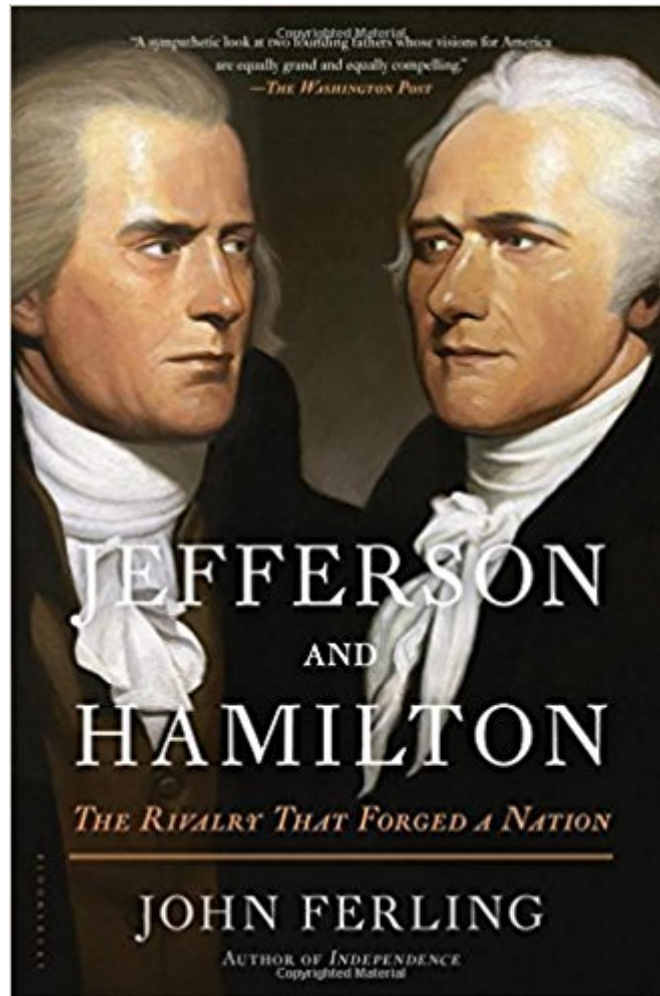




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# Jefferson And Hamilton: The Rivalry That Forged A Nation



## Synopsis

From the award-winning author of *Almost a Miracle* and *The Ascent of George Washington*, this is the rare work of scholarship that offers us irresistible human drama even as it enriches our understanding of deep themes in our nation's history. The decade of the 1790s has been called the "age of passion." Fervor ran high as rival factions battled over the course of the new republic—each side convinced that the other's goals would betray the legacy of the Revolution so recently fought and so dearly won. All understood as well that what was at stake was not a moment's political advantage, but the future course of the American experiment in democracy. In this epochal debate, no two figures loomed larger than Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. Both men were visionaries, but their visions of what the United States should be were diametrically opposed. *Jefferson and Hamilton* is the story of the fierce struggle—both public and, ultimately, bitterly personal—between these two titans. It ended only with the death of Hamilton in a pistol duel, felled by Aaron Burr, Jefferson's vice president. Their competing legacies, like the twin strands of DNA, continue to shape our country to this day. Their personalities, their passions, and their bold dreams for America leap from the page in this epic new work from one of our finest historians.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Jefferson and Hamilton is another masterpiece penned by the eminent Revolutionary War historian John Ferling." —*New York Journal of Books* "The author's comparative study is bold, brisk and lucid . . . Ferling draws crisp, sharp delineations between his

two subjects. — Kirkus Reviews — “Ferling provides valuable perspective not only on the Founding Fathers and their accomplishments but, overtly, on today, when fierce differences divide people who say they are seeking to preserve their nation and its values. Highly recommended. — Library Journal — “With moments of exciting clarity, Ferling’s account of two of the most famous American revolutionaries offers gossip, intrigue, and a window into their heated and turbulent relationship . . . As personalities clash and egos are wounded, Ferling gives readers a chance to rediscover the birth of the United States through the characters who helped craft its most vital institutions. — Publishers Weekly — “Mesmerizing. Masterful. History written with the gravitation pull of a good novel. — Dan Rather on Independence — “John Ferling is a national resource, and *Almost a Miracle* is a splendid combination of subject with a superb historian writing at the peak of his powers. — Michael Beschloss on *Almost a Miracle*

John Ferling is professor emeritus of history at the University of West Georgia. He is the author of many books on American Revolutionary history, including *The Ascent of George Washington*; *Almost a Miracle*, an acclaimed military history of the War of Independence; and the award-winning *A Leap in the Dark*. He and his wife, Carol, live near Atlanta, Georgia.

I often hear repeated praise for our founders, as if they were sent as a gift by the gods to us here on earth. Indeed they were a remarkable group of men. But men, with all of the same gifts and failings humans have carried through the ages, onto this time today. This book is a great reminder of those gifts and failings for those who haven’t read any history about the beginning of this country lately, or those who would like to start reading about our founders and their relations with one another. To be brief, the political divides of today are the business of government as usual, the business of government just as it was conducted 250 years ago. Read up, and realize how profound the compromises were that made our beginnings and how lucky we were that this group came together here.

One of my professors in college was Broadus Mitchell. He was the foremost Hamiltonian scholar of his day, author of multiple biographies of Hamilton and associates. Not surprisingly, my freshman year at Hofstra’s New College with Broadus Mitchell was an intensive study of Alexander Hamilton and the founding of America. The textbook was (surprise!) one of the several biographies of Hamilton authored by Broadus Mitchell. When I had was given the opportunity to review this book, I

was intrigued. I wondered what the author could tell me I hadn't read elsewhere and if he could tell the story better or differently, perhaps offer some fresh insights. I have patience with history books. I don't expect it to read like fiction. Much to my delight, John Ferling's opening chapters in which he compares and examines the youth, upbringing and psychological makeup of both men is beautifully written -- entertaining and lively. Perceptive. Astute. What drove them, what inspired them to become the men who built America. All was going swimmingly well until the war began. The Revolutionary War. I am not a war buff and was not expecting a play-by-play of the revolution. But there it was. Battle by battle, troop movement by troop movement. I could feel my brain switch from engaged to stupefied. I'm not sure why the full details of the war are included. Aside from showcasing Hamilton's military career (doable in a few paragraphs), it adds little to my understanding of either man. As far as I'm concerned, it mainly adds hundreds of pages where a page or two of summary would have sufficed. If you are a military history buff, you might like it. If not, skip the war and move on. It's a long book that includes a lot of great material. When Ferling is writing about the character and personality of his two extraordinary subjects, he's lively and illuminating, but when he lapses into "authoritative" mode, it bogs down. Seriously dull. I read a lot of history, stuff that other people think is boring and which I find fascinating so it's got to be pretty stultifying before I think it's boring. Yet it's too good to miss, so skip sections in which you aren't interested and read the rest. It is extremely uneven with sections so gripping I couldn't put it down and others so dreary I couldn't stay awake. I am disinterested in battles and troop movements, so maybe I'm the wrong person to judge, but I cannot see how this material adds anything useful. Jefferson never fought in the war. Hamilton did, but he was not a "military man." Even though he had a distinguished war record, being a warrior was not a core piece of his character or particularly relevant to his story. Several hundred pages could (and should) be deleted. Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton were two of the most influential men in American history. The author said it well when he commented (sorry, this isn't a quote ... I'm paraphrasing) that there are lots of statues dedicated to Jefferson, but we live in Hamilton's world. True enough. Hamilton was the consummate advocate of a strong central government with economic control through a central bank. Jefferson advocated extreme individual freedom, leaving most government to local authorities. It amuses me that Hamilton is the darling of the GOP while Jefferson is the Liberal ideal. Given Hamilton's belief in strong central government and Jefferson's preference for isolationism, individualism and decentralization -- well, it pretty much defines our nation's massive problem with cognitive dissonance. If you're a history buff with a serious interest in early American history, there is much to like. It is said that "Both men were visionaries, but their visions of what the United States were

diametrically opposed." It may have been true in 1780, but it has long ceased to have any current relevance. In the end, the strands of their opposing philosophies have gotten twisted into a single ball of thread, both necessary to our American dream. Jefferson and Hamilton is the story of the struggle -- public and ultimately personal -- between two major figures in our country's history. It ended when Alexander Hamilton died in a duel with Aaron Burr, Jefferson's vice president. Worth reading for sure, but not light entertainment. This is history buff material. Fortunately, there are still a few of us around.

This work gives a more personal look at Jefferson and Hamilton, and at George Washington, for that matter. History books in school, at least in my experience, tended to make people either good guys (these three) or bad guys (Benedict Arnold, for example). "Jefferson and Hamilton" discusses their backgrounds in some detail and their personalities. We get to know both warts and all. Jefferson could have the backbone of a jellyfish at times. For Hamilton it was his way or the highway. Jefferson spent considerable energy keeping small government focus. Hamilton would have turned the newly freed US into a British monarchy of sorts. The title focuses on the rivalry between these two for several decades, primarily after the American Revolution. The individual accomplishments, challenges and failures of each man, unrelated to their squabbles with one another, give a more complete picture of their value to early US history.

If you believe Washington chopped down the cherry tree and could not tell a lie and everybody was super human at the conventions you will not like this book. However if you assume good things were done by men with flaws and want a better understanding of how things got started, there may not be a better book. The country was split at the beginning. Two sides far apart. Washington, Adams and Hamilton vs Jefferson and others. Both sides played a huge part as to where we are now. Both sides have never been explained better in many years of reading history for me. These same two sides are alive and well today and have been from the start. I am glad I found this book.

The book provided all that I expected. It focuses upon the characters, philosophies, the personal strengths and shortcomings of two of the most significant figures in America at the time of this nation's birth. What is striking is the fact that Hamilton and Jefferson's political beliefs had little in common, with the exception of their unwavering desire to see this country grow and to flourish. Their vision of how America would evolve was quite different. Hamilton was tied to Anglo traditions and Jefferson dreamed of a more egalitarian society that relied on the contributions of all citizens.

Their respective political philosophies are imbedded in today's political parties. The difference today is that though the two major political parties remain polar in their philosophical differences, there appears to be little interest in arriving at solutions that will allow the United States to reach its full potential as not only the most powerful nation on earth, but to engage in a non-partisan collaboration to insure the common good that would be the envy of the world.

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