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Trevor Colbourn, ed. *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays of Douglass Adair.* Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998. xliv + 451 pp. $12.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-86597-193-6; $24.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-86597-192-9.

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A Lost Classic's Return

The republication of this book by Liberty Fund restores to print, in handsome and durable form, one of the most valuable essay collections in the field of early American history. Douglass G. Adair (1913-1968) revolutionized the study of American history in the Revolutionary and early national periods–and yet, except for those who worked with him and learned from his writings, nobody has heard of him. His 1943 Ph.D. dissertation in history at Yale–"The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer"–has influenced at least three generations of American historians and is a cornerstone of the famed "republican synthesis." In 1944, Adair became the editor of the third series of the *William and Mary Quarterly* and transformed that musty journal into the leading scholarly journal on early American history and culture. His essays, mostly published there but also in other widely scattered venues, turned the writing of the history of the Founding upside down, as shown by Robert Shalhope in his fine study of Adair's historiographical significance (pp. xxix-xliv) and Caroline Robbins in her affectionate and incisive memoir (pp. xix-xxviii).

Adair did not embrace either stale economic determinism or patriotic hero-worship. Rather, he took ideas seriously; in particular, he took seriously the idea that human beings shape and are shaped by the ideas that capture their imaginations and move them to action. Adair grasped the insight offered by Carl L. Becker in his 1922 study *The Declaration of Independence*: "[M]en are influenced by books which clarify their own thought, which express their own notions well, or which suggest to them ideas which their minds are already predisposed to accept."

Adair, one of the great tragic figures in the history of the American historical profession, took his own life on 2 May 1968. His friends and colleagues gathered his best essays and in 1974 published them in *Fame and the Founding Fathers* as a memorial to him. The volume's editor, Trevor Colbourn, notes in his eloquent preface his own intellectual debts to Adair–in particular, the influence of Adair's work on his own.[1]

The essays collected in this volume are dazzling explorations in the history of ideas and politics. "Fame and the Founding Fathers" (pp. 3-36), from which the book gets its title, is a dazzling meditation on the desire for enduring fame as a previously-unappreciated influence on the thought, words, and deeds of the Revolutionary generation. In the now-classic "The Authorship of the Disputed Federalist Papers" (pp. 37-105), Adair not only solved a historical puzzle that had perplexed generations of Americans, he provided a model of deft historical detective work. Twenty years after this two-part essay's original appearance in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, Adair could report (p. 367) that Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace had used the techniques of computer analysis to confirm his findings as to which essays of Publius were the handiwork of James Madison or of Alexander Hamilton. Similarly, Adair's two essays on *The Federalist No. 10*–the often-anthologized "The Tenth Federalist Revisited" (pp. 106-31) and "'That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science': David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist" (pp. 132-51)–are indispensable to anyone who would understand *The Federalist* or Madison.

Among the other important essays collected here are Adair's superb brief biography of Madison (176-99), his essay "Was Alexander Hamilton a Christian Statesman?" (cowritten with Marvin Harvey, pp. 200-26), and his trio of essays exploring knotty puzzles in Hamilton's life and career of Alexander Hamilton (368-418).

Three pathbreaking review essays presented here illustrate Adair's mastery of the genre. In its exploration of the uses to which different generations of Americans have put Thomas Jefferson's life and thought, "The New Thomas Jefferson" (pp. 335-49) presages Merrill Peterson's classic *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind.*[2]

In "The Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson (pp. 350-56), Adair voiced a still-useful caution to Jefferson scholars about not assuming too much about Jefferson's intellectual originality and creativity. Finally, "The Federalist Papers" (pp. 357-67) is an illuminating reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of various editions of *The Federalist* and a guide to the considerations that should shape editions of major eighteenth-century texts.

In 1974, most readers of *Fame and the Founding Fathers* singled out as its most valuable piece Adair's essay, left unfinished and unpublished at his death, on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings. In "The Jefferson Scandals" (pp. 227-73), Adair sought to refute the recurring claim (in his view, a charge–a fact significant to understanding the posture he took in writing about it) that Thomas Jefferson had a longstanding relationship with Sally Hemings, one of his slaves, during which she bore him several children. Many historians have repeatedly invoked Adair's essay as the ultimate refutation of the Hemings controversy, due in large part to Adair's stature as a historian and also to its fortuitous appearance on the heels (and from the publisher) of Fawn Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), to which it seemed a definitive refutation. In 1997, however, Annette Gordon-Reed's* Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy_ (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997) presented a carefully researched and strongly argued reconsideration of the Jefferson-Hemings controversy. Gordon-Reed's book has helped to cause a volte-face among most historians on the Jefferson-Hemings issue (including the present writer); her sensitive and thoughtful consideration of Adair's essay should be read immediately after reading the essay itself.[3]

Famne and the Founding Fathers presents two stronger examples of Adair's historical detective work alongside "The Jefferson Scandals": "Rumbold's Dying Speech, 1685, and Jefferson's Last Words on Democracy, 1826" (pp. 274-88), and "The Mystery of the Horn Papers" (cowritten with Arthur Pierce Middleton, pp. 289-332). The latter, in particular, is a methodological model for assessing disputed historical claims in its exposure of what most historians think of as the Horn Papers Hoax.

Besides the Jefferson-Hemings essay, which now has value as a primary source rather than a historical investigation, readers will naturally ask how much of *Fame and the Founding Fathers* remains worth reading. This book meets the test of a true historical classic: it merits thoughtful and appreciative rereading long after its content has been assimilated into the profession's conventional wisdom. Adair always wrote with grace, modesty, and accessibility, and yet also with formidable erudition and analytic skill. That he could blend these often antithetical virtues makes his essays enduring models of writing history for scholars and general readers alike.

In one key respect, the essays presented in this volume offer insights as yet unmined. In particular, "'That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science': David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist" (pp. 132-151) and his consideration of history and the making of the Constitution–"'Experience Must Be Our Only Guide': History, Democratic Theory, and the United States Constitution" (pp. 152-75)–suggest that historians of the Constitution and its origins have neglected one perspective from which to examine their seemingly well-worn subject. Adair was profoundly interested in the ways in which the members of the Revolutionary generation were intellectual citizens of the Age of the Enlightenment, and the ways that they mined history and political theory for information and insights into the tasks of constitution-making and governance. These two essays suggest something more–that in their efforts to derive from the amassed historical experience of the Western world general principles of human nature, society, politics, and governance, James Madison and his contemporaries were indeed seeking a new science of politics on the model of the great scientific advances associated with the name of Isaac Newton. History, to them, was a great record of past experiments in government of all sorts, a record of achievement and error that could be combed for guidance and synthesized into general principles. Further exploration of the centrality of this "idea of experiment" may well lay bare unsuspected connections linking the Revolutionary generation's interest in science and technology with their enduring achievements in which the philosopher and historian of ideas Morton White has called "political technology."[4]

To conclude on a personal note: In 1974, when this book first appeared, I had just completed my freshman year of college. I read it eagerly, and it opened my eyes to the value of writing about difficult historical issues in an elegant and accessible way. Anyone who is interested in American history between the 1770s and the 1830s must read this fine book. Anyone who cares about writing about history for a wide general audience will find *Fame and the Founding Fathers* to be a treasured model. I owe Douglass Adair, who died when I was 12, a debt that I can never repay. I hope that others will read this book and contract similar debts.

Notes

[1]. H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1965). In 1998, Liberty Fund reissued this fine book with an illuminating new foreword.

[2]. Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960; reissued, with new foreword, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

[3]. Full disclosure requires me to note that Professor Gordon-Reed is my colleague at New York Law School and a valued friend. She tells me that a new edition of *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings* is in the works, with a new foreword that will address the developments in the controversy since the book's first appearance in 1997.

[4]. For the term "political technology," see Morton White, *Philosophy, 'The Federalist,' and the Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For a first attempt to assess the linkages among scientific ideas, technological change, and constitutional arrangements in American history, see I. Bernard Cohen, *Science and the Founding Gathers: Science in the Political Thought of Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, and Madison* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995; rev. ed., 1997), and see also Shalom Doron and R. B. Bernstein, "Review of I. Bernard Cohen, *Science and the Founding Fathers: Science in the Political Thought of Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, and Madison*," H-Law, H-Net Reviews, June, 1998. URL:http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?-path=29373898094919.

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