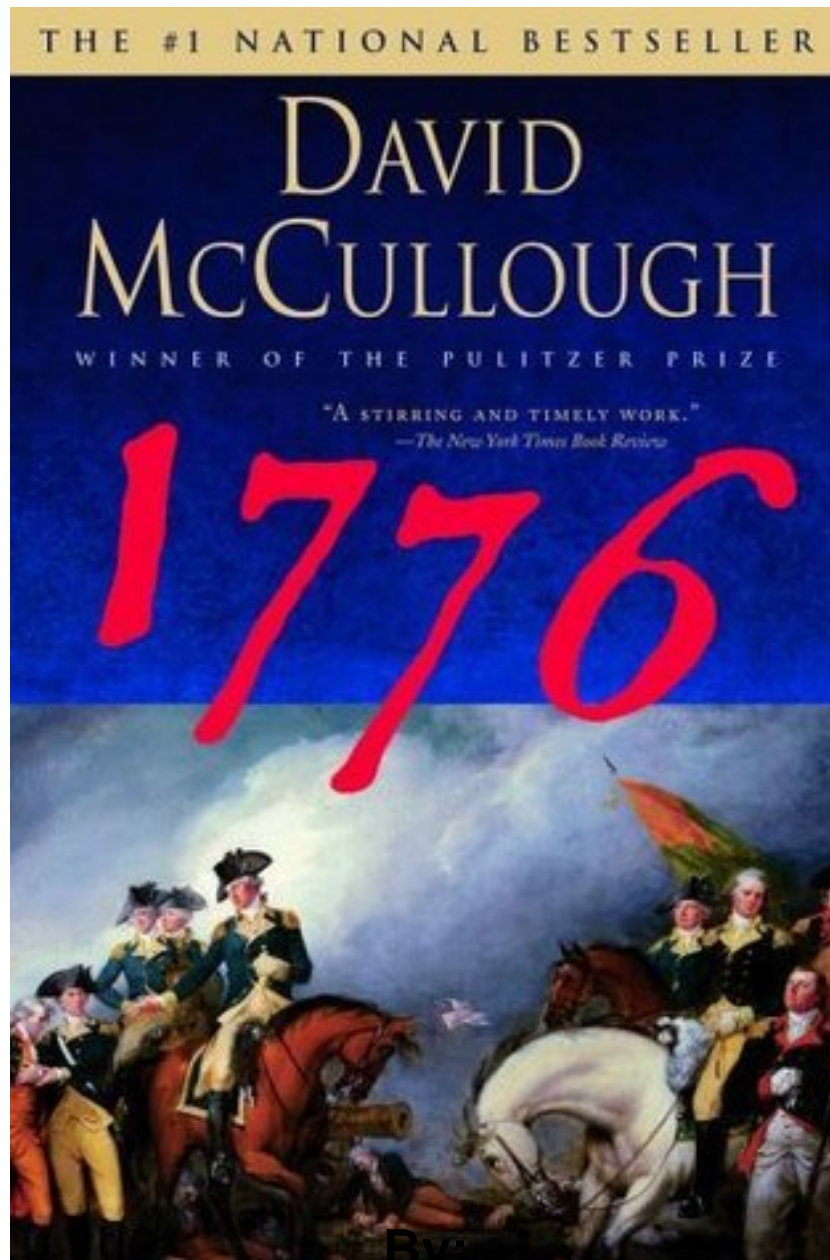


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By
David McCullough

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What people Say:

Diane

There are several reasons why I think this book is important, and it has a lot to do with the state of our schools. You've probably heard that public education in America is becoming more of a shambles each decade. I work at a college and often feel like I'm on the front lines of this battle. While we have a number of good students, we also have a fair number 18- and 19-year-olds who simply aren't prepared for higher education and who, if the economy weren't so degree-oriented, probably wouldn't

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is the overemphasis on standardized testing, especially as codified by the dreadful No Child Left Behind Act.

Both students and teachers have complained that high schools place so much emphasis on memorizing facts for the annual tests that it leaves little room for critical thinking, or interesting stories of history and literature, or anything else that makes learning fun and inspiring. I think this is a travesty, and it's not just the students who are being cheated – it is all of society, because without an educated citizenry we are lost.

We. Are. Lost.

Every time I see the title of McCullough's book,

, it reminds me of this issue because of an incident in a colleague's classroom. An English professor was making a point about how people today rely so much on their smartphones and the Internet that no one bothers to remember anything anymore because they assume they can just Google it. The professor pointed out that this lack of internal knowledge can hinder understanding and complex thinking. As an example he asked his students when America was founded.

Dead silence.

There were about 30 students in the class, and none of them knew. The professor said, "Seriously? You don't know when our country was founded?" After a few more moments of silence a student meekly raised his hand and said, "If we didn't have to memorize it for the test, we probably don't

know it."

Big sigh.

Will Byrnes

This is an interesting book that describes in personal detail the battles of the early revolution. We see George and company in Boston, New York City, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. McCullough paints portraits of the military leaders of those campaigns, Howe primarily, and Clinton for the Brits, Greene, Knox, GW and a handful of others for the Yanks. He shows us some of GW's correspondence and we learn of his disaffection for New Englanders. The troops were a rag tag bunch and George was constantl

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Jason Koivu

In

David McCullough captures the importance of that year's quintessential struggle for our country.

By focusing on this single year, as opposed to the entire war, McCullough is able to dissect more minutely the individual battles, turning points, specific leaders, and the result is one of the most humanistic depictions of George Washington I've ever read. Here he becomes more than mythic god of the American past, but rather a living, breathing, flawed man.

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Telescoping in on actions like The Battle of Long Island, oft overlooked in American Revolution text with a broader view, gives the reader a chance to appreciate the ebb and flow of the war, as the retreating Patriots fled the rushing sweep of the oncoming British force and turned what might have been their ultimate defeat into an amazing escape during the almost magical midnight evacuation of New York. Conjuring up such exciting scenes is McCullough's bread and butter.

While the American Revolution was not fought entirely on moralistic principles about freedom (many a "founding father" had a financial stake in this idea of independence), in view of the trials and deprivations suffered by those who fought in 1776, who's valor helped coin the phrase "The Spirit of '76", who can deny their pure motives? Even if you can't stomach such patriotism, you can at least admire the courage it must of taken to face such odds.

I've read McCullough before. His

Nate Cooley

David McCullough has again exceeded all expectations in his latest book, "1776." Like most historical narratives, the reader often knows the ending well in advance. In "1776", every reader had

to have expected that McCullough would close his book describing Washington's daring yet gallant crossing of the Delaware and the Continental Army's subsequent triumph at Trenton. Nevertheless, as I approached the end of the book I found myself anxiously awaiting that moment ... I literally read-on with ba

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David McCullough does a masterful job of describing with ease the events as they unfolded chronologically. Though as he does so, he more importantly provides acute analysis into the psyches of the main players. As much as this book was a narrative about the Continental Army from Bunker Hill, to Dorchester Heights, to Long Island and the Battle of Brooklyn, down through New Jersey and ultimately victory at Trenton, the book could have as easily been a biography of sorts about

, George Washington.

McCullough's portrait of Washington is not unlike others that have been popularly written. Expectedly, the book portrays our first president as a man of faith and stellar, quasi-consecrated leadership. At the same time though, McCullough is careful not to deify the General and provides keen insights into Washington's probable feelings of self-doubt and diffidence, especially after the nearly catastrophic and ego-piercing defeats at Brooklyn and Fort Mifflin. Furthermore, McCullough exposes the fact that those close to Washington, General Charles Lee and Joseph Reed, lost much confidence in the General after the Continental Army's retreat across the Hudson and down through New Jersey.

With all of this provided as a backdrop though, a true picture of George Washington - his character, his dominion, his authority - is brought into sharp focus through McCullough's description of the Army's treacherous but euphoric victory over the Hessians at Trenton. I could literally picture Washington's animation and feel his exuberance when in the face of a potential call to retreat, he exclaimed to those under his command, "It's a fine fox chase, my boys!" One can only imagine the scene of chaos that filled the streets on that early winter morning; yet it is easy to picture General Washington sitting atop his horse, jubilantly inciting his troops to action. At the same time, because of McCullough's adroit description of the sometimes lackadaisical and even distracted British Commander, William Howe, one can only imagine Howe's consternation when learning of the defeat of the hired Hessian helpers.

Having mentioned Commander Howe, I also appreciated McCullough's determination in devoting a large portion of the book to characterizing British personalities and actions. Too few authors of the Revolutionary Period spend enough time measuring what was going through the minds of the

British, the "enemy" at the time. Considering the fact that many living in the colonies during this period considered themselves loyal subjects of the King, it seems logical that a book describing the events of 1776 would adequately delve into British sentiment regarding the "rebels'" declaration of independence and the skirmishes and all-out war that followed. After all, the foot soldiers in the Continental Army were closely related, literally, to loyalists throughout the colonies.

In illustrating the overall British ethos, especially that of the King's Army, McCullough repeatedly denotes periods during the war where the Continental Army was and should have been on the cusp of ruin but for the seemingly high-minded haughtiness of the British leaders; most notably the aforementioned Commander Howe. Howe is painted as a somewhat apathetic and listless commander, severely lacking the killer instinct possessed by so many other leaders of the time on both sides. McCullough interestingly notes the stark difference between Commander William Howe and both his brother, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, and General Henry Clinton. Had General Clinton's thinking been adopted, the Continental Army probably never would have reached Dorchester Heights in the dead of night and thus would probably never have made it out of Boston.

In "1776", David McCullough has closely matched the superiority "John Adams" and his numerous other historical works. David McCullough truly is a "master of the art of narrative history." Like both of the late Stephen Ambrose and the late David Halberstam, David McCullough has become, in my mind, a national treasure.

Josh

McCullough's "1776" is a book about discovery: the force within oneself, one body of people, to be free without the anxiety of what it means to govern themselves independently.

Democracy was what they yearned for. The majority of the American people wanted to unite and unite they did. McCullough discusses the trials and tribulations of the first full year of the American Revolutionary War in the north to northeastern part of the colonies with clear and concise language. He uses many quotes and p

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reader in the streets of Boston, on the battlefields of Trenton and Princeton and in the heart of the early Patriot; that rag-tag farmer, blacksmith, carpenter and other highly inexperienced soldiers that fought and died for

As this book speaks about 1776 in general, it also discusses George Washington, the General of the Continental Army (the name of the American army) and later, founding father and first President of the United States. McCullough isn't biased, by any means. He shows Washington's ability to lead an army with his optimism towards the campaign and his uplifting oratory on topics of freedom, but also shows him to be indecisive in matters (as with giving up Fort Mifflin and Fort Mifflin, along with not covering the Jamaica Pass in the Battle of Long Island which was a decisive victory for the British) due to his inexperience at leading any army, much less a battalion.

At times, it feels like a biography of Washington and that year of his life rather than about the battles and the importance of what they signified, but it was still an interesting and engaging read. I personally hadn't read up on the "Revolution" since my early years in school and it was nice to revisit things that I had forgotten and learned a few things as well.