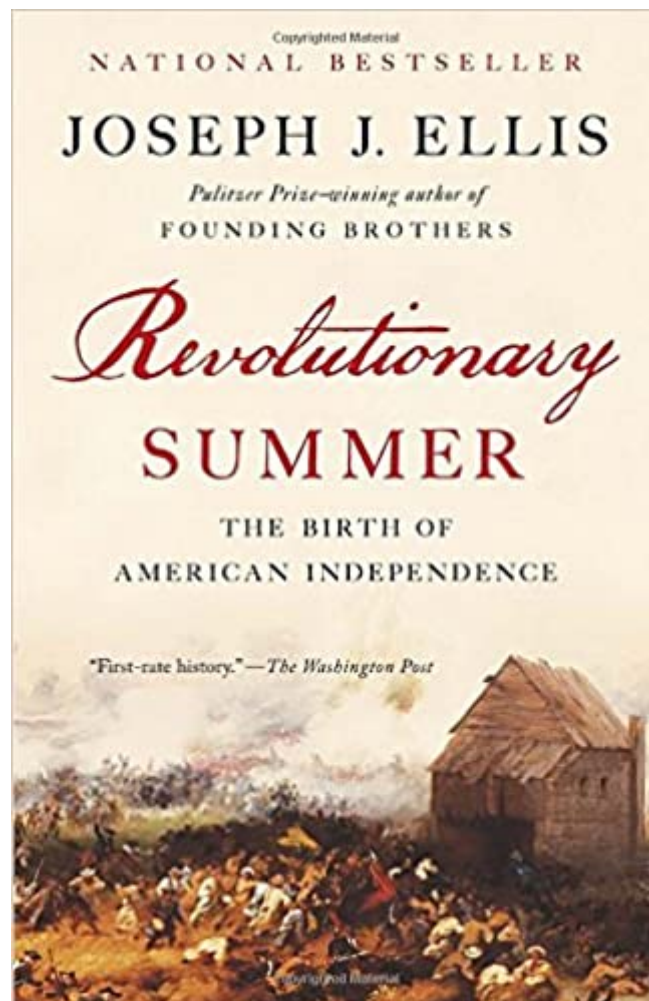




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Revolutionary Summer: The Birth Of American Independence



Synopsis

A Washington Post Notable Book
A Kirkus Reviews Best Nonfiction Book of the Year
The summer months of 1776 witnessed the most consequential events in the story of our country's founding. While the thirteen colonies came together and agreed to secede from the British Empire, the British were dispatching the largest armada ever to cross the Atlantic to crush the rebellion in the cradle. The Continental Congress and the Continental Army were forced to make decisions on the run, improvising as history congealed around them. In a brilliant and seamless narrative, Ellis meticulously examines the most influential figures in this propitious moment, including George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Britain's Admiral Lord Richard and General William Howe. He weaves together the political and military experiences as two sides of a single story, and shows how events on one front influenced outcomes on the other.

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (June 3, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307946371

ISBN-13: 978-0307946379

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 233 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #40,519 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #105 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding #1319 in Books > History > World #6530 in Books > Reference

Customer Reviews

In *Revolutionary Summer*, the eminent historian Joseph Ellis describes the events surrounding the birth of America during the summer of 1776 (loosely defined as May through October of that year). Ellis's stated aim is to treat the military and political events of the period in tandem, and he skillfully establishes that there were two different sets of goals at stake: George Washington's Continental Army considered independence an inevitability, while the Continental Congress considered it a last resort. A Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winner, Ellis recently retired as the Ford Foundation Professor of History at Mount Holyoke College. Reading *Revolutionary*

Summer is like receiving a distinguished lecture from a man who has dedicated many fruitful decades to breathing life into our understanding of history. He makes Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and others of the era come alive for the reader. Chris Schluep --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A specious coherence marks narratives of 1776 in which the Declaration of Independence inevitably occurs while the Continental army's doughty defense of New York ensures that independence would become fact. Events are not, however, so tidily told, avers historian Ellis, who restores contingency to his account of the storied summer and fall of 1776. Identifying a central problem of the historical situation, "Was there any realistic chance for the British to win?" Ellis recounts efforts of moderates within each warring party. On the American side was the rout of anti-independence John Dickinson by the radical John Adams, while Ellis portrays the British side as misunderstanding the colonial rebellion. The commanders George III sent believed in reconciliation with the Americans, and so William Howe conducted the battles of New York cautiously, negotiated futilely with a Ben Franklin serenely sure of American success, and never delivered the decisive blow against George Washington's army. Even had Howe destroyed the Continental army, Ellis suggests that the British still would have confronted strategic failure against an enemy determined to continue the war. With cogent argument and compact prose, Ellis augurs to attract the history audience. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Ellis commands a 100,000-plus print run for his latest installment on the American Revolution, tapping his popularity built on such standards as *American Sphinx* (1997), *Founding Brothers* (2000), and *First Family* (2010). --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Most people when asked to recall the Spirit of '76 that led to American independence will most likely focus on the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Granted, that was the event that started the horses carrying the cause out of the barn, but this event did not take place in a vacuum. The duty behind Joseph Ellis' book is to pull back to a 30,000 foot view of the events in the summer of 1776. In one sense, the American Revolution began a full year earlier with the April 1775 battles of Lexington and Concord, where colonists and British traded lead in anger in a war that would last over 8 years. American luminaries such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and John Hancock were taking their places on the world stage, along with lesser lights like Thomas Paine. In fact, it is the contribution of the heretofore unknown Paine - *Common Sense* - that lights the fire under the revolutionary faction of both the Continental Congress and the American

public. Ellis dedicates his work to showing in excellent detail the goings-on from the American point of view. He picks up this historical jewel and examines it from all sides, checking and finding stress, controversy and contentious debate. This was an exercise that needed to be done - one does not break away from the greatest power in the world on a whim. Unbeknownst to the Continental Congress, the Howe brothers (Admiral Richard and General Sir William) were getting ready to meet up in New York City bearing an iron fist inside of a silk glove. William was forced to leave Boston after the Battle of Bunker Hill and would lead the ground assault on America's prized port if the colonists refused to come to their senses. Seeing that the Howes were both "Peace Commissioners" and the leaders of battle should it be given rightly gave the colonial representatives pause. Of course, given British arrogance in refusing to treat the colonials with respect (which continues right up to Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown) leads to the war that we come to read about. In the midst of trying to make names for themselves by even after declarations of war to bring the colonies home, the Howes refuse to engage the Colonial Army in a manner that would end the war in a decisive victory. The brothers mistakenly believe that all that is required is to bloody the nose of Washington and his troops, and they will see the light. It is a mistake that proves costly as the Colonial Army soon begins to believe they can win and Congress believes they can do it. Ellis crafts a good narrative of the events, spinning them as a good story with backstories. He also takes the effort to show the failings of Washington the general, yet placing it within the context of the code of honor among gentlemen of the 18th century. An army wouldn't fight like that today, but absent that, there were strategic blunders that almost got the Revolution strangled in the cradle. **BOTTOM LINE:** An excellent book for the turbulent events of 1776.

Dr. Joseph Ellis is one of America's best known historians of the American Revolution. His biographies of such founding fathers as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and other patriots have earned him a Pulitzer Prize. This new book is "Revolutionary Summer" covering the momentous events of the fateful summer of 1776. Specifically it focuses on the May-October period of that seminal year of American history. The book is brief with only 185 pages of text to cover such an important topic. Ellis fulfills this difficult task with aplomb writing in an easy to understand style easily absorbed by an educated general reader. "Revolutionary Summer" posits the following Ellis observations: 1. George Washington's worst defeat of the long war was the retreat from Long Island and Manhattan into the wilds of New Jersey. 2. The British could not win the political war. The Americans were an army of amateur soldiers who managed to defeat a seasoned and smart British Army. 40,000 British troops died in America equivalent to our own losses in Vietnam. The war was

unpopular in Great Britain though King George III wanted it be fought with vigor.³ The war decided whether Republican government or a government of kings would dominate the American continent.⁴ The British strategy of cutting New England off from the rest of the nation was wise but was foiled by Americans in arms.⁵ Admiral Richard Howe and his brother William Howe wanted the war to end through negotiation and made many tactical mistakes in their conduct of the rebellion.⁶ The fledgling United States was well led by such founding fathers as Thomas Jefferson the poet of the Revolution whose "Declaration of Independence" still live in our nation's heart and mind; the wise Benjamin Franklin who helped secure the French alliance for America; George Washington who is the father of our land who kept the weak Continental Army fighting for eight long years. John Adams who served as the civilian organizer of military victory and worked well with General George Washington.⁷ The cause of freedom from Great Britain and the establishment of a new nation grew during the long war. About 20% of the American population were loyalists. This fine book is replete with quotable lines which stick in the mind of the reader: "...during the final months of 1775, the military and political sides of the American Revolution were not aligned."-p. 5 "Each state government should be comprised of three parts, on the English model, of executive, bicameral legislature and judiciary."-pp. 16-17 "Slavery was the most blatant contradiction of everything the budding American Revolution claimed to stand for."-p. 20 "Washington...was...so comfortable with his superiority that he felt no need to explain himself."-p. 27 "The army marching behind Washington might charitably have been called a work in progress."-p. 29 "The Royal Navy ruled the waves like no other navy in modern history."-p. 34 "The big difference between the enlisted men of the British and American armies was age and experience. The typical British soldier was twenty-eight years old, his American counterpart almost eight years younger...the redcoat had seven years of experience as a soldier, while the American had less than six months and those in several units of the Continental Army had none whatsoever."-p. 70 "There were three fundamental disagreements: first a sectional split between northern and southern states over slavery; second a division between large and small states over representation; and third, an argument between proponents for a confederation of sovereign states and advocates for a more consolidated national union."-p. 93 On perceptions of John Adams: "...he came across to his colleagues as the indefatigable and inexhaustible revolutionary spirit running a marathon at the pace of a sprinter."-p. 102 "Franklin...was a genius at sensing what the political imperatives of the moment required."-p. 106 "The Cause could never die."-p. 125 (the cause of American freedom and the formation of the United States). The book includes a good bibliography and provides color and black and white prints of the events of the summer of 1776 and portraits of many of the founding fathers and their British opponents. This short

book is an excellent work of the historical craft by Dr. Ellis. Excellent and well done!

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