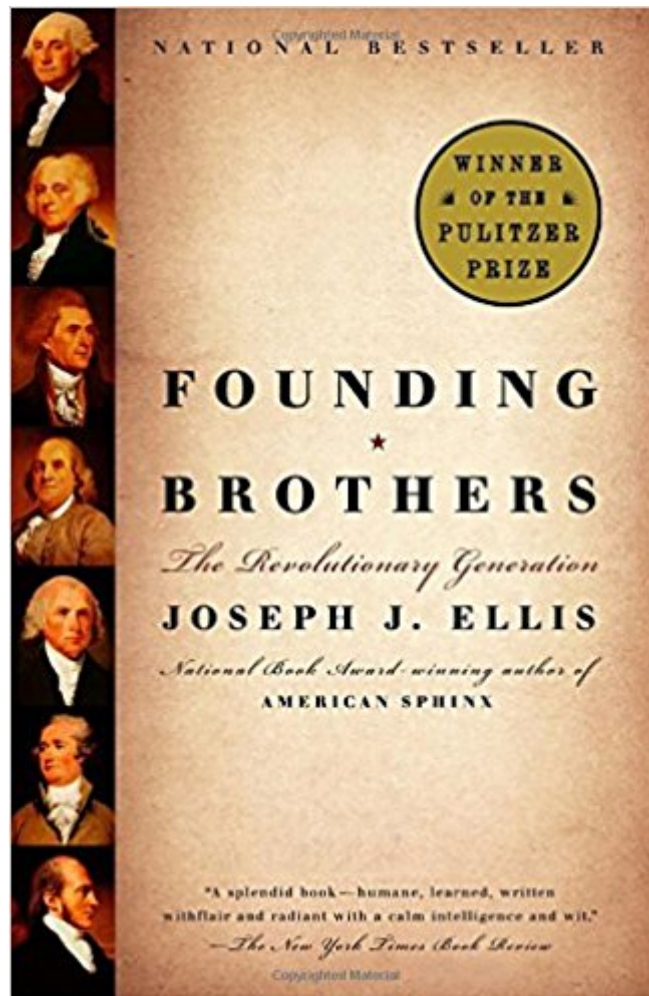




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# Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation



## Synopsis

In this landmark work of history, the National Book Award-winning author of *American Sphinx* 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 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's 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's famous correspondence—*Founding Brothers* brings to life the vital issues and personalities from the most important decade in our nation's history.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Vintage (February 5, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375705244

ISBN-13: 978-0375705243

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 774 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,510 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > American Revolution #9 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding #18 in Books > Deals in Books

## Customer Reviews

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 --This text refers to the Audio Cassette edition.

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. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audio Cassette edition.

This is one of the most well-known work on early American history. Ellis's argument of the gentlemanly American Revolution, which stresses consensus and compromise, is persuasive. His analysis of John Adams is more sympathetic than the mainstream view. This book is a good bridge to link general readership and academic scholarship. In an era of polarizing politics and increasing hostile interaction between different parts of the society, politicians and laymen alike should really look into the days of Washington and understand some of the true values of American political structure.

When I started this book, I expected a historical accounting similar to other books covering this period. But, Ellis's book went much further. Author Ellis enables a glimpse into the key figures and their issues during the country's first-generation administrations. This contentious period gave rise to political parties. Because communications during this period depended on journals and mailings, ample written records exist. I can't imagine the amount of research it took to locate and examine these, but the results are rewarding. The book dealt with such "behind the scenes" subjects as the reasons for the

Burr-Hamilton duel, the 1790 Quaker petition to end the African slave trade, and the formulation of Washington's Farewell Address. But, the book was highlighted by the evolution of the Jefferson-Adams relationship: from friendship, to abhorrence; and after 12 years of silence, to reconciliation. Ellis guides us through this relationship to their later years. Here, they have put aside their individual differences to reflect, clarify the record, and focus on their places in history. The book ends on a surprising note. This book was difficult to read. In explaining and analyzing deep and subtle topics, the book's sentences could be complex and the paragraphs lengthy. I needed to re-read some sections to grasp their meanings. But, the extra time was worth the effort.

It's easy for those of us living in the 21st century to take the revolutionary generation for granted. The Founding Fathers, the American War of Independence, and the establishment of an independent United States have become so familiar to our country's history that it's difficult to imagine a different course of events. In "Founding Brothers," Joseph Ellis takes us back to the late 18th century to remind us about the fragility of the new republic, and how incredible it was that history turned out the way it did. After grabbing our attention with page-turning coverage of the famous duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, Mr. Ellis focuses on the major issues the new republic faced following the establishment of the Constitution and the inauguration of the first president, George Washington. The immediate pressing issue was the financial status of the United States. With the states facing accumulated debt from the expenses of fighting the Revolutionary War, the debate centered on whether the federal government should assume the debt of the several states. Such a move was opposed by states like Virginia, which paid off its debts responsibly. In exchange for building a capital for the federal government on the Potomac, key supporters from the South agreed to a compromise. So began the accumulation of our national debt and the establishment of a site for the nation's capital of Washington D.C. Other key issues during the time included ardent relations with France, the establishment of land and naval military forces, and the issue few chose to talk about: slavery. Mr. Ellis dedicates an entire chapter to the mindset the Founding Fathers had when dealing with one of the most polarizing issues at the time. For those of us living with 21st-century hindsight, it may seem obvious and reactionary to say that the revolutionary generation should have struck an immediate blow to the institution of slavery. However, without compromises with members of the South, the constitutional experiment would have ceased to exist. Mr. Ellis titles this chapter "The Silence," implying that the Founders decided this was the most pragmatic way to deal with the issue at the time. Unlike us, they could not foresee this issue being resolved through a civil war over seventy years down the road. During this key

moment in American history, Mr. Ellis does a remarkable job in reminding us that the Founding Fathers were living, thinking human beings who faced the unique and tough challenges that came with establishing a free republic. For readers who want to understand the often-romanticized history of the beginnings of the United States and the men who made it happen, you can't do much better than this book.

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