

J. Jackson Barlow, Leonard W. Levy, & Ken Masugi, eds. *The American Founding: Essays on the Formation of the Constitution*. New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1988. Pp. xii, 341. Cloth, \$45.00.

Prepared with the explicit intention of helping to commemorate the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, *The American Founding* brings together the views of several prominent historians and political scientists on the constitution-writing process of the founding fathers. The original basis for this collection of essays was the publications of the Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy and of Public Research.

These essays are based on the question "Is America the best regime sought by the philosophers of old?" In their discussion, the authors point toward a renewed scholarly interest in the concept of the "best regime" as a theme in the study of the writing of the Constitution. The historians in these essays seek to understand the founding fathers as they understood themselves and focus their attention on both particular events, such as Jack N. Rakove's essay on the Confederation Period, as well as on broader themes in political thought, as Marvin Meyers and Merrill Peterson do in their essays on James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Political scientists, on the other hand, look for the more permanent and enduring, as well as the classical, in the contributions of the founding fathers. As Thomas G. West and Charles R. Kessler point out, the spirit of the founding fathers was a classical one, formed by a strong knowledge of the classical authors and by a classical conception of the nature of politics. However, as Michael P. Zuchert and Edward J. Erler demonstrate, they knew such modern authors as John Locke and the concept of natural rights.

If there is a theme to these essays, it would be that, in attempting to create the best regime, the founders were not utopians or perfectionists, but optimists. They realized that such progress toward good government as Americans had made was founded both on an attachment to "abstract truths" and a healthy skepticism of claims that a particular arrangement of offices or a particular constitution could guarantee good results. Their optimism comes out in the feeling that experience would uncover defects in the Constitution and that future political leaders would continue to make improvements in the means of government. As the editors note, the book might well be titled "Essays on the Political Science of the American Founding."

As the theme is oriented more toward political science, this book might well be considered for adoption in courses on the American Constitution or Political Thought as a supplementary reader. Historians, however, may find useful those essays pertaining to the influence of classical and modern thought on the founding fathers.

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Douglas T. Miller. *Frederick Douglass and the Fight for Freedom*. New York & Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1988. Pp. viii, 152. Cloth, \$16.95.

Frederick Douglass, the extraordinary nineteenth-century black leader, is the subject of this life-and-times treatment in this entry in the *Makers of America Series*. The series is edited by John Anthony Scott. A statement about the series on the book's jacket claims that it is targeted for young adults and general readers, and a reading of the text confirms this claim. The reading level is appropriate for college undergraduates and advanced secondary students, and the book would work as an assigned reading for a class. The length is modest and the data and interpretations are not strenuous.

The book opens with Douglass a witness to a beating of his aunt for refusing the sexual advances of her owner. Douglass was then seven years of age, his aunt only eight years older. From that slavery-damning opening, the narrative proceeds to enumerate the many evils and personal affronts associated with slavery in what might be termed a PG rating style if this were a movie. Maybe even a G rating. We read that Douglass was separated from his black mother at an extremely early age and did not know which local white was his father, although he had his suspicions; raised by grandparents and in the company of many cousins, at an appropriate working age he was turned over to his owner to begin his working life; he lived a sheltered life for a time as the companion of