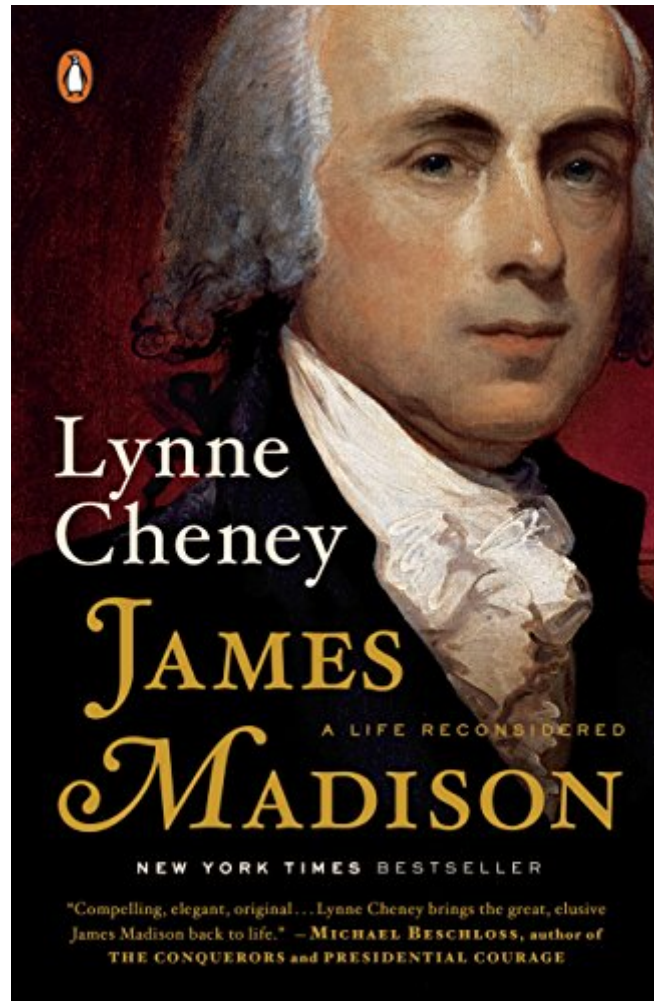


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James Madison: A Life Reconsidered



Synopsis

A major new biography of the fourth president of the United States by New York Times bestselling author Lynne Cheney. Lin-Manuel Miranda's play "Hamilton" has reignited interest in the founding fathers; it features James Madison among its vibrant cast of characters. This majestic new biography of James Madison explores the astonishing story of a man of vaunted modesty who audaciously changed the world. Among the Founding Fathers, Madison was a true genius of the early republic. Outwardly reserved, Madison was the intellectual driving force behind the Constitution and crucial to its ratification. His visionary political philosophy and rationale for the union of states "so eloquently presented in The Federalist papers" helped shape the country Americans live in today. Along with Thomas Jefferson, Madison would found the first political party in the country's history, the Democratic Republicans. As Jefferson's secretary of state, he managed the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the size of the United States. As president, Madison led the country in its first war under the Constitution, the War of 1812. Without precedent to guide him, he would demonstrate that a republic could defend its honor and independence "and remain a republic still. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Many years ago I read Ralph Ketcham's biography of Madison with (at least at that time) its somewhat unusual gray cover. The book presented an image of Madison analogous to the cover. Ketcham's biography is a scholarly richly detailed study of Madison's life but I left the book not really knowing Madison as a human being and with a sense of the man as brilliant and incisive but not a particularly interesting person. Lynne Cheney's biography is a completely different reading experience. She is an excellent writer who grabs the reader's attention and never lets go. Cheney not only gives us the philosopher and political genius that was Madison but, through his letters, an excellent sense of the man. Madison was a husband to one of the most dynamic women in early America and a deeply close friend to one of the most controversial figures, Jefferson. Cheney lays out those relationships in rich detail. While I had to force myself at times to finish Ketcham's book, never once did this book leave me cold. It is an exceptional biography. Another advantage of Cheney's book is that it provides a strong counterweight to the portrayal of Madison in Chernow's biography of Hamilton. In that book Madison is quite consistently (after 1790) portrayed negatively because of his hostile relationship to Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury. This book gives you the other side. Cheney explains the issues clearly and fairly. None of the other Founding Fathers lived as long as Madison or went through so many changes in roles, from author of the Bill of Rights and much of the Constitution itself to Congressman to President. Madison's failures and inconsistencies, from his slave ownership to his problems as President, are here put into context. Cheney nowhere justifies Madison's weaknesses but lets the reader see the development and historical issues surrounding them, often through Madison's own words. This is an enlightening book not just about Madison but about life in colonial America. Though I had some concerns prior to reading the book about the author's own political context, there is absolutely no political bias in this book. If the reader is looking for a book that humanizes one of the greatest minds in early American history, this is it. It is one of the best historical biographies on the market. I highly recommend it.

I'm only up to page 155 right now in this book, but I am liking everything so far and no reason to believe the balance of the book would be any different. If the people who laid the foundation of our country, and the forming of our system of government itself is of interest to you, than this book will

not disappoint you. Lynne Cheney is an accomplished author, and this is the first book authored by her I have ever read. Her style is engaging and she explains in modern language and terms, when necessary, the recorded thoughts and words of the founders as they deliberated back and forth the writing of the Constitution, which is where I am right now in the book. Her writing is not dry or stuffy, so you will find yourself engage in the story whenever you pick up the book to read for a spell. I seem to recall from a formal review of the book by someone who said she loses objectivity at times and defends Madison due to inherent hero-worship on her part. I have not sensed that, so far at least. She states Madison's beliefs and philosophies rather matter-of-factly, as she does with the other founders who shared different ideas. She explains the opposing viewpoints and obviously relates what ultimately took place, and lets the reader decide if the final choice were right, wrong, or could have been better. It is a good read altogether, and I haven't been the slightest bit bored with or lost in her commentary.

Very informative. There were many things that I didn't know about James Madison. This is a bit of a tough read; Ms Cheney tended to use language from that period to clarify quotes. Keep your dictionary handy.

Bravo, Lynne Cheney! In this readable book, the author shows James Madison's heavy involvement in the creation of the Constitution and Bill of Rights. He also wrote a number of the Federalist papers, late 1700's essays on the role of government. The book chronicles Madison's political career from member of the Continental Congress to U.S. Congressman to chief advisor to our first president, George Washington to secretary of state under president Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's administration made the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the size of the United States. Finally, Madison became president, our fourth. He made the decision to go to war against Britain in the War of 1812, the first war involving the United States since the Revolution. The war included a naval attack on an American fort that resulted in Francis Scott Key's writing the poem that eventually became the words to our national anthem. After surviving a fierce battle "our flag was still there." This was an enormous flag with stars that were two feet wide. Later in the war, the British burned our nation's capital. The U.S. fought on, achieving a major victory at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. The book details how America was dis-respected during its early years with Britain, France and the North African Barbary pirates seizing or destroying our nation's ships. British sea captains would board American ships and impress some of the sailors into the British Navy. But over time the U.S. grew stronger and more confident, becoming an emerging power. Cheney also discusses

Madison's family life and the popularity and influence of his wife, Dolley. This is a engaging portrait of the early United States as told within the context of Madison's life.

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