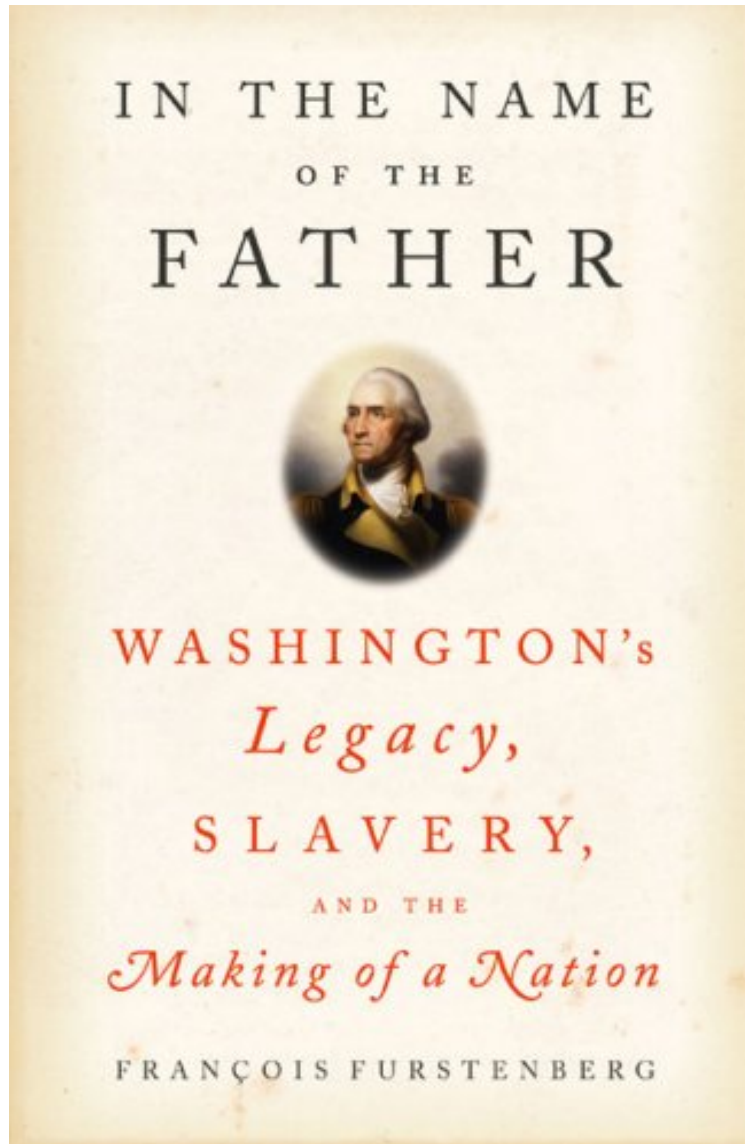


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In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation

Francois Furstenberg
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Francois Furstenberg : In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Washington and American Nationalism at WorkBy

gloine36

Francois Furstenberg's *In the Name of the Father* explores the themes of American nationalism and slavery in the Early Republic era of the United States. Ever since the generations of Americans that experienced the American Civil War passed away, the successive generations have had no direct connection with slavery existing in their midst. For the preceding generations of Americans, reconciling the fact that slavery was enshrined in the Constitution while at the same time it and other documents of the Revolutionary era extolled the concepts of freedom and liberty was problematic. How could slavery exist in a nation that prided itself on liberty? Modern Americans have a very difficult time understanding just how slavery flourished and was such a profitable economic enterprise that a civil war was waged over the extension of the institution into federal territories. Furstenberg begins by explaining how the death of George Washington and his position as Father of his Country was established as a basis for nationality while also linking slavery to Washington's legacy. Washington's death took place during one of the most heated political climates in the nation's history. There was a very real chance that the divisions between Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans could have led to a civil war or at the very least a shattering of the fledgling republic. Both sides claimed Washington as their champion during the electoral process. Following Jefferson's election over Burr in the House of Representatives as president, his party embraced Washington the man while ignoring the fact that he had been a Federalist. This obscuration as well as promoting Washington's Farewell Address in popular memory served to create a mythical apotheosis of Washington. Additionally, Washington's public memory was further shaped by the publication of books about Washington's life. First and foremost among these books was Mason Locke Weems's *Life of Washington*. By analyzing how this book of Washingtonian anecdotes basically enshrined Washington's status as an American demi-god, Furstenberg makes a definitive exploration of how Washington was connected to American nationalism. At the same time he lays the groundwork for connecting the public's memory of Washington to the issue of American slavery. Washington's role in American nationalism was that of a paternal figure to all people in the country including slaves. In addition to enshrining Washington in American nationalism, the civic texts were also incorporated into that concept, and those texts clearly and explicitly included slavery as an American institution. Many of the Founding Fathers owned slaves, a fact which history does not dispute although it has been downplayed in popular memory. Furstenberg delves into the creation of the American nationalism and how the Jeffersonian Republicans managed to reconcile their ownership of slaves in that concept. Contrary to popular memory today, the institution of slavery did not slowly dwindle or reach a point where it could have vanished on its own accord. If anything, by 1860 slavery in the United States was extremely profitable and a growing system of labor. Slavery was flourishing and showed no sign of becoming extinct in the southern states. By exploring the civic texts, Furstenberg discovers how the proponents of slavery developed the consent doctrine which basically stated that slavery was a condition whereupon the enslaved consented to their bondage. The fact that slaveowners were terrified of slave rebellions and went to great lengths to recapture escaped slaves proves how the South deluded themselves with that doctrine. In their words and speech the slaveowners dictated the consent doctrine, but in their actions they explicitly rejected it. Furstenberg's research into the civic texts as well as religious tracts of the era reveal that slaveowners used the power of the state and federal governments to limit or deny slaves the same materials. The education of slaves was suppressed while slave states enacted repressive laws banning any criticism of slavery. The divide over slavery became so pronounced that the major Protestant faiths split over the issue along sectional lines. Religion in the South sought to extol the paternal nature of slaveowning through Scripture while the exact opposite situation existed in the North. The access of religious tracts for slaves was restricted with the tracts themselves being rewritten to incorporate the theme of the consent doctrine. Furstenberg's book is a good example of how historical research works in discovering how the distortion in American public memory developed. His research can be used to in explaining how the Lost Cause mythology extolled by erroneously named heritage groups continue to use the same misconceptions a century and a half later that Southerners used before the Civil War. Readers who prefer the enshrined version of Washington and the Founding Fathers will be disappointed in Furstenberg's opinions, but the facts Furstenberg presents are rather compelling. There is still a debate over whether or not the Constitution enshrined slavery, but Furstenberg pulls no punches by linking it and many other civil documents together in the process used in creating American nationalism. The conclusion is well stated and the notes subsections back it up. The notes are extensive and give a deeper dimensional look at Furstenberg's thought process. While the book does not explore slavery in any great detail beyond what is necessary to explain the context of the era, slavery is not presented as a benign institution, but rather the degrading and inhuman injustice it actually was. Fortunately, Furstenberg does not demonize the people of the past for their beliefs, but presents the evidence as it was without depending on polemics to justify any of this research. Unlike many academic works, *In the Name of the Father* is readable by a larger audience. In the end, this book is definitely a worthwhile reading into the role Washington played in the creation of American nationalism and the continued existence of slavery in American history.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. In the Name of the Father: The Role of Civic Texts in American History By Kim Burdick. "Every age and generation is, and must be (as a matter of right), as free to act for itself in all cases, as the age and generation that preceded it ... If we think otherwise than this we think either as slaves or as tyrants. As slaves, if we think that any former generation had a right to bind us; as tyrants, if we think that we have authority to bind the generations that are to follow." [Thomas Paine.

1795]. Echoing a long ago article by political activist and historian Staughton Lynd, who wrote about dissent,* François Furstenberg provides a thought-provoking look at the importance of America's early civic texts. The Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, Washington's Farewell Address, Parson Weems's Biography of George Washington and other early texts, have become the malleable guidelines by which generations of Americans have viewed their rights, responsibilities, and privileges. Furstenberg focuses on the importance of the transmission of both late 18th and early 19th century sentiment and social norms in framing America's sense of self. His chapter on Parson Weems's success as a hard-working entrepreneur would make excellent assigned reading for business or marketing. The title is misleading. Anyone wishing to read an in-depth report on George Washington's relationship with his slaves must look elsewhere. However, if you are interested in how literacy and civic texts impacted the life of Frederick Douglass and other 19th century slaves, slave-owners, and abolitionists, this a fine place to start. Furstenberg provides one of the clearest looks at the transition from the War for Independence to the War Between the States that I have seen. He wraps up his book with a Victorian political cartoon showing the apotheosis of Lincoln, the intellectual Son, reuniting with Washington, the Father of our Country. Somehow, after reading this book, the idea makes sense. Worth reading. Kim Burdick Stanton, Delaware* See Alfred F. Young's first collection of essays, "Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism. 1968.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The very meaning being governed by the consent of the Governed By Herbert L Calhoun The book begins with Washington's death and the uncertainty left in its wake. The nation's deep emotional debt and visceral connection to him, as well as dependence on him, made it obvious that America was virtually unprepared to face the challenges ahead without him. Thus, what Washington had tried to do in his farewell address was to prepare the nation for the trials it was to face in his absence. His parting message was in large measure instructions on how to go about the business of sustaining a government ruled by the "consent of the governed." Doing so, above all else involved reciprocal responsibilities on both sides: Those governed must remain loyal to the principles laid down by the laws of the land; i.e., the constitution and the declaration of independence And in return, the government was to remain loyal to the collective voice of the people. In order of importance, Washington saw three key threats facing the fledgling nation: (1) geographic divisions, (2) political factions, and (3) meddling by foreign powers. But as the author's sophisticated treatment shows, there was a much deeper concern with the survival of the new nation. Its fundamental dilemma, highlighted in the declaration of independence as well as the American revolution itself, was the tension created in the full meaning of the phrase "government by the consent of the governed." The American revolution, after all, was nothing if not a violent rejection of the very idea of government without such consent. But such consent, as reflected in Washington's idea of reciprocal loyalties, was itself a new kind of "Americanized social contract," forged not just by obedience to its laws, but also through a consensus shaped by principles promoted in its founding documents -- all of which were expressed through the nation's printed materials. Thus as a result of this deeper concern, the declaration of independence and other founding documents became canonical tracts that shaped the nation's personality and reified the American polity through its civic institutions. The nation acquired a unique personality as it legitimized its institutions through the public consensus forged by the printed interpretation of the phrase "consent of the governed." In the end then, this book is about how a national civic and political culture evolved in the aftermath of the revolution and in the years immediately after Washington's demise. It is the story of how it and its institutions were built up around this, Washington's deeper concern. It shows how Washington's philosophy (which eventually became the centerpiece of Federalist Paper #10) became the "guiding hand" that resulted in the political and civic culture we have come to know. Said differently, an important aspect of the book is how Washington's philosophy as it was disseminated through printed materials became the vehicle for American national cohesion, and how that philosophy even today is linked to every aspect of America's cultural development. It is a sophisticated book full of nuances and cannot be speed read. It requires considerable reflection and cogitation and thus in the early going must be read carefully or the key points developed later in the book can be missed. Put simply, it is quite difficult reading. My own primary concern for buying the book was to get to the inherent contradictions of Washington's philosophy as it embraced and tried to justify slavery. Sadly, as was the case with Lincoln and Jefferson as well as the rest of Virginia's founding quartet, Washington's position also left large gapping moral holes that could not be "squared" or resolved within the revolutionary logic that granted full freedom only to white men. In the case of each of these founding fathers, the justifications for the continuation of slavery in the face of calls for freedom for white men only, and indeed the racism that was its progeny, this perversion of his philosophy, reflected a moral poverty that cannot be easily explained away. To a man, their rationalizations could not, and still cannot withstand independent or careful moral scrutiny. Despite this, "In the Name of the Father" is an eminently readable and important book linking George Washington's political philosophy in the early republic, his justifications for slavery, and the power of popular print culture in fashioning American nationalism. Four stars

How did people in our country-North and South, East and West-come to share a remarkably durable and consistent common vision of what it meant to be an American in the first fifty years after the Revolution? How did the nation respond to the problem of slavery in a republic? In the Name of the Father immerses us in the rich, riotous world of

what François Furstenberg calls civic texts, the patriotic words and images circulating through every corner of the country in newspapers and almanacs, books and primers, paintings and even the most homely of domestic ornaments. We see how the leaders of the founding generation became "the founding fathers," how their words, especially George Washington's, became America's sacred scripture. And we see how the civic education they promoted is impossible to understand outside the context of America's increasing religiosity. *In the Name of the Father* is filled with vivid stories of American print culture, including a wonderful consideration of the first great American hack biographer cum bookseller, Parson Weems, author of the first blockbuster Washington biography. But François Furstenberg's achievement is not limited to showing what all these civic texts were and how they infused Americans with a national spirit: how they created what Abraham Lincoln so famously called "the mystic chords of memory." He goes further to show how the process of defining the good citizen in America was complicated and compromised by the problem of slavery. Ultimately, we see how reconciling slavery and republican nationalism would have fateful consequences that haunt us still, in attitudes toward the socially powerless that persist in America to this day

From Publishers Weekly Starred . How were the ideals that were articulated in America's founding documents—freedom, democracy and government based on the consent of the governed—disseminated to the nation? That question animates this extraordinary new study by Furstenberg, an assistant professor of history at the Université de Montréal, which shows how popular print—broadsides, newspaper columns, schoolbooks, sermons—taught citizens "liberal and republican values," and ultimately "create[d] a nation." Thus Furstenberg devotes a chapter to Mason Weems's bestselling early biography of Washington: in addition to originating the famous cheery tree story, Weems taught a generation of Americans subtle stories about nationalism, virtue and piety. Indeed, Washington—or, rather, images of Washington—became central to American political education. In reading Washington's farewell address aloud to the family when it was reprinted, year after year, in the local newspaper, or in hanging his portrait on the dining room wall, Americans were expressing their consent to be governed by the government Washington presided over. In the deluge of founding father books, Furstenberg's blend of high-brow intellectual history and popular culture studies stands out; rather than lionize Washington, it advances an important argument about his role in shaping American political identity. Bw illus. (June 26) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist When George Washington decided to return to private life after his second term as president, he presided over a theoretical rather than an actual nation. Most citizens viewed their primary allegiance as owed to their state. Sectional feelings were strong, reflecting the vast cultural and economic differences; secession was on the minds of many, but that sentiment came from the west and northeast rather than the south. What the Founding Fathers called "factionalism" was intense, as Federalists and Republicans raged at each other. Finally, the institution of slavery seemed to mock American pretensions about a nation founded upon "consent of the governed." Furstenberg illustrates how Americans forged a sense of national identity out of these disparate elements. Utilizing civic texts (including the Declaration of Independence and Washington's farewell address), newspaper articles, and even paintings, he describes the slow but inexorable march toward a vision of what constituted an American identity. His treatment of slavery is particularly informative, as he asserts that the mental gymnastics required to reconcile slavery and republican principles would have devastating consequences. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved Extraordinary . . . In the deluge of founding father books, Furstenberg's blend of high-brow intellectual history and popular culture studies stands out. (Publishers Weekly, starred review) A profoundly important book for anyone interested in the origins of the American Republic. (Ira Berlin, former president of the Organization of American Historians)