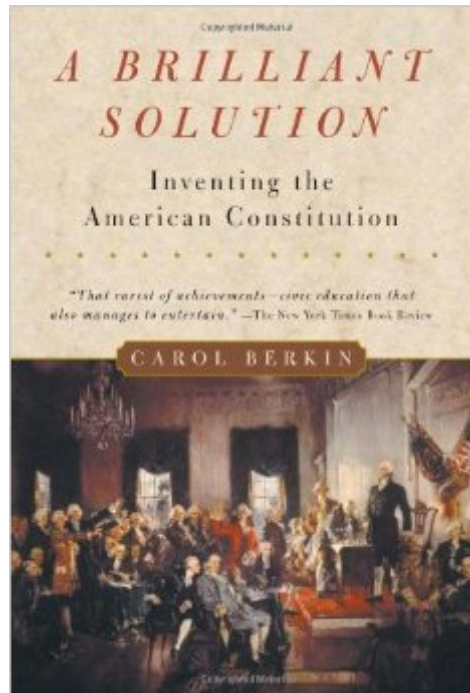


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A Brilliant Solution: Inventing The American Constitution



Synopsis

A rich narrative portrait of post-revolutionary America and the men who shaped its political future. Though the American Revolution is widely recognized as our nation's founding story, the years immediately following the war—when our government was a disaster and the country was in a terrible crisis—were in fact the most crucial in establishing the country's independence. The group of men who traveled to Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 had no idea what kind of history their meeting would make. But all their ideas, arguments, and compromises—from the creation of the Constitution itself, article by article, to the insistence that it remain a living, evolving document—laid the foundation for a government that has surpassed the founders' greatest hopes. Revisiting all the original historical documents of the period and drawing from her deep knowledge of eighteenth-century politics, Carol Berkin opens up the hearts and minds of America's founders, revealing the issues they faced, the times they lived in, and their humble expectations of success.

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; 1 edition (October 20, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0156028727

ISBN-13: 978-0156028721

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars. See all reviews (48 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #175,509 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Books > Teens >

Education & Reference > History > United States > Colonial & Revolutionary Periods #117

in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Political Science > Constitutions

#439 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding

Customer Reviews

Like so many elements of history, there is rampant ignorance or misunderstanding among the American public regarding the origins of our Constitution. Sadly, a significant majority surely have no concept whatsoever of the failed initial attempt at a United States government. More significantly, among the historically literate outside academic circles, there has been a common misperception of our Framers as a set of omniscient statesmen who shared a clear view of the ideal government and crafted a structure that remains unchanged in its essentials to this day. The purpose of Berkin's

book is, through a focus on the papers of constitutional convention delegates, to provide insight into the reality behind these myths. Her theses can be summarized primarily as follows: 1) the process by which the constitution was written was one involving sharply differing views, particularly as to the sharing of power between the individual states and the national government, substantial uncertainty and pessimism regarding the document's capacity to forestall tyranny and a great deal of compromise from strongly held principles, and 2) the character of the current US federal government would astonish the Framers in certain areas, most notably in the greatly expanded powers of the presidency. Berkin makes a compelling case for both theses through her narrative discussion of the drivers behind the scheduling of the convention, the twisting progress of debate during the sixteen weeks in session, the fierce fight for ratification by the states and the inauguration of Washington as our first president. The major strength of the work is the illumination of the key roles played by delegates such as Gouverneur Morris, James Madison, James Wilson and Roger Sherman.

In light of current events that occurred after the turn of the century, the presidential election of 2000 and the US Pentagon and World Trade Center disaster, Carol Berkin laments on those events as well as her life as a historian, and responds by reflecting on the historical past with her book, *A BRILLIANT SOLUTION: INVENTING THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION*. She revisits the US Constitution with the present in mind, but reflects on the past with a critical eye. For example, Berkin asks one of the most frequently asked questions to arise in recent times, what would the Founding Fathers do? Berkin succinctly provides answers with her examination of the Founding Fathers and state delegates who helped comprise and create one of the most significant documents in American history. The book is not meant to be a comprehensive examination, but a concise narrative that describes the inception of the Constitution, which began with the Articles of Confederation, and includes a vicissitude of discussion, which reveals the impassioned activity and skepticism that occurred in the writing of the document that even the Founders did not think would succeed. With her dramatic discussion surrounding the events of the writing of the Constitution, Berkin contains a character sketch of the key framers that intimately describes their intellect as well as their quirks and eccentricities. From personal squabbles to triumphant cooperation, it is amazing that everyone came out of the experience alive. The biographical sketches after her discussion spotlights each delegate and their unique personal qualities. Most of the delegates attained their education through prominent universities at home and abroad, and came from distinguishable families.

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