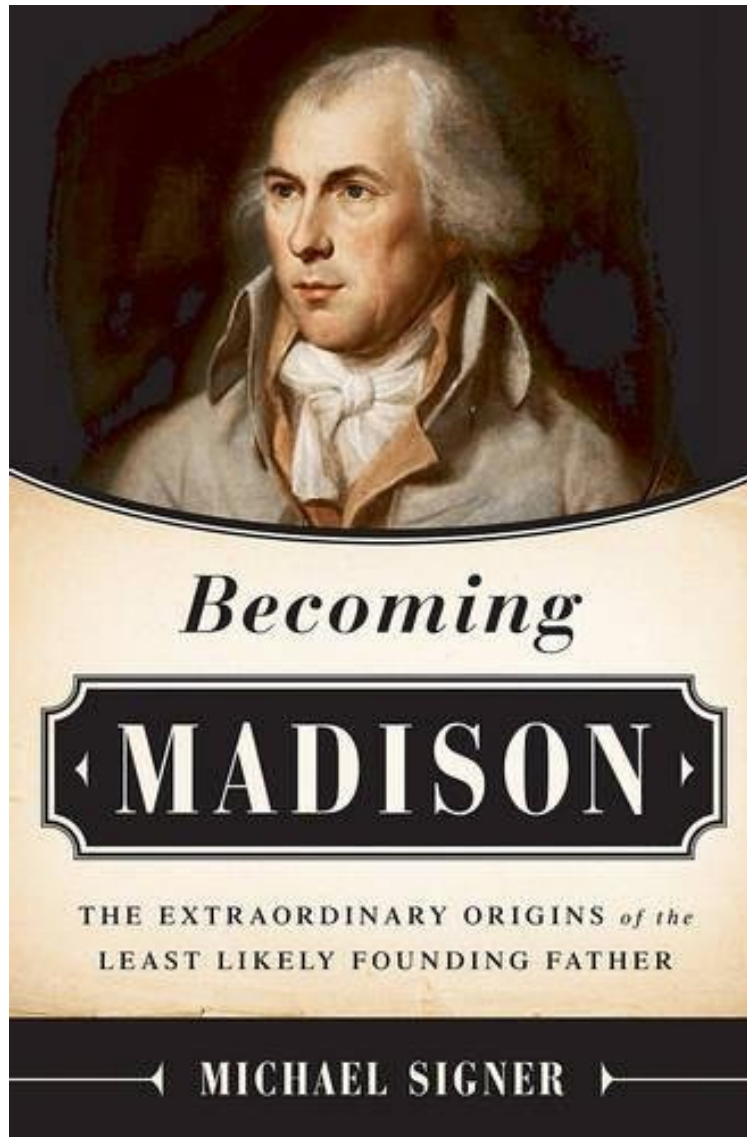


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Becoming Madison: The Extraordinary Origins of the Least Likely Founding Father

Michael Signer

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Michael Signer : Becoming Madison: The Extraordinary Origins of the Least Likely Founding Father before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Becoming Madison: The Extraordinary Origins of the Least Likely Founding Father*:

32 of 40 people found the following review helpful. Madison's "Method"...By VA Duck...or so it might have been titled. Author Michael Signer has discovered a system of tactics, actions and attitudes that James Madison used to

overcome the great confrontations of the Founding Period and often accomplish his desired goal. Signer distills the "Method" to be a recipe of nine tactics and repeats them for the reader before each of nine instances in the book where Madison changes, or attempts to change the course of history. The book is biographic - i.e. it follows Madison's life from birth through death, but the emphasis, and the real purpose of the book is to understand Madison's accomplishments, his method of confronting them and by extension his nature, brilliance and essential goodness. And the book may have succeeded except for three, or maybe four faults. 1) The new here is the "Method" - the biography has been told (many times) before; if this is a first read of Madison expectations are low and impressions are high; read after, as example Ketcham's, James Madison: A Biography, expectations will be high and unfortunately impressions low. 2) The "method", while interesting in concept, is more allusion than actual demonstration. The author presents the nine-component "Method" before each fateful turn of history, but except for the broadest impressions, the reader is left to find for him or her self the evidence of the Method's application (and more often than not that is an impossible task using the evidence as presented). 3) There are enough historical inaccuracies to shake the reader's confidence - more by example later, 4) Last and perhaps applicable only to this reader, Signer himself becomes... well annoying! The book is full of: uncomfortably florid language, pretentious vocabulary and awkwardly cobbled mixed metaphors. The book tries to show-off with vocabulary - not the UNusual vocabulary cleverly used as Chernow does in Alexander Hamilton to evoke the language and feeling of the era, but awkwardly and occasionally even incorrectly to attempt exhibition: "vertiginous" for dizzying (pg. 82), "ineluctably" for irresistibly (pg. 113), "metier" for occupation (incorrectly used pg. 120), "leitmotif" for recurrent theme (pg. 140), "puissant" for influential (pg. 142), "fixity" for permanence (pg. 142), "epee" for a verbal jab or dig (pg. 205). The manner becomes distracting. Then there are the sophomoric mixed metaphors: "the weather mirrored their turgid mood" (swollen weather ? pg. 193); "instead of balance among its hinged parts, he saw a 'parious' (?) yaw" (balance~ weight: yaw~ attitude); (pg. 277) "There was a deep canyon between these two poles.", between these two hills, mounts?; (pg. 236) "Nearing the end of the symphonic outline, Madison charged towards the Constitution's summit." (symphonic summit? Maybe crescendo?) "...Virginia was turning restless and dyspeptic." (irritable through indigestion?) (pg. 237). There are errors in history in the book as well, enough to cause reader uncertainty of author veracity: "George Washington studied there", William Mary College (pg. 33), in fact he received his surveyors license there - not quite the implication presented; "He [Madison] wanted, ...a federal republic through one legislative chamber that would give each state the same representation regardless of population. That would be the Senate" (pg. 190), exactly the OPPOSITE of Madison's wishes. He wanted BOTH houses of legislature to have representation weighted to their influence either by population or wealth and loosing that as part of the Great Compromise was a crushing defeat for him (see Res.2 of the "Virginia Plan"); "he joined the noxious compromise of counting slaves as 3/5 of a freeman" (pg. 206), left unsaid, however, is that Madison invented the 3/5 compromise four years earlier for the Confederation Congress of 1783. And, while there is some dispute at the academic level about the authorship allocation of the essays of the "Federalist", the total is 85 not 88 as erred (pg. 219): Hamilton attributed 51, Madison 26 not 29 and Jay 5 not 8. And impossibly, Hamilton boards a "single masted schooner" for a ride up the Hudson, "With his quill wavering in his hand and the waves rolling underneath..." (pg. 216). As a Madison biography, the book is a distinct 3-stars, "It's OK"; there are many better (Ketcham above, or more recently Stewart's, Madison's Gift). The "Method", the centerpiece of the book lies flat by the end of the read, left as an allegation rather than demonstrated as fact. The rigor of research, or its subsequent editing in this book is inconsistent. The real virtue of this book is that it illustrates the great focus, civility and intellect of its subject - James Madison. And finally, Signer begins in very un-Madisonian style with needless digs (epees?) at a wing of contemporary politics - so conservative readers may avoid a mild irk by bypassing his introduction. 4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Windy introductions can often be annoying especially where stretched to 21 pages and especially when ...By E2Rose Windy introductions can often be annoying especially where stretched to 21 pages and especially when an author needlessly and perhaps boastfully injects his political allegiance at the outset naming as the last of our statesman 11 senators (one republican, conveniently a female) including Ted bridgegate Kennedy and Robert Byrd who assembled his own KKK chapter. The author goes on to share hostage-taking in the Republican Party was largely to blame for the 113th Congress being the least effective in history. A sense of scholarly independence and impartiality is lost and suspicion aroused before reaching chapter one. On page 8 the author brings us "Madisons Method" (the authors label), "an interlocking set of nine (negotiating) tactics" per the author which are presented without quotation marks or a footnote leaving doubt. The Method surfaces elsewhere. On page 27 we read: And he would need to transcend the vulgarity of Virginias master-slave relationship in his own way making us to believe this principle resonated with Madison as if trying to obscure that slave ownership, while it may have waned later, never ceased for Madison. Then there is one John Witherspoon where the case is not made for the lengthy treatment of Madisons teacher at the College of New Jersey. While the deeply invested author cannot be separated from his work early on there is an ongoing sense of author speculation that accompanies this book. Michael Korda, the long time Simon and Schuster editor who counts David McCullough among his many great literary clients pointedly recommended shutting down and moving on or at the very least proceeding very, very cautiously when thoughts and feelings of the subject are honored as something more reliable than conjecture and possibility. For the age Madison led

a very privileged life, not particularly noteworthy until and most importantly the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, an escape from the raw and consuming physical work of the age made possible by the family planter slave estate and elitist culture. Yet it was just this circumstance of heredity and chance that made it possible for the statesman Madison and his political brilliance to evolve and mature at one momentous and historical crossroads for the fledgling democracy. Overall the narrative is rather humdrum, reliability an irksome and tiring thread. Among the many publications devoted to James Madison there must be more interesting and inspiring choices. 7 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Hm... this book is tainted by modern day politics, which can be detected early on with references to today's political parties and leaders. There was no reason to do so, and it makes the book have a whiff of agenda history that ought to be avoided.

In a time when America is desperately searching for leadership comes this inspiring story of James Madison's coming of age, providing incisive and original insight into the Founding Father who did the most but is known the least. Michael Signer takes a fresh look at the life of our fourth president. His focus is on Madison before he turned thirty-six, the years in which he did his most enduring work: battling with Patrick Henry the most charismatic politician in revolutionary America, whose political philosophy and ruthless tactics eerily foreshadowed those of today's Tea Party over religious freedom; introducing his framework for a strong central government; becoming the intellectual godfather of the Constitution; and providing a crucial role at Virginia's convention to ratify the Constitution in 1788, when the nation's future hung in the balance. Signer's young James Madison is a role model for the leaders so badly needed today: a man who overcame daunting personal issues (including crippling anxiety attacks) to battle an entrenched and vicious status quo. Michael Signer's brilliant analysis of Madison's Method, the means by which Madison systematically destroyed dangerous ideas and left in their stead an enduring and positive vision for the United States, is wholly original and uniquely relevant today.

An important study of the intellectual and psychological development of a young Madison who believed that leaders should forsake self-interest in promoting the common good. Library Journal "James Madison would be called a "flip-flopper" in today's political climate. Thank God he changed his mind and concluded that adding a Bill of Rights to the Constitution was not just good politics but necessary policy. This is just one of the wonderful aspects of James Madison's life that Michael Signer captures so well in this important biography. Our nation owes huge debts to Madison, and today's civic leaders owe a huge debt to Signer for reminding us why." US Senator Tim Wainwright "Becoming Madison is superb. As a native Virginian who grew up going to steeplechase races at Montpelier, the history is lively and engaging. But Michael Signer's greatest contribution is to turn a biography of Madison into a manual on leadership that is as relevant and valuable today as it was 200 years ago. Anne-Marie Slaughter, Director of Policy Planning, U.S. State Department, 2009-2011 and President and CEO, New America Foundation "This engagingly written, carefully researched book is the fullest account we have of the development of Madison's thought and statesmanship through the promotion and drafting of the Constitution to the greatest triumph of his life, the ratification of the Virginia Convention of 1788. Signer shows how there, in face-to-face debate with Patrick Henry, Madison proved what John Marshall termed Madison's unmatched ability to convince could overcome Henry's supreme power to persuade. This capacity characterized Madison's style and career in a way that allowed him to become the master philosopher and practitioner of Lincoln's Union 'conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all ... are created equal.' Signer also shows brilliantly how Madison's studies at Princeton under John Witherspoon began an influential and revealing partnership in public spirited citizenship for good government. Altogether the book brings us closer to understanding how Madison became able to be, all things considered, the father of the Constitution." Ralph Ketcham, Maxwell Professor Emeritus of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, author of James Madison: A Biography "For centuries James Madison has been overshadowed by the more striking and charismatic members of America's founding generation. And Madison's youth has been even less well known than his maturity. Michael Signer goes far toward filling this historical gap with an engaging, insightful account of how the unassuming young Madison became the hero of the Constitution." H. W. Brands, University of Texas at Austin, author of Andrew Jackson, His Life and Times and The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace "Sound and revealing." Wall Street Journal "Intellectual history at its finest an essential biography of an essential Founder. Richmond Times-Dispatch "In this engaging new study, Signer wrestles with the early life and career of James Madison and attempts to explain why Madison remains unheralded among the founding generation. ... According to Signer, however, Madison's humble status in American memory is not a function of his failures but rather a product of his successes... Highly recommended." CHOICE "A bull's-eye. Richard Brookhiser, The Daily Beast [A]s lively as a thrilling mystery, as enlightening as a full college semester and as pleasing as a frosty bowl of Southern punch. Lincoln Journal-Star Signer, a lawyer-scholar who once ran for Virginia lieutenant governor, is a stylist, and in Becoming Madison he focuses on Madison's education and statesmanship. Claremont Review of Books Highly readable and often insightful... A perfect introduction to a deeply private and immensely important man." Kirkus