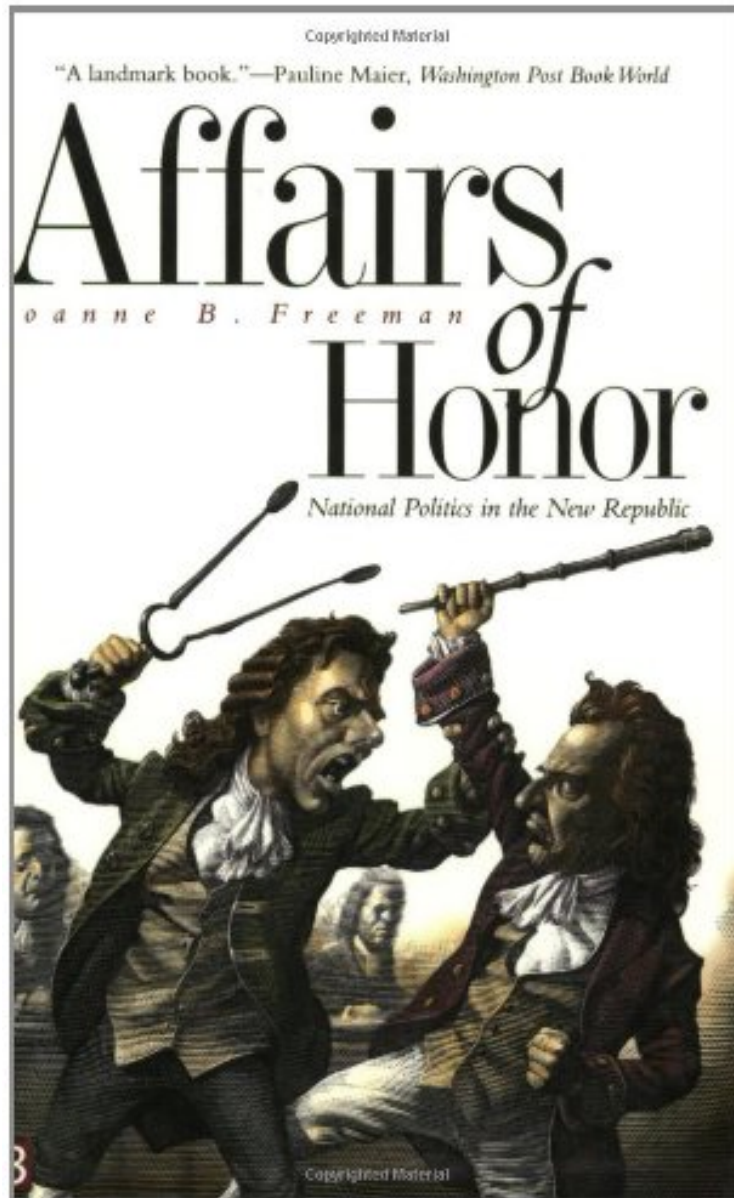


Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic

Professor Joanne B. Freeman, Joanne B. Freeman

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Professor Joanne B. Freeman, Joanne B. Freeman : Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Affairs of Honor:
National Politics in the New Republic:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Greatly added to my understanding of the early RepublicBy

SCM This is a fascinating look at the early republic from almost a purely emotional point of view--specifically, the culture of honor that was intrinsic to gentlemen at the time (but which is pretty damned foreign to most people now). I now know the nuances involved in caning, spitting, and dueling, although I fortunately have little cause to use them in my daily life. I stumbled onto this book while researching something entirely different and was hooked. I'm so glad. For one, it's engaging, and although I'm over the Revolution of 1800 (see further: Election of 2000), Professor Freeman manages to put a new spin on it. Minor quibbles: the organization is a bit on the odd side (this may be a result of the topic itself, which is not particularly linear) and it does drag toward the end, but if you're interested in American history and politics (or American historical politics), I recommend it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very informative By Tetsu Very informative book about early US politics. It is illuminating to compare the speech of the 1790s with that of politicians today. Lots of food for thought about how political operations have changed over the centuries. Well written and contains a large number of references. Very useful. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Affairs of Honor By djwatkins487 Freeman's survey of early American politics illustrates the discomfiting fact that things don't change. When we hear of the bantering, lying, and mischief that occurs in contemporary politics we like to think back to a time when things were different. A time when things were simpler, issues were black and white, and politicians were men of principle and honor. Like, say, those men active in the early American Republic. With the exception of a few practices such as dueling (affairs of honor), antiquated media outlets, and the universal acceptance of "personal reputation as the currency of national politics" (one could now argue that currency is the currency of national politics), politicking hasn't changed much in two hundred years. The author sums it up best with a quotation from the period, "The man of honor does not care if he stinks, but he does care that someone has accused him of stinking." The politics of early America are detailed through the examination events, contemporaneous media, and journals. With this review of the past one fact can be determined over all others; politicians of early America, no matter their party affiliation, financial wealth, or the issues that form there time in office, held their own honor above all else. Given the information provided in the book, Freeman's assertion about "personal reputation" mentioned above is certainly accurate. Honor was the prized possession of any man, but especially that of the politician, due to the social changes that took place at the conclusion of the Revolution. When the war ended, so did the social hierarchical norm that consisted of aristocracy, heritage, land ownership (to a certain extent), and military prestige. Men in early America were left with little else but their reputation from which to hang their hat. The author provides the reader with the information necessary to understand why men were willing to duel at the drop of an insult and how the federal government was able to pass such an overreaching law as the Sedition Act (making it seditious to print libels against the government). After all, it was a mans duty to defend his reputation. While jockeying for position in a new federal government, these men had to balance their reputation, political affiliation, and local personas. It makes for interesting reading no doubt. The book is well written and researched. However, there are several areas that become difficult to follow (due mostly to chronology) and others that seem mundane and repetitive. Otherwise, excellent book.

In this extraordinary book, Joanne Freeman offers a major reassessment of political culture in the early years of the American republic. By exploring both the public actions and private papers of key figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Aaron Burr, and Alexander Hamilton, Freeman reveals an alien and profoundly unstable political world grounded on the code of honor. In the absence of a party system and with few examples to guide Americas experiment in republican governance, the rituals and rhetoric of honor provided ground rules for political combat. Gossip, print warfare, and dueling were tools used to jostle for status and form alliances in an otherwise unstructured political realm. These political weapons were all deployed in the tumultuous presidential election of 1800 an event that nearly toppled the new republic. By illuminating this culture of honor, Freeman offers new understandings of some of the most perplexing events of early American history, including the notorious duel between Burr and Hamilton. A major reconsideration of early American politics, *Affairs of Honor* offers a profoundly human look at the anxieties and political realities of leaders struggling to define themselves and their role in the new nation.

.com The more things change, the more they remain the same. Modern American politics may often resemble a demented circus, but thus it has always been. So writes historian Joanne Freeman in this vigorous account of America's first national leaders, those entrusted with creating a nation unlike any other on Earth, one "egalitarian, democratic, representative, straightforward, and virtuous in spirit, public-minded in practice." The reality was less noble than all that; as Freeman writes, the first postrevolutionary Congress, convened in the spring of 1789, was marked by regional and private rivalries, mudslinging, acrimony, favor-seeking, and backroom bargaining, all of which produced far more discord than unity. In that climate, as John Adams and George Washington would often complain, these early politicians were more interested in "their interests, careers, reputations, and pocketbooks" than in matters of the public good. Yet, Freeman suggests, it could scarcely have been otherwise; an "emotional logic" governed the governors, involving a shared code of honor that drew no lines between the personal with the political, so that any disagreement over policy was liable to turn into a duel or campaign of slander; a day-to-day style of conduct

in which panic, paranoia, and shrill accusations were the norm; a fortress mentality in which anyone who was not a sworn friend was a sworn enemy. Amazingly, it sometimes seems, they made a nation. Freeman's well-crafted study makes a useful corrective to the view that contemporary politics represents a freefall from some golden age, and it adds much to our understanding of America's past. --Gregory McNameeFrom Publishers WeeklyThis study illuminates the founders, but it also promises to reshape the way historians think about politics, which in their time, contends Freeman (an assistant professor of history at Yale), was girded by the notion of honor "reputation with a moral dimension and an elite cast." John Adams and Aaron Burr were no less conscious than Bill Clinton of how they were being perceived and how they would be remembered. The elected representatives in the early republic, Freeman says artfully, were "constructing a machine already in motion, with few instructions and no precise model." They were not only reinventing the shape of the government from monarchic colony to loose confederation to national republic. They were also reinventing the way people did politics. One mark of this new politics was theater, which Freeman illustrates by way of the career of Pennsylvania senator William Maclay, a consummate thespian. Another new political tool was gossip, which Freeman locates in the contretemps between Burr and Hamilton and in the career of Thomas Jefferson. She also examines the early national "paper war," investigating how newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides and correspondence shaped political opinion. Freeman demonstrates that our conception of politics is often too narrow; that the "private" papers of Jefferson and co. reveal every bit as much about politics as their official state papers; and that the highly charged emotions of the founders are political data to be taken seriously, not individual idiosyncrasies to be overlooked. Freeman's prose is lively, and she balances entertaining narrative with sharp analysis. The last few years have seen a spate of books about the founding fathers and the early republic: Freeman's elegant study of honor and politics in the new nation will easily tower over most of them. (Sept.)Forecast: Launched with a blurb from Joseph J. Ellis, this should find a ready audience if it is widely reviewed, as it deserves.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.From BooklistStudy of the Founding Fathers never quite goes out of style, but the last few years have seen rising interest in the men who served in Congress and the White House in the early years of the republic. Freeman, a Yale historian, seeks to establish a context for the sometimes puzzling behavior of the founders by exploring the "honor culture" that structured their political status before political parties developed. In those early years, she argues, "the culture of honor met with a burgeoning democracy and an ambiguous egalitarian ethic of republicanism; the former questioned assumptions about political leadership, the latter renounced the trappings of aristocracy without offering a defined alternative." Freeman describes the challenges and the "theater" of national politics in the new nation, devotes chapters to three major techniques wielded by political players--political gossip, "a paper war," and dueling--and then examines, as a case study, the 1800 presidential election. A fascinating analysis of the interaction of politics and culture in the early U.S. Mary CarrollCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved