

of partisan interest (64). In Newport, where Congregationalist, Anglican, and Baptist churches, Quaker and Moravian meetinghouses, and a Jewish synagogue often stood contentiously amongst one another, a “landscape of mutual suspicion created barriers to political mobilization” before the British occupation of December 1776 (121). In Charleston, where fashion no less than fires and hurricanes compelled British North America’s wealthiest families to rebuild and refurnish their lavish homes, ostentatious consumption ran afoul of austere boycotts, destabilizing the authority of the planter class. And in Philadelphia, where the Continental Congress assembled within a magnificent State House as the people gathered on its capacious yard, *vox populi* resounded loud and clear.

Readers familiar with Carp’s “Fire of Liberty: Firefighters, Urban Voluntary Culture, and the Revolutionary Movement,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001): 781–818, know what fine work Carp makes of city spaces and their many politicized constituencies. His monograph—exciting, vigorous, and original—will sit worthily alongside urban studies such as Bridenbaugh’s and Gary Nash’s.

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BENJAMIN H. IRVIN

The Founding Fathers Reconsidered. By R. B. BERNSTEIN. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 256 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, further reading, index. \$17.95.)

At first glance of this title, one wonders how much more reconsideration the founders need. Most of those treated in R. B. Bernstein’s volume—Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison, and Hamilton—have received plenty of consideration over the years. But on second look, Bernstein has something quite helpful to offer—a succinct and engaging discussion of the founders that contextualizes them both in their time and ours and shows how their actions and legacies have been interpreted in the popular and scholarly discourse.

He handles his subject in a way that will prove very useful for teaching undergraduates about “doing” history. By introducing them to three divergent, sometimes conflicting, and largely inaccurate perspectives on the founders, he demonstrates that history is more a matter of interpretation than “facts.” The first view is the one that students themselves usually hold—the popular perception of the founders as “icons of disinterested statesmanship” (iv). Bernstein immediately contrasts this with a second depiction put forth by many academics, that of the founders as “representatives of a corrupt establishment” (iv). Finally, he discusses the view of the founders as the “sole determiners of what the Constitution means” (v). Bernstein’s aim is to synthesize the scholarship of the last forty years that offers a more nuanced interpretation of the men and their world. In a respectful tone, he proposes to “take the founding fathers down from their pedestals without

knocking them down" (xi).

In four lively and readable chapters, Bernstein presents the founding from various angles. He sets the scene with a brief discussion of modern associations with the founders and how words and images of them are used in public discourse today. Moving from our context to theirs, Bernstein next surveys the founders' geographical, intellectual, and political contexts. The last two chapters are the heart of the book, as they give an overview of the founders' challenges, achievements, and legacies. He ends with one of the most controversial topics of our day—whether and how the founders should be used to interpret the Constitution and the union made more perfect.

In little more than 150 pages, he manages to draw out some of the most interesting and pivotal moments of the founding, describe them in ways that will make them accessible to students, and then show how the ideas they represented are still relevant today. The breadth of scholarly and mainstream topics and ideas Bernstein invokes to illustrate his points is truly impressive, from Jack Greene's "periphery and center," Dred Scott, originalism, and HBO to Charles Beard, Web surfing, separation of church and state, and Obama.

For all these reasons, this book is perfect for classroom use. But there is one relatively minor concern. In dispelling some myths, it is in danger of perpetuating others. Although students will come away with a new appreciation of the founders, they will also be left with the same mythological impression that a small handful of men largely acted alone. The appendix, with a partial list of other figures, does not right this imbalance. But because this book can be easily paired with other materials and its message extended to other figures, it should nonetheless be required, rather than recommended, reading.

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JANE E. CALVERT

The Papers of Benjamin Franklin. Vol. 39, *January 21 through May 15, 1783*. Edited by ELLEN R. COHN. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009. 752 pp. Illustrations, index. \$95.)

Benjamin Franklin had few lulls in his diplomatic career, but the period covered in volume 39 of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* comes the closest. This volume begins with the cease-fire between Great Britain and France on January 20, 1783, effectively ending hostilities in the American Revolution. The collapse of the Shelburne ministry and the delay in forming the Portland ministry prevented any movement on a definitive treaty. Yet diplomacy continued on a number of fronts, and the editors argue that "Franklin's skills as a diplomat continued to be vital" (lvi). Indeed, Franklin was the center of the American diplomatic universe. French and British writers bombarded him with both congratulations and