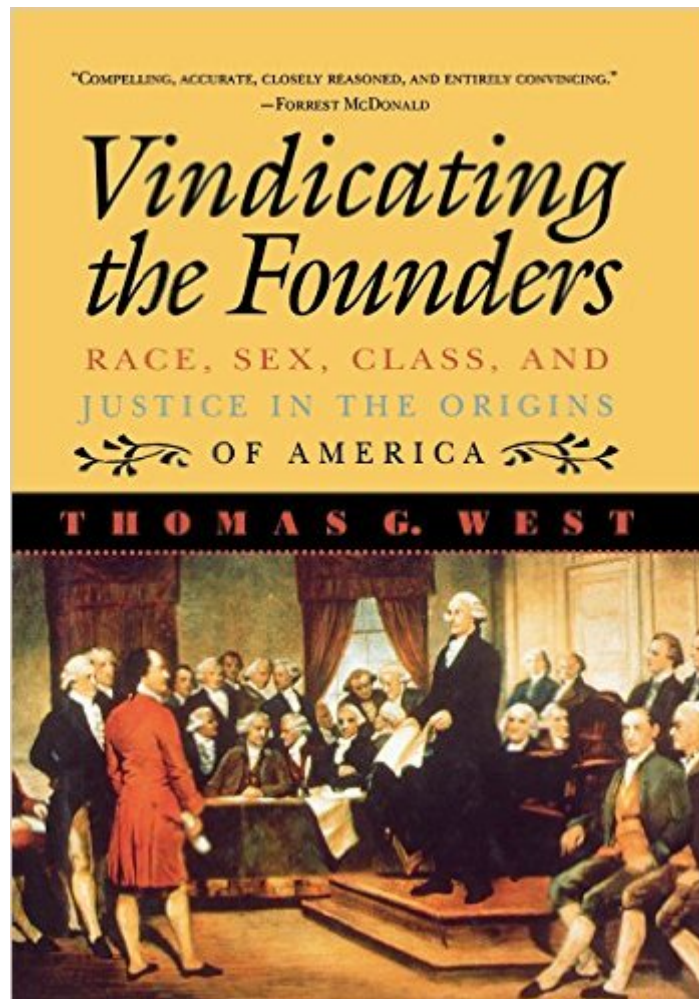


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Vindicating The Founders: Race, Sex, Class, And Justice In The Origins Of America



Synopsis

According to the conventional wisdom of our time, our nation's Founders were guilty of racism, sexism, and elitism. They were hypocrites who failed to live up to their own enlightened principles. The fact that Washington and Jefferson held slaves is taken as definitive proof that they never really believed "all men are created equal." It is also widely asserted that women, even after the American Revolution, enjoyed virtually no rights, and that the poor and property-less were denied the basic tenets of democratic participation. Observing that our understanding of the Founders so profoundly influences our opinion of contemporary America, Thomas West demonstrates why the Founders were indeed sincere in their belief of universal human rights and in their commitment to democracy. More importantly, this landmark book explains why their views, and particularly the constitutional order they created, are still worthy of our highest respect. In a straightforward style, West debunks numerous widely held myths about the Founders' political thought. He contrasts the Founders' ideas of liberty and equality with today's, concluding that contemporary notions of liberalism bear almost no resemblance to the concepts originally articulated by the Founders. This controversial, convincing, and highly original book is important reading for everyone concerned about the origins, present, and future of the American experiment in self government.

Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; First Edition edition (August 28, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0847685160

ISBN-13: 978-0847685165

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.8 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (26 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #135,488 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #115 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Political Science > Constitutions](#) #320 in [Books > History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding](#) #1135 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > United States](#)

Customer Reviews

It is a crime that the founders of America are dismissed because they are represented as failing to meet our present PC standards of faux morality. This terrific book takes on every PC misconception

about them and sets the record straight. While never presenting them as marble pillars of morality, the author puts all of the issues in their proper context and demonstrates clearly the intelligence, morality, and rightness of our founders. One of the most famous of the old canards that you will still hear is that the founders only considered slaves to be 3/5 of a human being because it says so right there in the Constitution. How sad that misunderstanding and misrepresentation is. Because each state was given a number of representatives based upon the number of residents, the issue was whom do you count. You have to first ask yourself whom the representatives from the slave holding states would represent. The slaves? Of course not! So, if the rights of the slaves were not going to be protected, to give their slaveholders the ability to count those slaves as people and thereby become over-represented in Congress would actually work against interests of those people trapped in slavery. Those opposing slavery wanted the slaves to remain uncounted for representation. The slaveholders wanted them to count as a full person (does that mean the slaveholders cared about the human rights of the slaves more than the abolitionists?). The compromise was to count them as 3/5. However, it is essential to remember that those who wanted the slaves counted as a whole person were uninterested in the rights of those human beings and those that wanted them uncounted actually had the interests of the slaves more in mind.

Most of the negative reviews of this work cite its author's being a follower of the conservative University of Chicago political philosopher, Leo Strauss. Though I despise Leo Strauss as much as they might, their criticisms are off-base, because West here documents that conservative interpretations of the U.S. Constitution are false. He documents that the predominant intentions of America's founders were progressive: condemning slavery and seeking its abolition, supportive of equal rights for Blacks and Whites, supportive of equal rights for women and men, supportive of voting rights for the poor, etc. Leo Strauss's support for Plato's "philosopher kings" reigning over a powerless deceived citizenry is alien to West's book. West's documentation is sound. His criticisms of other historians, even including of liberal ones such as Charles Beard and Gordon Wood, are on the mark, but will inevitably offend the vast majority of historians, who have built upon falsehoods they've derived from such historians. This book is well organized, as a topic-by-topic critique of previous historians' misrepresentations of the supposed conservatism of people such as Thomas Jefferson -- whom, for example, West convincingly documents did believe in equal rights for Blacks and Whites, notwithstanding Gordon Wood's having asserted to the exact contrary. Though Leo Strauss was an extreme conservative, West has provided here a book which argues, in a more thorough way than has previously been done, for interpreting the original intent of the U.S.

Constitution as having been progressive.

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