

Good example of
research paper on
david mcculloch's
john adams vs
sherman edwards...

[Countries](#), [England](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Compare how 2 different authors used the same historical data and the same events in 2 different ways. Describe how accurate each of these author's works were to the real event and what they had changed.

Introduction:

Both David McCulloch's 'John Adams' and Sherman Edwards Petersburg's 1776 are works of art which deal with the Founding Fathers and the American War for Independence. Whilst the former is a biography in the grand manner (as we are used to by McCulloch, the latter is a musical which revives the spirit of that important year and is full of interesting and intriguing turns.

John Adams was an intriguing and interesting character who was rather enigmatic in more ways than one. Coming from a rather strict puritanical background, he was schooled in the virtues of honesty and integrity from a very early age. This is no more evident than in the part of the book which deals with the goings on of the Continental Congress at Philadelphia and here we observe Adams at close quarters wheeling and dealing but at the same time maintaining an honest line. McCulloch provides us with several important details about Adams' personal life with his relationship with his wife being crucially important and featuring countless times in the book. In fact, McCulloch confirms that Adams 'had no liking for grand oratorical flourishes'. On his part Adams once told his wife Abigail in a letter that he had no truck with affectation and would instead prefer to rely on the art of persuasion as well as eloquence to prove his point.

"We shall be driven to the necessity of declaring ourselves independent and we ought now to be employed in preparing a plan for the confederation of

the colonies and treaties to be proposed to foreign powers together with a declaration of independence. Foreign powers cannot be expected to acknowledge us, till we have acknowledged ourselves and taken our station among them as a sovereign power and an independent nation” (McCulloch p 99).

This stirring speech delivered by Adam enables us to observe him at close quarters as he went about convincing his fellow Congress members that it was useless to remain haggling over insignificant details but to go ahead with declaring the nation independent. In fact the author here provides us with an important snapshot of Adams’ capabilities both as an orator as well as a persuasive advocate. For Adams, the structure of a government was a subject of passionate interest which raised a fundamental question on the reality of human nature, the power of politics and the good society which he always wanted to achieve. This was an important concern for him and had also propelled a considerable amount of his reading as well as the exchange of ideas with those whose judgement he most respected and this obviously included his wife Abigail who was beside him during thick and thin. It would also be pertinent to observe some of her words in a letter she wrote to Adams in the year 1775;

“ The great fish swallow up the small and he who is most strenuous for the rights of people when vested with power, is an eager after the pregoaritives of government. You tell me of degrees of perfection to which human nature is capable of arriving, and I believe it, but at the same time lament that our admiration should arrive from the scarcity of the instances’. (p 101).

Here we can observe at close quarters the intimate relationship between

Adams and his wife who was herself a keen observer of political events that were going on. So it is important to note that the crux on which Adams' work is built upon are the vast archive of letters which he analyses in minute detail and which serve as a literal goldmine to reveal the person in all his stature and personality. Although we cannot be sure that the letters are all true in what they state, we can get a pretty clear picture of most of the proceedings that went on between the two senior Adams.

The information is quite different in Edwards' Petersburg 1776. Here we have a parody of events which led up to the signing of the actual Declaration of Independence but this does not mean in any way that they were denigrated by this portrayal. Occasionally Adams has been portrayed as being stuffy and without much humanity but these change completely in Sherman's portrayal of things. The musical's librettist Peter Stone also commented quite heavily on the nature of the musical where he recalled that ' John Adams and the others were not going to be treated as Gods in any way. Although there was reverence and respect between the politicians this does not mean that there wasn't any familiarity between them'. It is also intriguing that the main character in the musical is John Adams himself with the plot focuses around the wheeling and dealing to persuade all the Thirteen Colonies to sign up for independence. Although Abigail Adams retains an important role in the musical, she is certainly not as present in the drama as she is in McCulloch's book which almost allows her equal treatment with her husband.

The comparisons between book and play are instructive. In McCulloch's portrayal we come across a very sympathetic and gregarious John Adams who is also very much in tune with what is going on whilst in the play he is

initially portrayed as rather disliked and very pesky person in several ways. He is constantly asked to sit down and shut up and even flees the Chamber where the discussions are taking place at one point. Abigail Adams is also watered down as a historical personality where she is occasionally viewed with disdain and ridicule especially when she is asked if women are contributing to the war effort.

It would also be interesting to provide a historical background to the proceedings that were going on at the time and which had culminated in the famous 'Boston Tea Party'. The American Revolution had been going on for quite some time as taxation without representation was quite a contentious issue in the colonies in the mid 1770's. Naturally the British sought to impress their point of view on the colonists with rather brute force and this undoubtedly led to substantial friction between the ruling class and the colonial people.

The situation got worse with the Boston Tea Party when the colonists dumped British products in the sea to demonstrate their rebellion against unjust taxation without representation where they felt that their natural rights were being impinged upon. This triggered off the war where the British initially gained the upper hand although slowly and through inspired leadership, the Americans managed to actually win the war against superior forces and quite unbalanced military odds. Adams was an important figure in all this and McCulloch grants him special roles especially in the way in which he skillfully conducted government in Washington's absence and kept the Continental Army always a step ahead from insolvency.

Initially the British forces routed the ill organised and ill equipped American

colonists and easily conquered New York and other positions of strategic importance leaving the Americans on the brink of defeat. Several governors in important states such as New Jersey remained loyal to the Crown and this put added pressure on the colonists who appeared pretty leaderless and without much initiative.

Initially as well, British naval superiority managed to control practically all the important American seaports creating a situation where a naval blockade was the order of the day. Naturally this continued to put added pressure on the colonists who were at their wits end to come up with some sort of counterattacking measure, that is until George Washington entered the fray. Pressure was growing internally in Britain as the war was costing huge amounts of money to the Exchequer and apart from that, King George III was quite unpopular with the public, especially due to his belligerent stance towards the Americans. Additionally a considerable number of other nations began aiding the Americans in their quest for liberty and these included the French and the Dutch who provided large sums of money to the independence cause although this eventually bankrupted France's economy and led to the French Revolution.

The British also presumed that the 'colonial rabble' would be quickly suppressed but they reckoned without the courage and innovation of most of these patriots who were rather adept at guerilla and smash and grab warfare. In fact in the early battles of Lexington and Concord, the British won with ease but the Americans learnt from their mistakes and quickly began to adapt them to the battlefield. The coming of age of battle hardened commanders such as George Washington and Patrick Henry also aided the

colonists cause no end and created a situation where the Americans could fight their own battles according to their skills and territorial advantages. The British also employed African Americans and native American Indians to fight against the colonists to various results. More often than not, these forces were quite unreliable and although the British offered them promises of liberty and independence as well as land, the fighting spirit of the Indians especially could not really be counted upon. As always the British underestimated the fighting prowess of the colonists who were growing from strength to strength with each day that passed.

A distinct advantage which the colonists held over the British was their knowledge of the territory, something which they used constantly and regularly. Thus in battles where the British initially gained the upper hand, they were always outgunned and outfoxed in the end by the Americans who retreated further into their own territory and then made that regular counterattack which eventually won them the battle.

Washington also employed some outstanding military tactics which were also crucial and decisive in various encounters. His crossing of the Delaware River when it was frozen over with ice remains one of the high points of the whole war and was crucial to enable the colonists to gain the upper hand. The territorial advantage was also used during some lighter skirmishes and as the American began to receive help from other foreign nations, the situation improved. French and Dutch troops also fought alongside the colonists and helped them with military tactics which eventually enabled the colonists to outgun and outfox the British on several counts.

The contrast between Sherman and McCulloch could not be greater

especially in the way the negotiations for the Declaration of Independence take place. Scene Two is particularly interesting when Adams confronts Benjamin Franklin and Richard Lee who seem to be quite confident that they would make a better job than Adams himself is doing. The dislike and obnoxiousness which seem to permeate Adams are key factors in his lack of success, at least according to Franklin, Sherman is very liberal with historical fact here since there is not much evidence that Adams was so terribly disliked.

The Articles of Confederation were indeed important instruments since they created a basis to form a government which included checks and balances, something which was very advanced for the time and notably absent in other countries. The innovative approach included a three tier government which gave certain independence to the states but at the same time, the system of President, House of Representatives and Senate was radically innovative since it allowed neither branch of the Executive or Legislative gain control. This is clearly a result of the protracted negotiations undertaken by Adams and the other members of Congress which are personified in the book by McCulloch although in an opposing sense, Sherman does take considerable liberties with historical accuracy.

In a sense this all started with the Constitutional Convention which took place in Philadelphia and which laid the groundwork for a written Constitution which is still in force today. Perhaps the greatest powers of the government under the newly drafted Articles of Confederation was the ability to conduct business with other countries as well as address local state problems which were always on the agenda.

However there were weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation which did not always create a proper basis for effectively governing. First and foremost was the limiting of the states to between two and seven members in the House of Representatives – this did not allow for the rapid population expansion which took place in later years although the Founding fathers could be excused for not predicting this.

Another problem was that under these articles, the central government's power was drastically limited. Although the Congress appointed by the Confederation could take decisions, it drastically lacked the power to enforce. In fact, the actual implementation of a large number of these decisions which also included the modification of said Articles could only be made by the unanimous approval of all the thirteen states and their respective legislatures.

The speed with which the play 1776 develops is almost hair raising as at the end the protracted negotiations provide a workable compromise which resulted in the eventual Declaration of Independence. Although not everyone was pleased with the outcome it was certainly a great achievement. The role of John Adams may have been compromised in some parts but in others he shone through and this is perhaps also the essence of McCulloch's book.

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