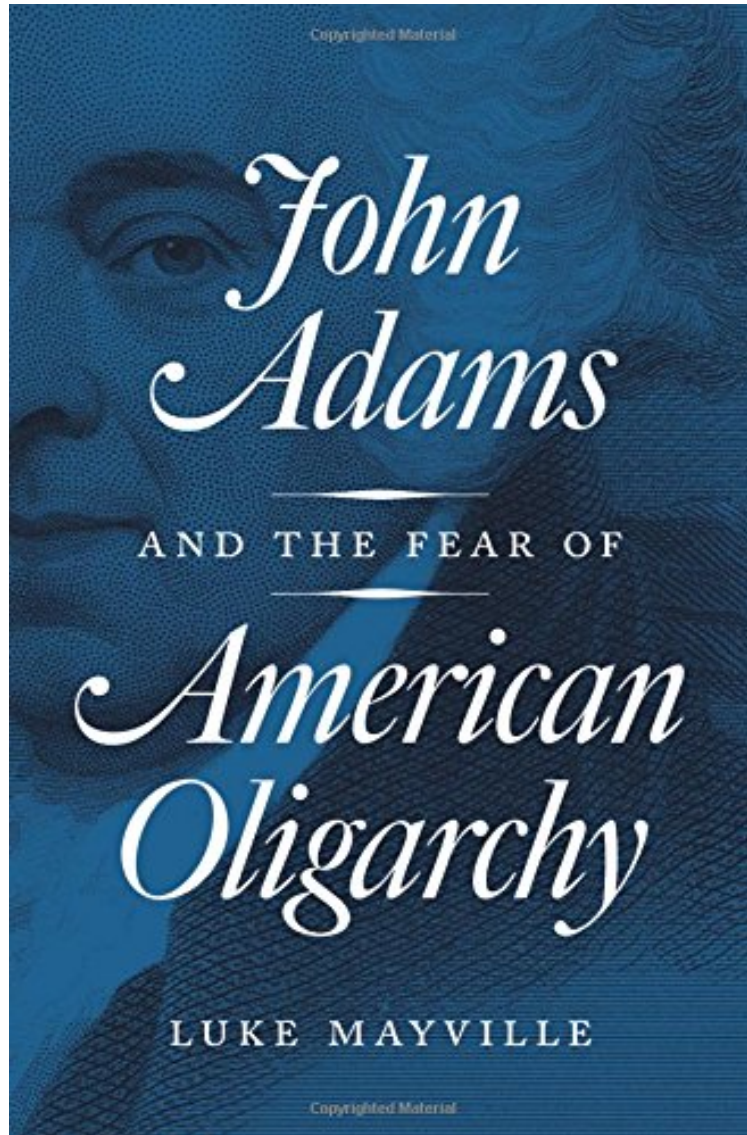


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## John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy

Luke Mayville

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**Luke Mayville : John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Not your high school American history book--well researched and executed!By BeeJMy fears that this book would be overly academic were quickly dispelled in the first page. This book is incredibly accessible, and useful when it comes to understanding the social and political rationale behind one of the most controversial founding fathers. I would recommend to anyone who wants to better understand how early

American history still impacts current events and thought surrounding meritocracy and the creation of America. Amazing, accessible read! 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An historical account that has relevance today. By m murphy I enjoyed this book which explores the misunderstood views of one of our country's founding fathers. John Adams would surely feel vindicated as a witness to our current political system and its impact on society. Though I am not a history "buff", I was very intrigued with the story given its relevance to modern day and the author does an excellent job of explaining Adams' writings as evidence of his fear, a fear which is clearly justified. I recommend this book for anyone with an interest in history and for those with concern for our future. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A compelling read with widespread appeal. By AaronFaucett What an incredible read! Like a previous reviewer I held my own apprehensions about diving into a book seemingly quite niche, when my knowledge on the subject of early American political philosophy is superficial to say the least. I do, however, have a keen interest in contemporary American politics which proved all that is required to enjoy the analysis within. In the early pages we are told that an aim of the book is to clarify one of the essential "truths" about ourselves that American values and ideology make difficult to admit. The author then takes a complex and varied body of work from the writings of John Adams and his contemporaries, as well as historical thinkers, and thoughtfully teases out central themes with respect to the nature of power, influence, and the human psyche. He does this with great care for the reader, providing historical context and the depth necessary to ensure that the layman can enjoy the richness and originality of the political, philosophical, and psychological thought alongside the academic. It is precisely this attention to the uninitiated reader that allows him to so effectively expose the "truth" that lay dormant in the introductory chapter. This book was filled with wonderful little "a ha!" moments when my own intuitions or suspicions related to inequality and the human condition seemed to be plucked from my own brain, organized and made sensible, and eloquently put forth by Adams and the author. It also harbored ideas that made me reexamine some of my own assumptions when it comes to the nature and structure of government. Perhaps most of all it made me appreciate the discourse, passion, and ingenuity embodied by the fathers of the 'American Experiment', and the many ways in which their philosophical struggle with the nature of oligarchy, including its precedents and its consequences, mirrors our own. I believe this book has broad appeal for anyone interested in politics, philosophy, psychology, as well as historical or contemporary affairs. A remarkable, and perhaps above all a relevant read deserving of our attention.

Long before "the one percent" became a protest slogan, American founding father John Adams feared the power of a class he called simply the few—the wellborn, the beautiful, and especially the rich. In *John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy*, Luke Mayville presents the first extended exploration of Adams's preoccupation with a problem that has a renewed urgency today: the way in which inequality threatens to corrode democracy and empower a small elite. By revisiting Adams's political writings, Mayville draws out the statesman's fears about the danger of oligarchy in America and his unique understanding of the political power of wealth—a surprising and largely forgotten theory that promises to illuminate today's debates about inequality and its political consequences. Adams believed that wealth is politically powerful in modern societies not merely because money buys influence, but also because citizens admire and even sympathize with the rich. He thought wealth is powerful in the same way that beauty is powerful—it distinguishes its possessor and prompts reactions of approval and veneration. Citizens vote for and with the rich not because, as is often said, they hope to be rich one day, but because they esteem the rich and submit to their wishes. Mayville explores Adams's theory of wealth and power in the context of his broader concern about social and economic inequality, and also examines his ideas about how oligarchy might be countered. A compelling work of intellectual history, *John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy* also has important lessons for today's world of increasing inequality.

"A needed examination of Adams's political thought on wealth-based aristocracy or oligarchy." --Choice  
"Remarkably well-written and astonishingly lucid, *John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy* makes an absolutely central point about Adams's thought, persuasively reestablishing him as a genuine democrat in his ultimate sympathies." --Sanford Levinson, University of Texas Law School  
"John Adams and the Fear of American Oligarchy is a most timely, valuable, and enlightening book. It shows conclusively that Adams was one of the sharpest critics of oligarchy among the American founders and, indeed, in the history of political thought. The book will generate much-needed discussion in political thought, American political studies, and contemporary democratic theory." --John McCormick, University of Chicago  
About the Author: Luke Mayville is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for American Studies at Columbia University. He is a contributor to *Commonweal*.