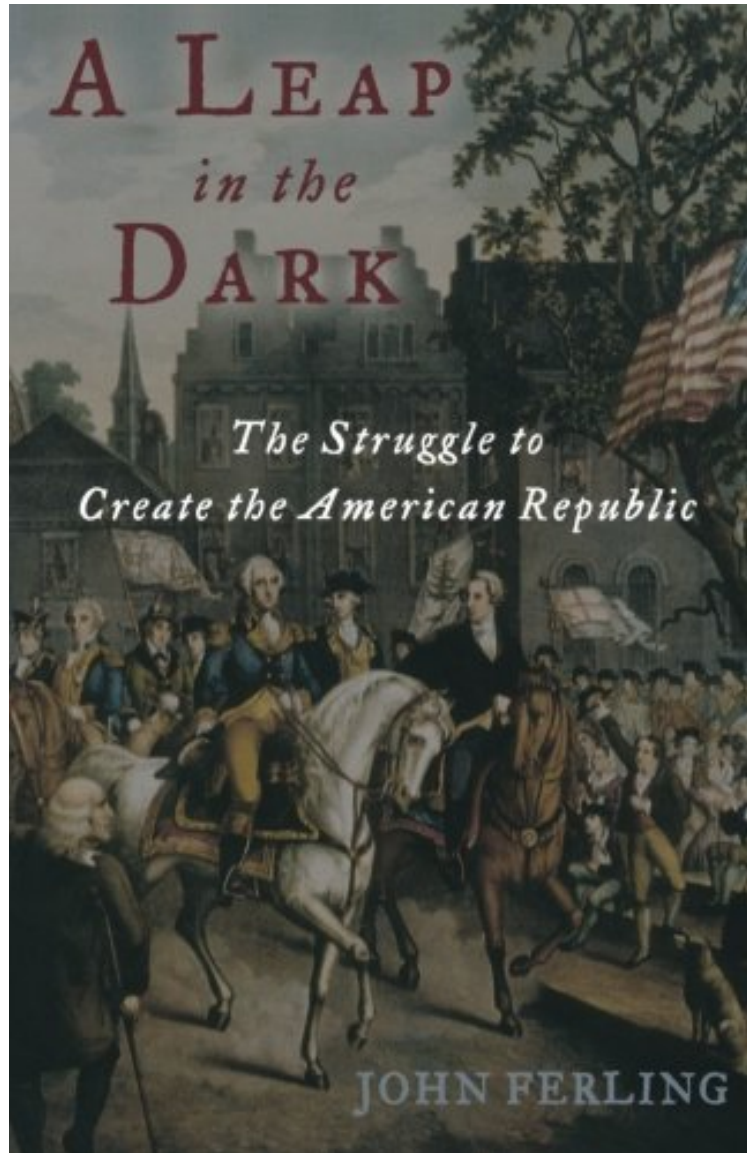


[Free] A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic

A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic

John Ferling

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John Ferling : A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Events behind the eventsBy Larry RichardsonLet me just state up front that I am kind of a nut about anything dealing with our revolution. This book is one of the best I've ever read in looking into what was behind all the events that brought our colony to the brink of war and beyond. Ferling supplies a

tremendous amount of detailed background information beginning with the era of the French Indian war. His analysis of the politics and men of the revolutionary period is extremely detailed and any reader will discover details that you learn for the first time. This is a very well researched book, and yet it's written in a style that is very readable. For those just beginning a study of the revolution and the people and events of the time, this book might be TOO detailed. But for those of us that can't get enough, this book is tremendously informative and at the same time, a most interesting read. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A Good Place to Start By Debra Ferling is always a pleasure to read. I also recommend his "Almost A Miracle". This work is a great place to begin for an overview of this period, especially Ferling's account of the events leading up to the Revolution. However, it seems to me that Ferling generalizes too much in the years after the Constitution. The portrait Ferling paints is one of the non-elite Anti-Federalists vs. the elite Federalists. However, many Anti-Federalists came from the elite whose power within states was threatened by stronger central government. The Clinton-Livingston machine that ran New York and the planter elite that controlled Virginia are examples. This over-simplification is extended into his discussion of Federalists vs. Republicans. For example the small farmers of Shay's rebellion benefitted from the Federal assumption of state debts and became enduring Federalists. Also, many of the "new men" Ferling speaks of, including the self-made Hamilton, were Federalists. The geographical split of the parties is not explained. By 1800, Federalists were strong in New England, but becoming virtually non-existent in the South. It is hard to believe that New England was composed of elitists and left-over Tories, while the South was the home of egalitarians. I agree with Ferling's statement in his preface that people rarely adopt ideologies that conflict with their personal interests. This was no less true of Anti-federalists and Republicans, though Ferling shows this connection more clearly with their opponents. It is good to remember that the yeomen farmers of Virginia, whom Jefferson praises as the foundation of republicanism, were dependant on and deferential to wealthy planters like Jefferson making it safe for him to embrace them. And the Southern Republicans' resistance to central government dovetailed nicely with the preservation of their peculiar institution, slavery. By working to insure a weak central government that would not interfere in (or tax) property rights in land or slaves, Republicans made sure that the people would not have the means to threaten their privileged status. I would strongly recommend to anyone who wishes to more fully understand the period from 1788 to 1800 to read Elkins and McKittrick's "The Age of Federalism". It is a thorough, well-written and detailed account that will provide many of the nuances that Ferling leaves out. For an excellent treatment of the underpinnings of 18th century political economy read Drew McCoy's "Elusive Republic". Another good read is Elizabeth Dunn's "Dominion of Memories" which, in a small volume, packs a lot of information on Virginia's planter elite, their obsession with protecting a pastoral utopia that never really existed and the decline of the Old Dominion. The time period for this work is largely 19th century, however it does show the background of Republican thinking and how that ideology played out in Virginia. Joseph Ellis' "American Sphinx" gives a less hagiographic (and fuller) view of Jefferson. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. A Good Introduction to and Political History of the Founding of the United States By Marvin Aberle John Ferling ambitiously sets out in this book to cover an extensive and rich period of American history. As his chapter titles suggest, the period covered spans from 1754 to 1801. I chose this book instead of Robert Middlekauff's *Glorious Cause* as an introduction to America's founding because it goes beyond the ratification of the Constitution (where *Glorious Cause* ends) to cover the contest between Federalists and Republicans and the presidencies of Washington and Adams. I wanted a comprehensive survey of the period and Ferling certainly delivered. The book does, however, focus primarily on the political evolution of the period and skims the military history. So very much happened in the time between 1754 and 1801, that it is impossible to thoroughly address every event and happening. Ferling has condensed the period into merely 500 pages, something that could take well over 2000 pages to thoroughly cover. But he has focused in on the important events and processes for his book to adequately serve as an introduction to the beginnings of the United States. I especially enjoyed, as many of the other reviewers have, the interesting portraits he paints of the most important characters: George Washington, Samuel Adams, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton. These 4- to 8-page descriptions can serve as jump-off points to pursue these characters in more depth in other works. *A Leap in the Dark* is an excellent introduction to the American Revolution, the creation of the Constitution, and the first two American presidencies. If, however, you are already familiar with the general course of events and personalities of the period, it would be better to seek out works more narrowly focused.

It was an age of fascinating leaders and difficult choices, of grand ideas eloquently expressed and of epic conflicts bitterly fought. Now comes a brilliant portrait of the American Revolution, one that is compelling in its prose, fascinating in its details, and provocative in its fresh interpretations. In *A Leap in the Dark*, John Ferling offers a magisterial new history that surges from the first rumblings of colonial protest to the volcanic election of 1800. Ferling's swift-moving narrative teems with fascinating details. We see Benjamin Franklin trying to decide if his loyalty was to Great Britain or to America, and we meet George Washington when he was a shrewd planter-businessman who discovered personal economic advantages to American independence. We encounter those who supported the war against Great Britain in 1776, but opposed independence because it was a "leap in the dark."

Following the war, we hear talk in the North of secession from the United States. The author offers a gripping account of the most dramatic events of our history, showing just how closely fought were the struggle for independence, the adoption of the Constitution, and the later battle between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. Yet, without slowing the flow of events, he has also produced a landmark study of leadership and ideas. Here is all the erratic brilliance of Hamilton and Jefferson battling to shape the new nation, and here too is the passion and political shrewdness of revolutionaries, such as Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry, and their Loyalist counterparts, Joseph Galloway and Thomas Hutchinson. Here as well are activists who are not so well known today, men like Abraham Yates, who battled for democratic change, and Theodore Sedgwick, who fought to preserve the political and social system of the colonial past. Ferling shows that throughout this period the epic political battles often resembled today's politics and the politicians--the founders--played a political hardball attendant with enmities, selfish motivations, and bitterness. The political stakes, this book demonstrates, were extraordinary: first to secure independence, then to determine the meaning of the American Revolution. John Ferling has shown himself to be an insightful historian of our Revolution, and an unusually skillful writer. *A Leap in the Dark* is his masterpiece, work that provokes, enlightens, and entertains in full measure.

From *The New Yorker* This deft account of the American struggle for independence dispels the aura of inevitability that usually surrounds such histories by beginning its narrative not on the verge of the Revolution but twenty years earlier. Ferling demonstrates how the thought of independence emerged only gradually out of the fight against unfair taxation and British indifference. The endless clashes with Colonial authorities turned cautious merchants and gentlemen farmers who thought of themselves as loyal British subjects into genuine revolutionaries. Still, a sense of uncertainty persisted well after the British surrender, and Ferling vividly evokes the political turmoil of the post-Revolutionary years. Even as he takes the Founders off their pedestals, their accomplishments only gain in stature. Copyright 2005 The New Yorker From Booklist Spanning the period between the Stamp Act of 1765 and Thomas Jefferson's inauguration as president in 1801, veteran historian Ferling surveys the politics and politicians of the American Revolution and early republic. Addressing readers already well grounded in the disputes leading to the formation of the U.S., Ferling focuses on the process of signal events, particularly the continual reevaluation of power, motive, and future expectations that political players make. An example is Ferling's examination of the Boston Tea Party of 1773, in which he introduces Samuel Adams and outlines the radical's political touch. Figures less eager to break with Britain also populate Ferling's narrative, such as Benjamin Franklin, who moved adroitly to the cause of independence, and others less nimble, who lost all in the subsequent war. Briefly summarizing the war's military course, Ferling focuses on the politics of financing the war and the postwar debt, restoring to significance a host of historical personages in the tier below the Founders. A scholarly but accessible work for large collections. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "This book moves like a bottle rocket."--*Kansas City Star* "Every generation of Americans deserves a first-class history of the revolutionary era, and John Ferling has supplied it for this one. Those 2 million readers of David McCullough's *John Adams*, captivated by Adams's ardent patriotism and fiery opinions, will especially benefit from returning to the subject under the firm direction of a historian with a command of the scholarship that is matched by his gifts as a writer."--Joyce Appleby, *Washington Post Book World* "This deft account of the American struggle for independence dispels the aura of inevitability that usually surrounds such histories by beginning its narrative not on the verge of the Revolution but twenty years earlier.... Ferling vividly evokes the political turmoil of the post-Revolutionary years. Even as he takes the Founders off their pedestals, their accomplishments only gain in stature."--*The New Yorker* "Solid history that will refresh anyone's memory of the essential stories and figures in America's founding. And it will enlighten anyone about the origin of some current civic problems.... His book provides not just political and intellectual history, but emotional history as well."--*Christian Science Monitor* "The author's prose is smooth, but spellbinding. He brings to life the flinty, cross-grained Alexander Hamilton, the acute and enduring thoughts of John Adams, and some minor characters not found in most history books.... Ferling has written several books on the Revolutionary period, but *A Leap in the Dark* may well be his masterpiece."--*Dallas Morning News* "Many Americans today see the period from 1754 to 1801 in American history as a rational progression from British colony to the independent United States. Nothing could be further from the truth, as shown by Ferling in this account of the Founding Fathers' struggles to do what had not been done before: create a nation. Throughout, he debunks popularly held notions.... Ferling's intriguing narrative is filled with stories of Americans both famous and obscure."--*Library Journal* "In *A Leap in the Dark*, John Ferling conveys the personal and contingent character of public affairs by skillfully interweaving capsule biographies of leaders into his analysis of events. His book, which stretches from the French and Indian War through the inauguration of President Thomas Jefferson, supplies a learned and readable narrative of American politics during a crucial era in the nation's history."--Richard Brown, University of Connecticut "Questions about the establishment of the American Union are the focal point of this traditionally fashioned political history of Revolutionary America that moves gracefully from the period of the Seven Years' War through the presidential election of 1800. [Ferling] capably describes the emergence of the newfound republican political order. Present[s] the various political achievements of the American Revolution in a

highly engaging fashion, making for a study that deserves a large reading audience."--James Kirby Martin, The Historian, University of Houston