

Portrait of america by oates



In the book Portrait of America by Oates, the founding fathers are portrayed as ordinary men in an extra ordinary world circumstance. Most of our founding fathers, I write now as an ordinary American citizen, were just ordinary everyday men cast, by circumstance, in an unordinary role.

Benjamin Franklin was a self-made individual. As a young printer's apprentice, he was strong and athletic. He was able to “ carry a large form of type in each hand, while others carried but one in both hands. He was a superb athlete and a proficient swimmer.

He proceeded to acquire a fortune and propel himself to the top of his peers. He was an enterprising newspaper editor and publisher, a tireless promoter of cultural institutes a great scientist, America's first, and a great statesman. Older than the other founding fathers by a generation, he proved to be the most radical, most devious and the most complicated. For instance, although raised as a Puritan, he was also a hedonist, and had a liberal sexual code for himself.

Born in Boston in 1706, the youngest son of a youngest son, and a sibling of twelve, he was a vegetarian before it was fashionable. He did not like to hurt anyone and avoided hostilities. On a voyage when the ship was becalmed, the crew caught cod in the idle moment, when there was nothing else to eat; he enjoyed a cod feast, and then promptly returned to vegetarianism when he landed. Explaining it he said one to be a “ reasonable creature” most times. Franklin was a happy extrovert who enjoyed the company of women, was gregarious, a happy extrovert, and self-assured.

He became an abolitionist though late in his life. Franklin was above all, basically pragmatic. Samuel Adams was born a Calvinist in Boston, Massachusetts. Samuel Adams saw England's government as venal, her manners effeminate and corrupt, and her religion popish. He saw the Revolution as a method of saving the colonies from such a fate and as a method of saving any virtues inherent in America. By 1765 three dominant strains were fixed in his character. Puritanism, political acumen, and hatred for British rule. He was a member of the Caucus club.

Allied with this club was Merchant's club, the Masons, and the Sons of Liberty all politically active. He misquoted the Royal Governor and Royal tax collector. He continued to be seditious in his behavior by fomenting whatever mischief he could to the detriment of England. He was an implacable enemy of England. All of his life his personal finances were in shambles. His father loaned him a thousand pounds to start a business-any business. Money ran through his fingers like water. His inherited malt business from his father when his father died, became a shambles.

When he went to Philadelphia for the Assembly that was to become the fledgling Congress, friends had to put the money together to outfit him for the journey. Years later, when the Declaration of Independence was signed, he was one of the few who after those many long years was not hoping for compromise. During the War for Independence, he maintained his frugality and dourness and drab ways. He was the one original members of the signers of the Declaration of Independence that remained in Philadelphia to sign the Articles of Confederation.

After that event, he went home to Boston. The Constitution reflected the characters of the original framers in that: 1) the Constitution was ironed out through long deliberation by the delegates. All through the young nation's history, decisions came only after long and sometimes contentious debate. This was never truer than this convention's lasting through a hot summer. All delegates had come to the Convention from state assemblies after long deliberations in their home districts; 2) the deliberations were utter secret.

Through rules of nothing being written down and published, and guards posted outside the Assembly chamber, and nothing written, allowed to be taken out of the hall that was not scrutinized secrecy was maintained. Both of the preceding discussed men were great secret keepers. They went about their daily government affairs with the utmost secrecy. Sam Adams was almost innately secretive whereas Jefferson learned to be secretive at an early age. Adams was a prim and proper Calvinist whereas Jefferson was a Puritan but decidedly lax one; 3) both wanted to do away with any form of government that could remotely be referred to England in any way.

Adams hated England with a passion, whereas Jefferson was a pragmatist. One had just defeated England, why would you set up another kingdom? ; 4) the Constitution was a product of all the citizens not the states that had sent delegates-a sentiment that both men could support; 5) Both men had objections to different parts of the document, but consented to the document, in that what was written and read to the public could not be improved upon by any further version.

The Constitution was a hodgepodge, bound together by common values. A feeling both men could understand and lend support to. It was dedicated to the ideals of American independence and liberty and a conviction that a strong federal government was needed to safeguard those ideals. Even back then, state's rights were brought up but quickly put down in favor of union. America was always a nation of contentious people, who in times of need come together to unite and form a joint front against the conceived enemy.

The framers of the Constitution were just such people. Although from many, many diverse backgrounds they came together, to jointly form a more perfect union. The two men profiled were two such men. Both men were from the North, but each different from the other. One Franklin, a very good businessman, the other Adams, did not have the acumen and killer instinct. One was a statesman; the other was only an agitator. One was a man of the world, the other a man of his upbringing and formative childhood. (Oates, 2003)