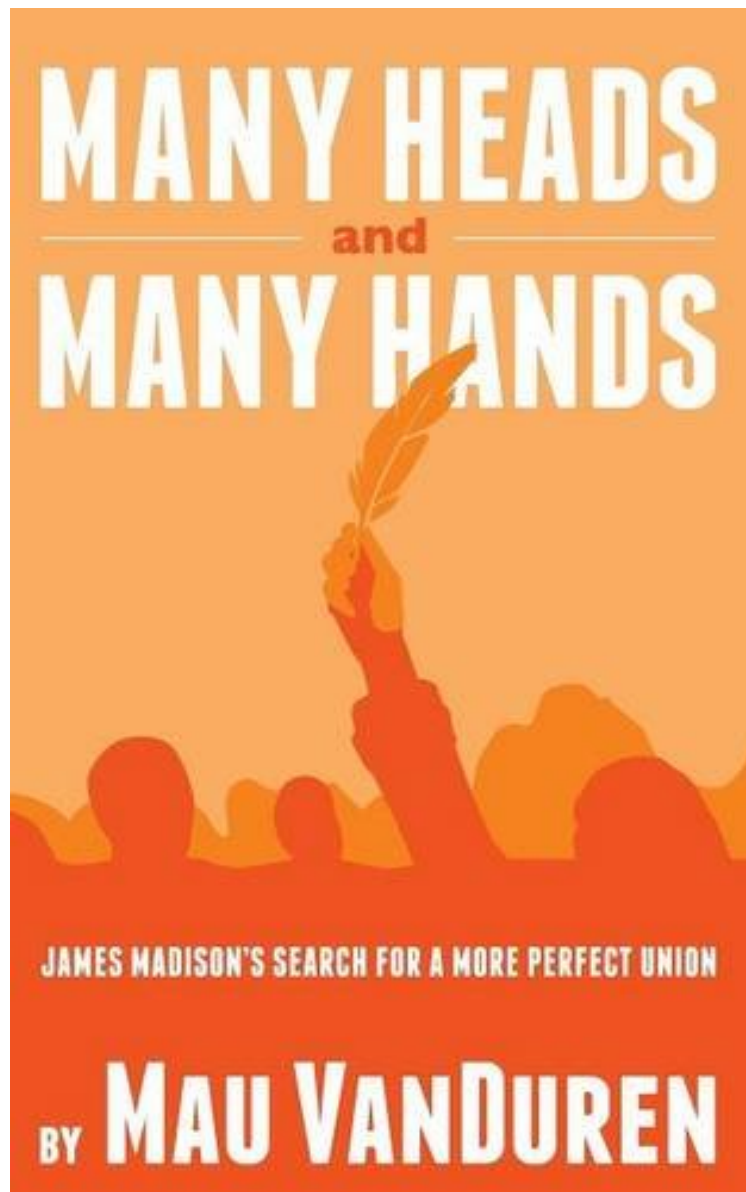


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MANY HEADS AND MANY HANDS: James Madison's Search for a More Perfect Union

Mau VanDuren

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Mau VanDuren : MANY HEADS AND MANY HANDS: James Madison's Search for a More Perfect Union before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised MANY HEADS AND MANY HANDS: James Madison's Search for a More Perfect Union:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Suppose you were going to draft a Constitution for the United States? Where would you start?By Sharon Kay StoutIf you were going to create a constitution for a fledgling country, where would you start? Suppose we are talking about the United States? What powers should be vested in the federal government -- and which left to the individual states? OR -- if you wanted to create a democratic government in some tribal society, what might you want to think about? What traditions of self-governance exist?This is an intriguing account of the little-known back story behind the drafting of the Constitution of the United States. It goes back in history and looks at precursors -- the experiments in democracy as well as other forms of governance -- that were known to James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. In addition to the ancient Greeks, these included the then modern Netherlands, Germany, England, and Scotland. Both Madison and Jefferson read widely, and their experience with the colonies under the Articles of Confederation was informed not only by reading about human nature and the Enlightenment, but also what had and had not worked elsewhere. VanDuren, who is Dutch, pays particular attention to the Netherlands -- history which is less familiar to Americans. VanDuren is an activist as well as a historian. His account encourages the reader to engage in activism, to consider anew the U.S. Constitution, and by example -- to study more of the resources available to us. I will be reading more American history, and more on the Founding Fathers, after having read this book.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Great new insights into the foundations of the U.S. constitutionBy Jacqueline CoolidgeA fascinating new look at the foundations of the U.S. constitution, filling in a lot of gaps that are not well known to most Americans, even a lot of history buffs. Most of us don't get much beyond the Magna Carta and the standard "canon" of enlightenment thinkers. Apparently Madison and Jefferson were looking at a lot more - real life examples of nation-states that had already instituted representative democracies (well, at least for adult males) and rights of citizenship. Many of us had been aware of the "bill of rights" in Great Britain, enacted during their own "glorious revolution." But where did THOSE ideas come from? As it turns out, very little of it was new. Vanduren draws attention to the concerns of the U.S. "founding fathers" as they grappled with the shortcomings of the "articles of confederation" that governed the original 13 states. They were suffering from fatal fractiousness, and centrifugal forces were tearing the nascent country apart. Madison holed up in his library and dug more deeply in the details of the history and institutions of the Dutch Republics - on which the original U.S. was based. The Dutch Republics were also sinking into internecine conflict. What could we learn from their plight? What had they got right (that we could still build upon) and what had gone wrong (that we could hopefully improve upon)? His insights informed his draft of our constitution. As it turns out, some of the best ideas enshrined in the Dutch Republic had roots even deeper in history, reaching back to the medieval "water boards" of the "low countries" and concepts of the "public good" that were painstakingly reconstructed, as Paris emerged from the dark ages, from the ancient Roman and Greek democratic institutions on the one hand and Germanic/Saxon traditions of participatory governance on the other. Most interesting in this compilation of lost nuggets of history are a series of historical-fiction vignettes Vanduren weaves into the book to help the reader appreciate what life was like - in 7th century Paris, 15th century Bruges and 16th century Leiden. Leiden turns out to be a critical venue - not only the host of one of the most vibrant universities in Europe (hosting Descartes, Erasmus, and publishing the books of Newton) but also the most welcoming refuge for persecuted religious minorities all over Europe and the British Isles. This is where the Pilgrims spent 12 critical years before embarking on their famous journey to Plymouth. We learn about a number of interesting characters that have been virtually ignored in American history, but may have been more influential than they have been given credit for. I had never heard of Edwin Sandys or Francis Doughty before - two colorful characters whose shenanigans helped shape American governance traditions during the earliest colonial days. This book offers truly fresh and interesting new insights into the rich sources of inspiration for the great American experiment in democracy that still nourish us today. For those who read the Kindle edition (as I did before I wrote the above) you should still consider buying the hard copy, as it has lots of great maps and illustrations - really enriches the text!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the ...By JCI would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the U.S. Constitution and its origins. It spans from the Middle Ages to its final signing and ratification in late 1780s. The Dutch influence was something I knew little about. It is remarkable that our founding fathers (especially Madison) had the foresight and knowledge to create such a document. I originally read *Many Heads and Many Hands* on my kindle, and just recently received the hard copy. It is beautifully done. The illustrations are amazing; the table of contents, index, and bibliography are as complete and detailed as anything I have seen. Other than being an entertaining read, it is also an excellent reference. I look forward to reading Mau VanDuren's next book.

"This lively and entertaining book begins a much-needed conversation about the modern history that our Founders knew so well and which our generation has largely forgotten." -- Dr. Lynn Uzzell, Scholar in Residence at Montpelier Using stories of pivotal individuals within this process, VanDuren reviews the creation of these layers of law that eventually inspired the framers of the U.S. Constitution. For instance, Frankish Queen Balhilds reforms to land ownership in the seventh century led to Philips van Leydens 14th-century demand that rulers respect public interest A fictionalized version of the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia ties all these threads together. First-

time author VanDuren delivers impressive research on individuals whose ideas guided the drafters of the Constitution. Kirkus Reviews In this age of Google and Wikipedia, it is understandable that most see history as a pile of facts . . . VanDuren serves up a richer feast. He paints the history of modern democracy as a vast tableau that wanders from its origin in Europe to the United States. VanDuren shows that many of the earliest intellectual and political movers and achievements in this drama are Dutch. -- Joe A. Oppenheimer, Prof. Emeritus, Government and Politics, University of Maryland Those who care about the future of democracy will appreciate Mr. VanDuren's vigorous and rigorous examination of the way Dutch and English influences worked from the European Middle Ages down through New England, New Amsterdam, and New York to the Federalist Papers and the American Constitution in the late 1780s. John C. Kemp, Plimoth Plantation. Have you ever wondered why we practice separation of church and state? Or have secular marriage, or freedom of religion? Or enjoy democracy and the rule of law? And equality under the law? No taxation without representation? As Americans we hold these concepts dear. Our republic was founded on them and we find them in our Constitution, of which James Madison was the main author. Madisons vast knowledge of history was supported by a keen understanding of human nature. Alone in his library, he studied ancient and contemporary nations, foremost the Dutch Republic. The American confederation had been modeled on it, and suffered from the same shortcomings. The people in whose footsteps he followed are the Many Heads and Many Hands who inspired Madison in his search for a more perfect union. From a cave in South Africa to the Roman Rhine, into Dark-Ages Paris, through the Burgundian lands to the marshes of Holland, and via the fields of England to the shores of America, this is a titanic story of scholars, pastors, princesses, generals, and common people too, striving over the centuries for security and freedom, and at last building a government that can promise both, within the confines of a just law.

"This lively and entertaining book begins a much-needed conversation about the modern history that our Founders knew so well and which our generation has largely forgotten." -- Dr. Lynn Uzzell, Scholar in Residence at Montpelier "In this age of Google and Wikipedia, it is understandable that most see history as a pile of facts . . . VanDuren serves up a richer feast. He paints the history of modern democracy as a vast tableau that wanders from its origin in Europe to the United States. VanDuren shows that many of the earliest intellectual and political movers and achievements in this drama are Dutch." -- Joe A. Oppenheimer, Prof. Emeritus, Government and Politics, University of Maryland "Those who care about the future of democracy will appreciate Mr. VanDuren's vigorous and rigorous examination of the way Dutch and English influences worked from the European Middle Ages down through New England, New Amsterdam, and New York to the Federalist Papers and the American Constitution in the late 1780s." John C. Kemp, Plimoth Plantation.