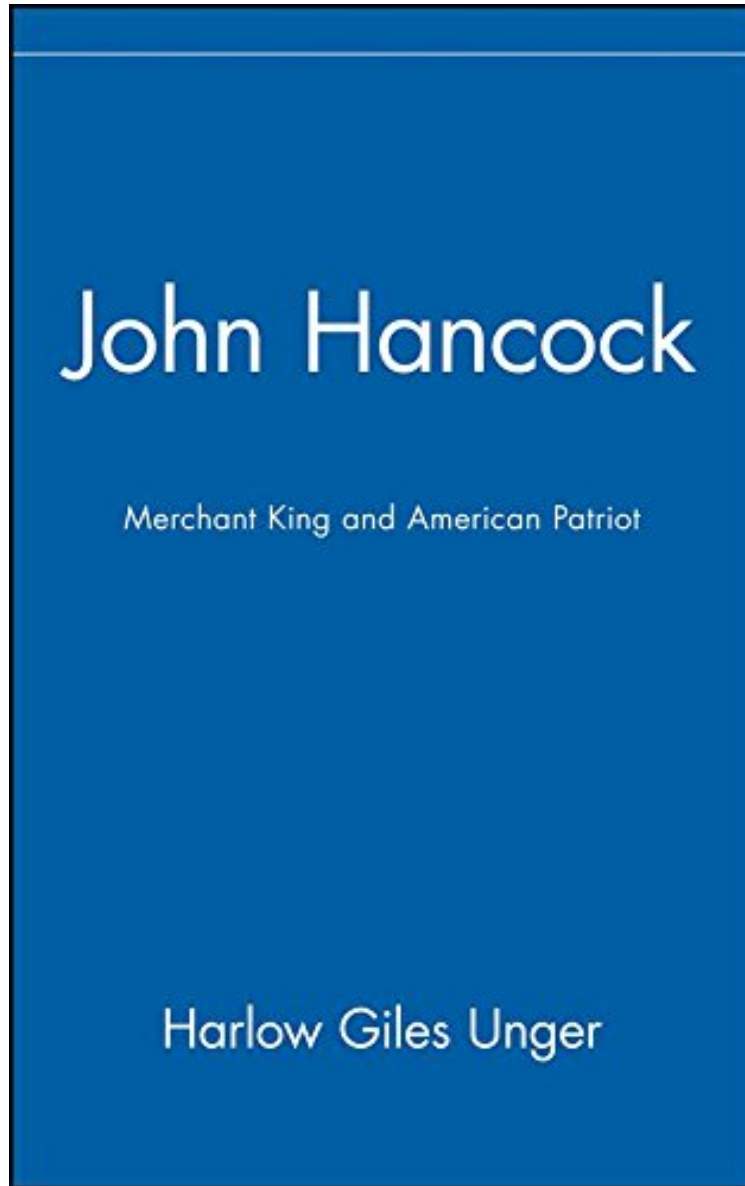


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John Hancock: Merchant King and American Patriot

Harlow Giles Unger

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Harlow Giles Unger : John Hancock: Merchant King and American Patriot before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised John Hancock: Merchant King and American Patriot:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Toward understanding John Hancock By Daniel Putman Who exactly

was John Hancock? Ungers biography gives in-depth background on the man whose signature almost all Americans know but whose life few know anything about. The book has some real strengths and some real weaknesses. Its greatest strength is the detail Unger has about Hancock. He does an excellent job of weaving excerpts from letters and original sources into the text. He also gleans from both American and British sources information about the man that spells out his critical relationship with his extremely wealthy uncle Thomas Hancock, the origins of the House of Hancock, and the details of both Thomas and John's business dealings. The book gives an excellent overall view of the business interests behind the Revolution and Hancock's combination of enormous wealth and great generosity. The book details Hancock's extreme, almost fanatical interest in the trappings of wealth: coaches with glittering arms and footmen, the best and most ostentatious clothes available - combined with his strong popularity among people who could afford nothing like that. The reader will gain some insight into these apparent contradictions and have a much better grasp of Hancock's personality than is generally known. Unger's impression is of a complex person who managed through his life to combine things that seem almost impossible to imagine today. The book contains a great deal of interesting and original information about this Founder. But the reader will also almost certainly never read a biography that has the word mob in it more frequently. Likewise for the word thug. And almost every single occurrence of those words is associated with Samuel Adams who is vilified in the book. A sample sentence from after the Boston Massacre: The testimony at the soldiers' trials had unmasked Sam Adams as a sinister, power-hungry plotter willing to sacrifice innocent lives and destroy the city, if necessary, to fulfill his designs. It is Adams' mobs and Adams' thugs. This continues throughout the book and I could not help but wonder why Unger loses so much objectivity when discussing Sam Adams. Some earlier historians had portrayed Hancock as weak and as easily manipulated by Adams. Perhaps Unger wants to give us a different picture. Other historians have portrayed the relationship as a mutual one between two very different people. That seems much more likely given everything else Unger shows us about Hancock who does not at all seem weak at many critical junctures in his life. Undoubtedly, Adams was a rabble rouser but his motives were much more complex than Unger lets on. As a counter to Unger's portrayal, it is worth checking out Ira Stoll's recent biography of Adams to see how Adams' deeply engrained religious background combined with his strong nationalism helped to create someone who often went beyond what seemed reasonable at the time. Unger's portrayal of Sam Adams, as well as at times his portrayal of Adams' friends and his cousin John Adams, detracts from the book and makes his portrayal of Hancock, especially in the last half of the book, less credible. It is still an excellent overall portrayal of John Hancock but his treatment of those Hancock often dealt with does not help. Overall I would recommend the book because of the effective use of background materials to portray Hancock's complex life. That will be eye-opening to many readers and is an important contribution to our understanding of the man. But the reader should know that the book has a constant tendency to vilify Sam Adams and some of the other people with whom Hancock dealt.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Another Great Biography by Harlow Giles Unger. By Tom Fenton. This is the fourth of Unger's books I have read and I have yet to be disappointed. His writings are a pleasure to read and easy to understand. With "John Hancock..." Unger has tackled a life that is not easy to describe. There were four John Hancocks mentioned in the book: (A) John Hancock, (1671-1752) pastor of the Congregational Church for 54 years, and often referred to as the Bishop; (B) his son John Hancock (1702-1744), also was also a pastor of North Parish in Braintree (now Quincy) for 18 years until his death; (C) his son John Hancock, (1737-1793) the signer of the Declaration of Independence, and his son, (D) John Hancock, who died after a childhood accident. The third John Hancock and the most famous of the four, was adopted by his uncle Thomas Hancock, son of Bishop Hancock and raised to take over Thomas' financial empire. One of Unger's best traits in his writing is the number of minor details that he weaves into his story, details that are seldom mentioned in other books. These minor details serve to tie other events to the time line and flesh out the story and make reading a more satisfying endeavor. A few of the other reviewers mentioned Unger's animosity toward Samuel Adams, with one using the term "mean" and another using the term "vicious". While it is very obvious that Unger is not kindly disposed to Sam Adams' actions, I would not agree with the characterization of his writing as either mean or vicious. The author is writing a positive biography on John Hancock and in investigating his life, is naturally disposed to see things from his subject's viewpoint. He is also quite correct as to how Sam Adams was viewed by other citizens: sometimes very moving and sometimes very annoying. I found nothing inappropriate in the way the story is told. I have read Sam Adams' biography. He was described in his biography in the same terms Unger describes him. Unger is neither too positive nor too negative about John Hancock or Sam Adams. He simply tells the story as he sees it. And, having read both Sam Adams (by Mark Puls) and John Hancock from both pro- and con- viewpoints, I am thankful to both Harlow Giles Unger and Mark Puls for expressing their historical viewpoints. Education is about learning new facts from different viewpoints and combining these viewpoints into your own understanding. I am better educated for having read Harlow Giles Unger's books. I have a fifth book of his I am about to read: "Noah Webster: The Life And Times Of An American Patriot". I am confident I will be well fed. Five happy stars for Mr. Unger's work on John Hancock.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Finally, a Hancock Biography that makes sense - I loved it!! By Clifford Ribaud. I've read most of the currently available (and a few currently unavailable) biographies on John Hancock and have been continually perplexed by the lack of insight into the actual man and the often strange

"attitude", as exhibited by snide comments from that various authors, many of which seemed unsupported by much more than hearsay. Mr. Unger's book however does a wonderful job of putting Hancock into the historical perspective and milieu that surrounded him as well as providing what I think is a more accurate and sensible picture of an American revolutionary hero who has seemingly mostly been ignored by history. It is a very readable book and really most interesting in terms of the way it portrays some of the other characters such as Sam Adams who has often been mentioned as one of the lights of the revolution, but who was in fact essentially a failure at life and mainly a crafty rabble rouser attempting to further himself by inciting and manipulating and stepping on the backs of others. I will be buying and reading more of Mr. Unger's books!

PRAISE FOR HARLOW Giles UNGER'S NOAH WEBSTER: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AN AMERICAN PATRIOT""Noah Webster was a truly remarkable man; shrewd, passionate, learned and energetic, God-fearing and patriotic. Mr. Unger has done a fine job reintroducing him to a new generation of Americans.""-Washington Times""Superb biography. . . . Don't miss this stirring book."" -Florence King, The American Spectator

From Publishers Weekly
In a biography awash in early American history, Unger celebrates the career of John Hancock, whose life was as large as his legendary signature. A successful merchant and accomplished politician, Hancock became the first signatory of the Declaration of Independence by virtue of his election as president of the Continental Congress. And when he served as a delegate to the Federal Convention of 1787, it was his suggestion to entertain amendments to the proposed Constitution that later became the basis for the Bill of Rights. Hancock lived at the center of late 18th-century Boston politics and commerce, and his life is an engaging prism through which to view Revolutionary New England. Unger, a journalist and a biographer of Noah Webster, effectively uses letters, newspaper articles and first-hand accounts by Hancock and other preeminent Americans to make immediate the events and controversies--the Stamp Act, the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party--that culminated in the Revolutionary War. He adds a human and remarkably contemporary impression of the rough-and-tumble nature of revolutionary politics through his descriptions of the innuendo and outright attacks directed at Hancock by fellow Bostonian Samuel Adams (though to better understand Adams's enmity, more discussion of the nuances of the men's respective political views would have been useful). Unger devotes substantial energy to Hancock's private life and habits (Hancock's fondness for almost regal accoutrements was controversial), but his marriage to Dorothy Quincy, as handled by Unger, remains frustratingly enigmatic. Unger's writing is generally straightforward, although occasionally stilted. Overall, this is a rich and satisfying biography that should see only modest success, though it could get a boost from two other fall titles on Revolutionary leaders: H.W. Brands's big bio of Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Ellis's *Founding Brothers*.
Illus. not seen by PW. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. * In a biography awash in early American history, Unger celebrates the career of John Hancock, whose life was as large as his legendary signature. A successful merchant and accomplished politician, Hancock became the first signatory of the Declaration of Independence by virtue of his election as president of the Continental Congress. And when he served as a delegate to the Federal Convention of 1787, it was his suggestion to entertain amendments to the proposed Constitution that later became the basis for the Bill of Rights. Hancock lived at the center of late 18th-century Boston politics and commerce, and his life is an engaging prism through which to view Revolutionary New England. Unger, a journalist and a biographer of Noah Webster, effectively uses letters, newspaper articles and first-hand accounts by Hancock and other preeminent Americans to make immediate the events and controversies--the Stamp Act, the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party--that culminated in the Revolutionary War. He adds a human and remarkably contemporary impression of the rough-and-tumble nature of revolutionary politics through his descriptions of the innuendo and outright attacks directed at Hancock by fellow Bostonian Samuel Adams (though to better understand Adams's enmity, more discussion of the nuances of the men's respective political views would have been useful). Unger devotes substantial energy to Hancock's private life and habits (Hancock's fondness for almost regal accoutrements was controversial), but his marriage to Dorothy Quincy, as handled by Unger, remains frustratingly enigmatic. Unger's writing is generally straightforward, rich and satisfying biography that should see only modest success, though it could get a boost from two other fall titles on Revolutionary leaders: H.W. Brands's big bio of Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Ellis's *Founding Brothers*.--Publishers Weekly, September 25, 2000