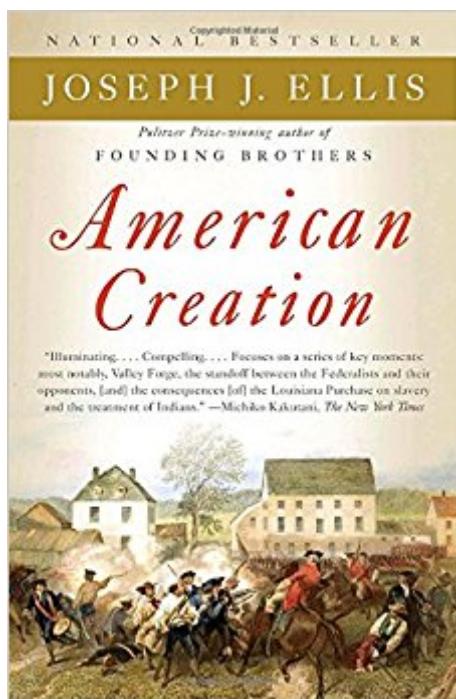


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American Creation: Triumphs And Tragedies In The Founding Of The Republic



Synopsis

National Bestseller Acclaimed historian Joseph J. Ellis brings his unparalleled talents to this riveting account of the early years of the Republic. The last quarter of the eighteenth century remains the most politically creative era in American history, when a dedicated group of men undertook a bold experiment in political ideals. It was a time of both triumphs and tragedies—“all of which contributed to the shaping of our burgeoning nation. Ellis casts an incisive eye on the gradual pace of the American Revolution and the contributions of such luminaries as Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, and brilliantly analyzes the failures of the founders to adequately solve the problems of slavery and the treatment of Native Americans. With accessible prose and stunning eloquence, Ellis delineates in American Creation an era of flawed greatness, at a time when understanding our origins is more important than ever.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. This subtle, brilliant examination of the period between the War of Independence and the Louisiana Purchase puts Pulitzer-winner Ellis (Founding Brothers) among the finest of America's narrative historians. Six stories, each centering on a significant creative achievement or failure, combine to portray often flawed men and their efforts to lay the republic's foundation. Set against the extraordinary establishment of the most liberal nation-state in the history of Western Civilization... in the most extensive and richly endowed plot of ground on the planet are the terrible costs of victory, including the perpetuation of slavery and the cruel oppression of Native Americans.

Ellis blames the founders' failures on their decision to opt for an evolutionary revolution, not a risky severance with tradition (as would happen, murderously, in France, which necessitated compromises, like retaining slavery). Despite the injustices and brutalities that resulted, Ellis argues, this deferral strategy was a profound insight rooted in a realistic appraisal of how enduring social change best happens. Ellis's lucid, illuminating and ironic prose will make this a holiday season hit. (Nov. 5) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Reviewers embraced American Creation for the same reason they enjoyed Ellis's previous books: his treatment of the Founding Fathers is neither idolatrous nor iconoclastic. He portrays them as the fascinating, complex, and human characters they really were. Some historians disagreed with details of Ellis's interpretation, but they tended to emphasize that, like the founders themselves, Ellis has created a useful framework in which the ideas of the Revolutionary period can be discussed. Ellis's prose, on the other hand, did not inspire any comparisons with Thomas Jefferson's; in fact, several reviewers suggested another round of editing. But all critics agreed that the author's masterful handling of the material checked and balanced the occasional tyrannical sentence. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

American Creation is one of the best researched, well-written and insightful books on American history that I have read. Divided into a series of essays that bridge the period from the Declaration of Independence to Jefferson's Presidency, it tells the story as it was perceived at the time, with all the complexities, different personalities and array of political issues that the Founding Fathers had to deal with. Reading it made you feel like an eye witness to the events of the day. It also had considerable relevance to contemporary politics, especially the essay dealing with the creation of the two-party system. An outstanding choice for any history buff.

Purchased for my daughter for class.

While touring to promote his Founding Brothers, Ellis was asked, "Why do we have to choose between John Kerry and George Bush when 200 years ago we could have chosen between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson?" Fascinating question, and his answer, American Creation, is a truly insightful and well-crafted book. Ellis breaks the founding down into a number of different pieces like

the War for Independence, Slavery, the Louisiana Purchase, the Constitution and Native Americans. He treats all of them very even-handedly, framing them in the context of what the realities were around 1800, but also giving penetrating insights into how we might look at things differently today and why. The theme that runs throughout the book is that the people Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton and Washington were fallible characters who were meaningfully different from the legends Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton and Washington we see now. That said, Ellis really shows how an alignment of the right thoughts, the right time and the right opportunity conspired to pull some extraordinary things from people who might have remained unknown to history had the planets lined up differently. You come away from the book understanding far more about what the politics of the founding were really like. In some ways, they aren't as dissimilar from today's politics as we might think; in other ways, they are, but for very specific reasons that Ellis makes clear. Highly recommended for any fan of history.

Anything written by Joseph Ellis is worth reading and re-reading. Wonderful synthesis of historical events that defy the fabricated and confined neatness of, say, Trumbull's painting of the Signing. His rhetoric soars. He uses only primary sources. Every book is a jewel of historical truth. Whenever I go to Amherst, I carry all my Joseph Ellis books, hoping to see him or to gain an audience with the great man/mind. His signing my collection would be grand. Maybe I'll see him enjoying the popovers at Judy's.

I won't bother the reader with a long review of the topics covered in the book. Ellis writes with real flair and obvious passion about the Revolutionary War, the heroes of the Constitutional Convention, and the problems they faced in creating a new government for the nascent nation. Many things were quite opposite of the popular view of the Founders, especially these days. For example, Ellis disarms the idea that slavery was not a concern to the Founders, or that somehow many wanted the institution to continue with a frank discussion of the consequences of slavery. Actually, slavery was of tremendous concern, and many of the Founders wanted the institution ended. The tragedy of the Founders' accomplishment is that they were not able to end it at all without putting in place the ingredients of the Civil War. Furthermore, the difficulty in trying to reach a compromise with all the original thirteen colonies given the differences in status, population, and economic power is shown for what an extraordinary struggle it was. Finally, the Jefferson decision to exercise executive power to bring about the completion of the Louisiana Purchase is discussed as another interesting benchmark of federal and executive power. Given all that happened before Jefferson's term within

the idea of the separation of powers, and the limitations of executive authority (something that is increasingly lost upon both the executive branch AND the American public at large) and one senses that Jefferson was indeed correct to worry about the results of his decision. Truly, I would recommend this book without reservation to anyone with the slightest interest in early American history or the so-called American Revolution (given that nothing was really all that radical about it). Ellis has written a scholarly book that is not overly pedantic. Quite frankly, it is a pleasure to read for both scholars and gentlemen (and ladies too). Bravo, Mr. Ellis!

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