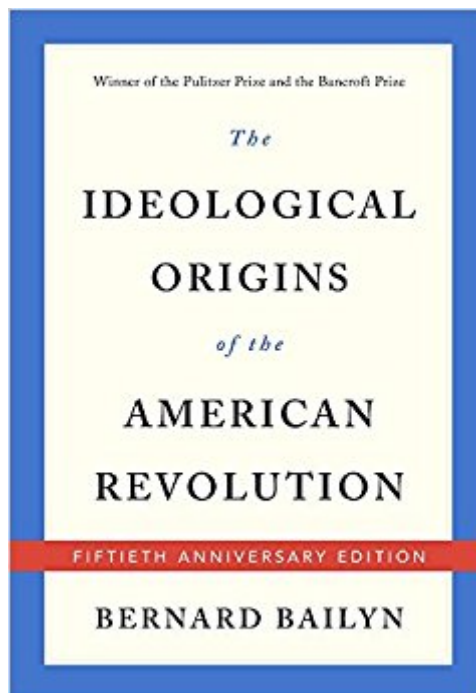




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The Ideological Origins Of The American Revolution: Fiftieth Anniversary Edition



Synopsis

The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, awarded both the Pulitzer and the Bancroft prizes, has become a classic of American historical literature. Hailed at its first appearance as "the most brilliant study of the meaning of the Revolution to appear in a generation," it was enlarged in a second edition to include the nationwide debate on the ratification of the Constitution, hence exploring not only the Founders' initial hopes and aspirations but also their struggle to implement their ideas in constructing the national government. Now, in a new preface, Bernard Bailyn reconsiders salient features of the book and isolates the Founders' profound concern with power. In pamphlets, letters, newspapers, and sermons they returned again and again to the problem of the uses and misuses of power—the great benefits of power when gained and used by popular consent and the political and social devastation when acquired by those who seize it by force or other means and use it for their personal benefit. This fiftieth anniversary edition will be welcomed by readers familiar with Bailyn's book, and it will introduce a new generation to a work that remains required reading for anyone seeking to understand the nation's historical roots.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"One cannot claim to understand the Revolution without having read this book." ---New York Times
--This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Bernard Bailyn is Adams University Professor, Emeritus, and James Duncan Phillips Professor of Early American History, Emeritus, at Harvard University.

I am reviewing the Kindle edition. I got this book as part of Judge Napolitano's History 101 course for FreedomWorks University. The book focuses on the development of thought amongst the early American public, particularly as perceived through the prolific pamphlets published during those times. The best part of the book is its summary of those thoughts and the tracing of the development. However, as a single book by a single author (as opposed to an anthology or collection of writings), I occasionally got bogged down in the reading. It was my interest in the subject that helped me to keep going. I don't know whether the presentation could have been made any clearer or could have been made to flow better, but if you decide to tackle this volume, you may experience some of the same. The other point I wished to make is somewhat of the opposite nature. After only a comparatively few chapters, suddenly the book was over. In the Kindle edition, a huge chunk of the book is made up of notes and index. In a paper edition, I would have been following the notes as I read and would have realized the proportions of the main text. It was simply unexpected on my part. Having said all of that, I still think the person with a keen interest in the subject will appreciate the book and will probably have a greater desire to try to wade through many of the pamphlets cited in the volume.

Brilliant. Provocative. Complex. Illuminating. The list of favorable adjectives applicable to Professor Bailyn's seminal work is nearly infinite. Subsequent to an exhaustive examination of colonial literature, namely pamphlets, Professor Bailyn describes the evolution of colonial ideology which, he argues, led directly to the American Revolution. Professor Bailyn begins with an introduction to the ideological sources which shaped and developed colonial revolutionary thought. He describes, at length, the impact of 17th and 18th century opposition writing in England upon colonial ideology, especially "Whig" ideology. He then details how the American press widely distributed this ideology throughout the colonies. In addition, Professor Bailyn highlights the importance of classical Roman thought and English common law upon the colonists' revolutionary thinking. Professor Bailyn contends that the combination of these libertarian sources provided the spark for the "shot heard round the world. An extremely complex examination, albeit imminently readable, the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution is a must read for serious study of the reasons for the colonists' decision to break away from the patronage of the British Empire.

Although heavily argued during this, its fiftieth anniversary, I think it is still remarkably valuable to read. Even Prof. Bailyn's preface to this edition in 2017 makes it worth it alone, to see how he feels after re-reading it. For \$16, if you don't have it, grab it.

Head-on challenge to the traditional view that places economic concerns as the dominant reason for the American Revolution. Superior research, drawing on an array of sources and their arguments that ultimately support American exceptionalism. Places much more emphasis on "natural rights" as fundamental to patriots' thinking than reliance on classical Greek philosophers who contemplated "democracy."

Very good book. The one criticism that I have about it is that the author often talks about historical works as though the reader is familiar with the hundreds of writings by authors of the time period. Other than that, the subject matter is fascinating. It makes me proud to be an American.

Despite a seemingly complex title, I found this be one of the most easy-to-read books on American history I have ever put my hands on. Perhaps this is because it such an outstanding study in how and why we became what we are now. There is much that we take for granted in our political system and this book explains clearly where our system of government came from. It is easy to spend an entire afternoon with the book since the author does such a great job of re-telling the stories through the authors and great minds of our early political period. The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution is one of the best books I have ever read regarding our early political history. I cannot recommend this book enough to anyone interested in trying to understand where we came from and how we developed as a nation.

Many other reviewers have already done a good job summarizing this very influential book which won both the Pulitzer Prize for History and the Bancroft Prize in 1968 -- a rare achievement. In particular, I think R. Albin's review gives a very accurate summary of the book much along the lines of what I would have written. I would add that Bailyn extended his book, originally published in 1967, in 1992 with a postscript that covers ideological debates between the federalists and anti-federalists about the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. He points out that the same fears of tyranny and enslavement that lead to the Revolution also dominated the thoughts of the opponents of the new Constitution who viewed the creation of a strong central government with great suspicion and fear.

Supporters of ratification (including the most famous of them, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison) had to work very hard to convince people that the new government would have sufficient checks and balances to protect the liberties and rights that the Revolution had gained them. My only complaint about the book is its excessive use of overly long footnotes, some of which overflow onto the next page. These footnotes would have been easier to read as endnotes. Alternatively, some of the more interesting content in the footnotes could have been incorporated into the primary text. This might be the publisher's fault more than Bailyn's.

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