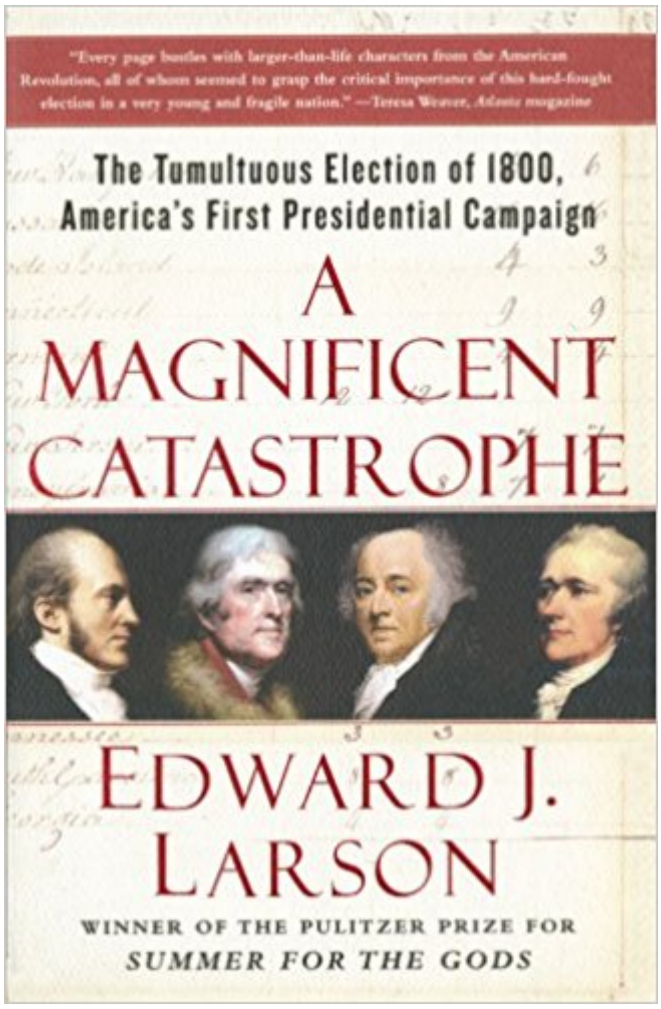
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A Magnificent Catastrophe: The Tumultuous Election Of 1800, America's First Presidential Campaign



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Synopsis

>"They could write like angels and scheme like demons." So begins Pulitzer Prize-winner Edward Larson’s masterful account of the wild ride that was the 1800 presidential electionÃ¢â ¬â •an election so convulsive and so momentous to the future of American democracy that Thomas Jefferson would later dub it "America’s second revolution." This was America’s first true presidential campaign, giving birth to our two-party system and indelibly etching the lines of partisanship that have so profoundly shaped American politics ever since. The contest featured two of our most beloved Founding Fathers, once warm friends, facing off as the heads of their two still-forming partiesÃ¢â ¬â •the hot-tempered but sharp-minded John Adams, and the eloquent yet enigmatic Thomas JeffersonÃ¢â ¬â •flanked by the brilliant tacticians Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, who later settled their own differences in a duel. The country was descending into turmoil, reeling from the terrors of the French Revolution, and on the brink of war with France. Blistering accusations flew as our young nation was torn apart along party lines: Adams and his elitist Federalists would squelch liberty and impose a British-style monarchy; Jefferson and his radically democratizing Republicans would throw the country into chaos and debase the role of religion in American life. The stakes could not have been higher. As the competition heated up, other founders joined the frayÃ¢â ¬â •James Madison, John Jay, James Monroe, Gouverneur Morris, George Clinton, John Marshall, Horatio Gates, and even George WashingtonÃ¢â ¬â •some of them emerging from retirement to respond to the political crisis gripping the nation and threatening its future. Drawing on unprecedented, meticulous research of the day-to-day unfolding drama, from diaries and letters of the principal players as well as accounts in the fast-evolving partisan press, Larson vividly re-creates the mounting tension as one state after another voted and the press had the lead passing back and forth. The outcome remained shrouded in doubt long after the voting ended, and as Inauguration Day approached, Congress met in closed session to resolve the crisis. In its first great electoral challenge, our fragile experiment in constitutional democracy hung in the balance. > is history writing at its evocative best: the riveting story of the last great contest of the founding period.

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Customer Reviews

John Dossett lends a melodious and erudite tone to this book about the most disastrous presidential election in American history: the 1800 contest between incumbent John Adams and his polymath v-p, populist Thomas Jefferson. Dossett's Jefferson speaks with a slow, suave Virginia drawl, his elegant voice bathing in the rich words that flowed from the founder's pen. His Adams sounds blunt, curmudgeonly and judgmentalÃ¢â ¬â •as Larson often portrays him. The abridgment narrows the focus of the 1800 election to a horse race between these two very different men, who saw their friendship torn asunder and, many years after the election, pieced together again. Despite the abridgment's careful editing, the audio still has to contend with the weighty and unexciting technical details of backroom politicking and electioneering that shaped the ballot's outcome. But there's plenty to maintain the listener's interestÃ¢â ¬â •including slave rebellions, sexual scandals, backstabbing and festering hatred between Alexander Hamilton and the scheming Aaron Burr. History lovers will enjoy this dramatic rendition of one of America's most turbulent political moments.
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With the benefit of two centuries of hindsight, it now appears that what united John Adams and Thomas Jefferson was far greater than what divided them. However, when these onetime friends opposed each other in the presidential election of 1800, their differences were viewed as immense. As a result, the election was notable for serpentine maneuverings and intense vitriol on both sides. This was still the age when "gentlemen" candidates did not openly campaign, but the respective Federalist and Democratic-Republican camps went after each other viciously. Larson's account of the campaign is filled with juicy tidbits about the personalities of the key players. Adams was pugnacious, even obnoxious, and often felt trapped by some of the more extreme positions of his

Federalist supporters. Jefferson, who shunned personal confrontation, made no effort to restrain the unfair attacks upon Adams by his followers, and he could be intemperate and irresponsible in some of his speculative remarks, particularly in his early support for French revolutionaries. This is a well-written and thoroughly enjoyable examination. Freeman, Jay --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

John Adams is president and the federalist candidate, but so thoroughly disliked that his own party was defecting to Pinckney. Alexander Hamilton plays a big role on the federalist side, but he has already climbed to power and influence, so is not as interesting as he probably was earlier in his life. Jefferson is Democratic Republican candidate, living on his plantation at Monticello, maintaining the "natural increase" of his slaves. Both were self-serving schemers in an era when revolutionary patriotism had given way to concerns of money and station and the partisanship which continues to this day had already taken root. The constitution had already shown itself to be inadequate in such an environment, and the Twelfth Amendment would be the result.This book is anti-climactic as early voting in New York City decided the presidential election and Larson has difficulty building interest in the rest of the campaign.

Very interesting history of this first real campaign especially in the 2016 election cycle. So many parallels. I saw Mr Larson speaking on CSPAN and sought out this book. It did not disappoint. The birth of parties in the US was not intended or wanted by the Framers and yet in only a few elections they were holding fast and shaping the country. Back room deals and smoke filled rooms. Crazy to read now. Really well written and engaging

If you are still upset, for any reason, about the 2012 elections, you should read this book immediately. It contains a wonderful tonic called "historical perspective" that will cure what ails you. If you think that our political climate today is especially toxic, divisive, or mean spirited, you should read it too. You will learn that most important of all lessons: that you are wrong. America is not more divided today than it has ever been. We are not even close.Edward Larson does a good job of explaining all of the reasons that the Election of 1800 was such a disaster. It all boils down to this: the people who wrote the Constitution did not envision permanent political parties who would run candidates for public office. Men such as Alexander Hamilton and James Madison were suspicious of parties, and they crafted a Constitution that would minimize the possibility of permanent factions emerging. And then, two of America’s most brilliant and dedicated statesmen ruined it all by creating

political parties anyway. Their names? Alexander Hamilton and James Madison.From George Washington’s first term in office, it was clear that there were two basic ideas about how America should work. Hamilton believed that the Constitution provided for a robust national government with near-absolute taxing powers and the ability to do anything that needed to be done to build America’s economy and its infrastructure. Jefferson and Madison, on the other hand, believed that the national government should be small, that taxes should be low, that states should make most of the major decisions, and that America did not need any economic development beyond a lot of new land to farm. By 1798, those who held the first set of views were called "Federalists," while those who held the second were called "Republicans." And, before the election of 1800, both Federalists and Republicans caucused together (secretly) to select their nominees for President and Vice President. The Federalists chose the incumbent president, John Adams, and South Carolina’s Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Republicans chose their hero, Thomas Jefferson, to run for President, and the New York Senator Aaron Burr to run for Vice President.Well, sort of. As a matter of fact, there was no way under the Constitution to run candidates for President or Vice President. Presidents were chosen bv electors, rather than by popular votes, and electors where chosen however states wanted to choose them: some were appointed by state legislatures and others were elected in general plebiscites. Electors were required to cast two equal votes for President; they could not specify that one was for Vice President. Whoever got the most votes became the President, and whoever came in second became the Vice President.What this really means, then, is that all four men--Adams, Jefferson, Pinckney, and Burr--were running for President, and they all knew it. A number of "High Federalists" (i.e. really conservative Federalists) tried to engineer a victory for Pinckney, viewing Adams as too moderate and politically unreliable--a Federalist in Name Only, or FINO, who could not be trusted to keep the forces of Republicanism at bay. They were playing a very dangerous game, though, since any vote against Adams could have the unintended consequence of electing Jefferson. Of course, nobody on either side thought that anybody other than Jefferson from the Republican side could become President--nobody, that is, except Aaron Burr, who actively schemed to make sure that no Republican voted for Jefferson but against him. He played hard for a tie, and he won, throwing the election into turmoil for months while the House of Representatives tried to come up with a President.I learned a lot from this book about the intraparty intrigues on both sides. Much more interesting (to me, at least) was the absolute certainty on the part of both Federalists and Republicans that American democracy would be destroyed if the other side won. It all sounded so modern to me. Republicans believed that Adams and the Federalists had designs to destroy the Constitution, appoint a president-for-life, and return the

nation to monarchy. Politicians and pundits argued that America was at a crossroads that would lead, if Jefferson were not elected, to the end of everything that the Constitution and the Revolution stood for. Federalists, for their part, saw Jefferson and his fellow Republicans as lawless, degraded, atheistic Jacobins (French Revolutionary rabble) bent on destroying both religion and the upper classes. Nothing, they believed, could be more important than defeating Jefferson.As the election played out, both sides worked themselves into a frenzy of hatred and anger against the other side (sound familiar). At the same time, the High Federalists worked hard against their own ostensible candidate for President, while the second Republican on the ticket schemed to replace his boss. And he almost did. Throw into the mix a plot to disqualify Republican electors, an attempt to change the way New York's electors were chosen, a few high-profile show trials under the Alien and Sedition Acts, a slave rebellion, a secession threat secretly written by one of the candidates, a few high-profile, high-sleaze campaign books--and what do you get? Business as usual in the early American republic.Since writingÃ Â That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing, I have often been asked what the Founding Fathers would have thought about political civility in our day. They would have thought, I reply, that we have entirely too much of it.

Larson presents a quite competent review of this watershed election of 1800. The events were so incoherent that the story is frustrating, but that's not Larson's fault. We were then who we are now: a diverse people who are not timid about conflict.

This book may be more than you really want to know about the birth of our political parties in 1796 and 1800, but to an American history buff, this is a fascinating look at the seminal election of 1800. If you think our politics of 2012 is rough, take a look/read of the 1800s, when no character assassination of an opponent was too mean-spirited and no newspapers were objective ... only partisan. The 1800 election between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson was a classic, with such rogues as Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton omni- present to stoke the fires of partisanship and intrigue. Though we know the outcome of the election before we read, A MAGNIFICENT CATASTROPHE reads like a political thriller. History junkies will love this book!

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