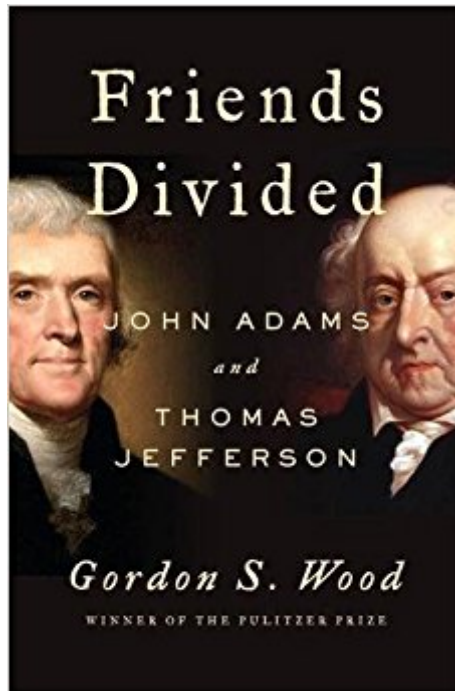




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Friends Divided: John Adams And Thomas Jefferson



Synopsis

From the great historian of the American Revolution, New York Times-bestselling and Pulitzer-winning Gordon Wood, comes a majestic dual biography of two of America's most enduringly fascinating figures, whose partnership helped birth a nation, and whose subsequent falling out did much to fix its course. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams could scarcely have come from more different worlds, or been more different in temperament. Jefferson, the optimist with enough faith in the innate goodness of his fellow man to be democracy's champion, was an aristocratic Southern slaveowner, while Adams, the overachiever from New England's rising middling classes, painfully aware he was no aristocrat, was a skeptic about popular rule and a defender of a more elitist view of government. They worked closely in the crucible of revolution, crafting the Declaration of Independence and leading, with Franklin, the diplomatic effort that brought France into the fight. But ultimately, their profound differences would lead to a fundamental crisis, in their friendship and in the nation writ large, as they became the figureheads of two entirely new forces, the first American political parties. It was a bitter breach, lasting through the presidential administrations of both men, and beyond. But late in life, something remarkable happened: these two men were nudged into reconciliation. What started as a grudging trickle of correspondence became a great flood, and a friendship was rekindled, over the course of hundreds of letters. In their final years they were the last surviving founding fathers and cherished their role in this mighty young republic as it approached the half century mark in 1826. At last, on the afternoon of July 4th, 50 years to the day after the signing of the Declaration, Adams let out a sigh and said, "At least Jefferson still lives." He died soon thereafter. In fact, a few hours earlier on that same day, far to the south in his home in Monticello, Jefferson died as well. Arguably no relationship in this country's history carries as much freight as that of John Adams of Massachusetts and Thomas Jefferson of Virginia. Gordon Wood has more than done justice to these entwined lives and their meaning; he has written a magnificent new addition to America's collective story.

Book Information

Hardcover: 512 pages

Publisher: Penguin Press (October 24, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0735224714

ISBN-13: 978-0735224711

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #50,805 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #73 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > American Revolution #132 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding #165 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > US Presidents

Customer Reviews

"Whenever I read Gordon Wood, the dean of eighteenth century American historians, I feel as if I am absorbing wisdom at the feet of the master. *Friends Divided* is teeming with exceptionally acute and unvarnished insights into Thomas Jefferson and John Adams as they do battle for the nation's soul. Jefferson's sunny, almost Panglossian, optimism, juxtaposed with the dark, dyspeptic musings of Adams, presents readers with nothing less than a vivid composite portrait of the American mind."

—Ron Chernow, *The Founding Fathers*

"Among the other well-known personages in the narrative are Abigail Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Rush, all portrayed vividly by the author, whose approachable writing style is equal to his impressive archival research.

—An illuminating history of early Americans that is especially timely in the ugly, partisan-filled age of Trump.

—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

"As the dean of American historians, Gordon Wood had long shaped the nation's thinking about the true nature of the Founding. Now he turns his intellectual honesty and clear-eyed prose to the lives of Jefferson and of Adams, giving us a brilliant portrait of their complicated relationship. This is an indispensable account of two men, of the country they built, and of why their legacies matter even now. Bravo!"

—Jon Meacham, author of *American Lion* and *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*

"America's dialogue with its competing impulses had its origins in the fractured friendship of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Gordon Wood brings his unmatched knowledge of the scholarly literature to the task of recovering both sides of what is still America's longstanding argument with itself."

—Joseph J. Ellis, author of the forthcoming *Then and Now: The Founders and US*

Gordon S. Wood is the Alva O. Way University Professor and professor of history at Brown University. His books have received the Pulitzer, Bancroft and John H. Dunning prizes, as well as a National Book Award nomination and the New York Historical Society Prize in American History. They include *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic*, *Revolutionary Characters*, *The*

Purpose of the Past, The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin, and The Idea of America.

Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson by Gordon S. Woods This is a wonderful book that explains far better than any I have read previously the love/hate relationship of these two revered founders of our nation. Like oil and water, these two worked together to craft a nation, but separated bitterly as their inherent differences came to bear. Yet they were smart enough and, perhaps cordial enough, to carefully bring that complex relationship into a tentative friendship in their latter years through an amazing correspondence. While their rivalry always simmered just beneath the surface, they considered many questions that divide and unite Americans still. The journey of their relationship is important to consider in these divisive times, and Woods lays it out clearly in this book.

Gordon S. Woods is a thorough and careful historian. His description in one of the earlier chapters of this book of the different points of view in Massachusetts and Virginia goes far to explain the rifts that are part of our nation today. “All men are created equal” was the ideal, but not the reality in either world populated by the founders of our country. Both delineated the social strata of the country’s population in such a way that makes it clear how those same divisions have continued to this day. We still struggle trying to achieve that ideal, and one wonders if it really is achievable in the hearts of men. This is no dry recounting of deeds like many historical works. Woods goes deeply into the issues at the heart of each ideology. He examines where they run parallel and where they split off into entirely different directions. He presents an understanding of what happened which sheds much light on what continues to happen in this country. One hopes this book becomes a must-read at the college level.

My take-away from reading this book is a simple one. We Americans are all friends divided. Only by dialogue and understanding can we agree to disagree and live together in peace. This is a great lesson for us all

For many reasons this is another important book by the great American historian and Pulitzer Prize winner Gordon S. Wood. We all know that there are many fine biographies of these men such as *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* and *John Adams*. This is not really a dual-biography, but rather a Plutarchian parallel study of how they viewed, often differed, and acted upon key issues in America’s first half century. These two founding fathers had fundamental differences in their view of the nation and the course it should follow, and helped pave the way for competing political parties. Yet, as Wood point out these views are more often complimentary rather than contradictory, as they both saw our nation through

different worldviews that seemed to emphasize their independence and originality; one the aristocrat who believed in the common man, the other in the middleclass townsman who favored the elites. Starting with the time of their deaths, on the 4th of July 1826, our nation viewed them differently. While Adams was honored more in the North, Jefferson had already risen to the level of a legendary national figure. In an age when some wish to denigrate Jefferson, and punish him for being the child of his time and location, Wood still sees the importance of Jefferson as the man who stood for the idea of inclusion in a world of "liberty and justice for all". The book has extensive notes; my examination copy lacked the illustrations and index that will be in the published volume.

This is a great high level compare and contrast on two very important men in the foundation of the United States. There is a lot of content in this book, it is not a book for fast skimming. It begins with the basic differences in John Adam's and Thomas Jefferson's backgrounds, and then slowly delves into the nuances between the two. There are definitely a lot of defining details to unpack: social status, geography, economics, politics, personality and also popularity, and intellectual pursuits. Some of the more scintillating details about romances and dalliances come later, and the difference in how both men relate to the opposite sex is analysed as well. There is a lot of history covered, not only Colonial History, but British as well. The struggles these men endured and their relationship, despite their differences, makes for a great read. All in all a great book, highly recommend for any history buff.

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