a gathering of our mighty, men (with women behind the scenes) who not only dared to speak frankly, but had the courage to do so as they exercised their newly found - if yet unsanctioned - rights afforded by the hard-won revolt against a monarchy. The reader fully understands the dissenter's fears that centralized power may gradually overwhelm the people's rights just as despotic power had done against it's citizens through so many previous centuries. If these voices had not been there, perhaps no bill of rights would have been developed to ride beside the Constitution; and most of us realize what this oversight might have meant for us today. But we had all of them; and they thought, fought, debated, disagreed, but ultimately, they put aside their differences, came together and "did the work of the people", forming "the more perfect Union" despite (or maybe because of) their human frailties. Unlike what we see happening today. (I just had to throw that in)Benjamin Franklin's speech is the first one in the collection and perhaps rightly so - his age at the time had to nail him the top spot. He was 83 and I sincerely hope my own mind is as clear at that age even though never as brilliant. Tenche Cox, proponent of the constitution, published through Indepenent Gazetteer in Philadelphia; Cato, an outspoken anti-Federalist, published through New York Journal; and of course, Patrick Henry was taking a lot of heat from the Federalists for his abject refusal of the idea. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton whom I suspect George Washington used as his mouthpiece; Thomas Jefferson, John Adams; and lesser acclaimed writers who were fully as articulate in their delivery of their arguments. It's an incredible journey back to our roots and I can never do justice to all of it - or all of them - here is this review, as it must be read, absorbed and internalized by the individual reader.Another amazing collection of American brilliance in written speech form, the Library of America's "American Speeches - Political Oratory from the Revolution to the Civil War" is, without doubt, the ultimate premiere of free thought collections you will ever read gathered together all in one spot. If you love American History of the Revolutionary period, and want to be astounded by the calibre of courageous people that lived for us during that time, men and women, creeds and colors

alike, blazing trails via the power of words through the virtual untested wilderness of liberty for us, this book will provide an invaluable addition to your library.

I've gathered other collections (i.e., The Federalist Paper, Constitutional Debates) over the years, but this collection (along with Volume 2) is by far the most comprehensive yet affordable collection to date. Given the fact Bernard Bailyn compiled the contents and wrote the background material, the reader can rest assured that a distinguished historian is behind these endeavors. Bailyn's commitment to detail and analysis of primary sources has always been one of his hallmarks. He continues that commitment in these two volumes.There is more material here than the average person probably ever knew existed regarding the constitutional debates. Letters, newspaper articles, formal treatises, and speeches all provide the documentation. Bailyn wants to show the depth and richness of the discussion, which varies from those who feared loss of personal liberty to those ready to embrace the document. Anyone who picks up these volumes will come away with an idea of how complex the constitution really is - that it will never be all things to all people, but it does ground our national identity. It becomes the task of each succeeding generation to uphold the tradition yet strive to assure the Constitution carries out its intended purpose. Obviously this is no small feat to be taken lightly.The books are arranged chronologically, more or less, divided into subsections. The reader will get the broad spectrum of constitutional debates (the Federalist Papers are included, the "antifederalist papers" are included) as are the fears, assurances, and the entire range of human emotion regarding the Constitution are all there for the reader to peruse.The only spoiler I offer is the peculiar selection of a Benjamin Franklin letter as the very first entry of the set. Franklin fears the Constitution yet is willing to embrace it just the same. In a way, this might be the quintessential document of the entire collection as all Americans have reason to heed Franklin's concerns.

Too often our schools only teach the Federalist Papers if they teach the debate at all. This series corrects that deficit. The only downside is I know they have curated the papers and I wish the editors gave us the basis for their inclusion/exclusion decisions.

love these. well researched, thorough with explanatory notes and biographies as well as history timeline. you'll need plenty of time to go through these 1K+ page books so don't get them for brevity

For a good idea of the facts about how we came to have the U S Constitution and the Bill of Rights,

this is a great reference source. The fact that this edition is in a high quality book form is an added bonus.

First part of the debates. Excellent book of speeches by founding fathers about proposed changes they wanted to the constitution, more power/less power,In the constitution.

There is more to the Constitution than the final document. The debates provide some context on how we got the words.

This is must have reference material. Reading books like this will give you a near super human ability to tell people to shut up in a way that is more satisfying than just saying "Zip it hippie!"

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