

Founding Brothers by Joseph Ellis

Chapter 1 "The Generation"

Quiz:

Joseph Ellis makes a number of arguments regarding the founding fathers. Address the following

1. What does he mean by the phrase: "No event in American history which was so improbable at the time has seemed so inevitable in retrospect as the American Revolution." (Pg. 3) Why was it so improbable? (Pg. 4 -5)
2. What does Ellis mean when he says we need to be "nearsighted and farsighted at the same time." (Pg. 6)
3. What is Ellis arguing when he says: "The very arguments used justify the secession from the British Empire also undermined the legitimacy of any national government..." that could govern effectively. (Pg. 7)
4. Ellis argues there was a "Miracle at Philadelphia"...What was the miracle at Philadelphia? Or What does he say was the insoluble (unsolvable) political problem? (Pg. 8-9)
5. What is the Jeffersonian interpretation of the American Revolution? (Pg. 14)
6. What is the Hamiltonian interpretation of American Revolution? (Pg. 14)
7. Ellis argues that he identified some "common themes" that helped create this special thing called the United States... 1. A Collective Enterprise, 2. Personal Relationships, 3. Deferred the Slavery Question, 4. They were "Actors in a Historical Drama", what was his point in each of these? (Pg. 17)

This reading deals with the Political Ideals of the American Revolution

"Achievements of the revolutionary era and the early republic were political... are historically significant because they shaped the subsequent history of the US..."

The Founders:

Were a small number of men

Knew each other

Collaborated with each other

They were talented and rose because of that talent

"They created the American republic, then held it together throughout the volatile and vulnerable early years by sustaining their presence until national habits and customs took root." (13)

The Revolution Generation believed they were doing historic things... they believed they were in a "Historical Drama"

They knew they were making history

Adams instructed Abigail to save all of his letters...

Legacy of the Revolution and America "...Liberal institutions and ideas first established in the US... representative government based on the principle popular sovereignty... market economy... = national success" (becomes the norm in the 20th century)

The institutions they created have stood the test of time...

Longest running republic

At the Time success of the revolution was improbable.

There was a low chance for success.

"Benjamin Harrison to Elbridge Gerry... "I shall have a great advantage over you, Mr. Gerry, when we are all hung for what we are now doing. From the size and weight of my body I shall die in a few minutes, but from the lightness of your body you will dance in the air an hour or two before you are dead." (5)

"The creation of a separate American nation occurred suddenly rather than gradually... it was an improvisational affair in which sheer chance, pure luck... and specific decisions... determined the outcome" (5)

Theme of Nearsightedness and Farsightedness

Short term prospects were bleak, surviving the war and keeping unity

Farsighted prospects... if they could succeed they would be very successful, an "empire" awaited

There were two conflicting ideas,

1. Whig Principles: The anti-government ideas, Anti- Strong Government

- a. "...was an obsessive suspicion of any centralized political power that operated in faraway places...
 - b. Reflected in the Articles of Confederation
 - c. "No central authority empowered to coerce or discipline the citizenry was permissible..." (7)
 - d. They were a collection of independent states.
 - e. The Central Paradox is that the ideals of the revolution said not central government, but they could not survive in that form.
 - f. They had an aversion to coercive power of a faraway government
- ## 2. Need for a Strong Government
- a. "Insoluble problem"
 - b. "Create a consolidated Federal government with powers sufficient to coerce obedience to national law... While remaining true to the Republican principles of the Revolution"
 - c. Hold together

The Constitutional Convention:

The New Republic lasted because: "... In 1787 a tiny minority of prominent political leaders from several key states conspired to draft and then ratify a document designed to accommodate republican principles to a national scale."

Criticism of the Convention (8)

1. The convention was extra legal (only supposed to revise the articles)
2. Sessions conducted in secret
3. Created by elites
4. Protected Slavery

Did not demand unanimous approval

The Second Founding

It was the "Miracle at Philadelphia"

First founding was the Declaration of Independence/Winning the Revolution

Second founding was the American Nation

13 independent states loosely aligned would end in Civil War or another foreign war.

"The primary purpose of the Constitution was to provide the framework to gather the scattered strands of the population..." (10)

Q: What was it to be American before the independence?

Term "Americans" came from writers who used the term negatively, as a way of referring to a marginal population unworthy of equal status... the word was uttered and heard as an insult that designated inferior status..." (10)

Status of America 1789

Positives

- New government in NY
- Near 4 million people in the country
- Huge area of land
- Far away from Europe
- Lots of property ownership
- Dedication to republican institutions
- George Washington to keep things together and be first President

Negatives

- Large area of land to manage
- No republic ever that big up to 1789
- Was likely to fail
- American culture was against strong government
- No common identity or unity, they identified as Virginians, or Massachusetts men...
- Slavery contradicted the values of the revolution

Republican Version of the Revolution: Jeffersonian Ideology

- Mercy Otis Warren author
- "American Revolution was a liberation movement"
- Clean break from English "domination" and corruption...
- Liberty
- Individual Liberty
- Fear of government

Federalist Version of the Revolution: Hamiltonian Ideology

- Written by John Marshall
- John Adams
- George Washington
- Alexander Hamilton
- They argue that the Revolution was to create a new nation...
- Saw the Revolution as a surrender of individual and personal, state and sectional interests to create and sustain a new nation.
- A government is needed for use all...

Author Says:

"With the American Revolution, different factions came together in common cause to overthrow the reigning regime, then discovered in the aftermath of their triumph that they had fundamentally different and politically incompatible notions of what they intended." (15)

They had 2 different agendas...

Neither side completely triumphed.
These sides evolved into political parties.

Eventually they merged to violence at the Civil War.
There was no slaughter like the French Revolution... they argued.

Themes of the Revolution Era:
Collection of great leaders worked together
They were personally connected
They were devoted to the cause
They removed the most divisive issue of Slavery from the discussion...
Unity was above all important to maintain the independence.