

Valiant Ambition: George Washington, Benedict Arnold, and the Fate of the American Revolution

By Nathaniel Philbrick

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"May be one of the greatest what-if books of the age—a volume that turns one of America's best-known narratives on its head."
—*Boston Globe*

"Clear and insightful, it consolidates his reputation as one of America's foremost practitioners of narrative nonfiction."
—Wall Street Journal

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *In The Heart of the Sea* and *Mayflower* comes a surprising account of the middle years of the American Revolution, and the tragic relationship between George Washington and Benedict Arnold.

In September 1776, the vulnerable Continental Army under an unsure George Washington (who had never commanded a large force in battle) evacuates New York after a devastating defeat by the British Army. Three weeks later, near the Canadian border, one of his favorite generals, Benedict Arnold, miraculously succeeds in postponing the British naval advance down Lake Champlain that might have ended the war. Four years later, as the book ends, Washington has vanquished his demons and Arnold has fled to the enemy after a foiled attempt to surrender the American fortress at West Point to the British. After four years of war, America is forced to realize that the real threat to its liberties might not come from without but from within.

Valiant Ambition is a complex, controversial, and dramatic portrait of a people in crisis and the war that gave birth to a nation. The focus is on loyalty and personal integrity, evoking a Shakespearean tragedy that unfolds in the key relationship of Washington and Arnold, who is an impulsive but sympathetic hero whose misfortunes at the hands of self-serving politicians fatally destroy his faith in the legitimacy of the rebellion. As a country wary of tyrants suddenly must figure out how it should be led, Washington's unmatched ability to rise above the petty politics of his time enables him to win the war that really matters.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
An Amazon Best Book of May 2016: I spent early summers running around Valley Forge in Pennsylvania and my later childhood years living next door to Lexington, Massachusetts, where the first battle of the American Revolution was fought—so I thought I had a pretty good handle on the war. Philbrick proved me wrong with his fascinating history of the years from 1776 to 1780, when the new country teetered between victory and disaster, its destiny influenced by George Washington and Benedict Arnold. Both generals were audacious—Washington and Arnold jumped into situations risky both to themselves and to the soldiers who fought for them. Both generals suffered indignities at the hands of the Continental Congress, a body riven by its own politics and hamstrung by its inability to set taxes on its citizens. But while Washington learned to temper his aggressiveness, sought others' wisdom, and developed a strategy for winning the war, Arnold remained self-centered and self-aggrandizing, focusing on the tactical to the detriment of the larger goal—culminating in his decision in 1780 to turn coat and deliver the fortress at West Point to the British army. Philbrick's eye for the illuminating detail and his clear writing keeps the story taut, unlike many history books that too often overwhelm the reader with a sludge of see-I-did-my-research prose. Riveting and relevant, *Valiant Ambition* explodes the myth that a triumphant revolution was inevitable. --*Adrian Liang*

Review
"May be one of the greatest what-if books of the age—a volume that turns one of America's best-known narratives on its head."
—*Boston Globe*

"Clear and insightful, it consolidates his reputation as one of America's foremost practitioners of narrative nonfiction."
—*Wall Street Journal*

"Philbrick is both a meticulous historian and a captivating storyteller. The book has unforgettable novelistic details [and] also contains much astute historical analysis and argument. Philbrick sees Arnold not as the man who almost lost the war so much as the catalyst that helped to win it."
—*Christian Science Monitor*

"This is history at its most compelling: political machinations, military jostling and outright treachery. And Philbrick's vivid writing brings the whistling cannon balls and half-frozen soldiers to life (and death) in vivid detail….He peels back the mythology to reveal a teetering war effort, a bickering Congress, discordant states unwilling to coalesce to support the new national government and — above all — a traitor who sought to sell out his own country for personal gain and achieved instead the one thing that no other revolutionary could: a unification of the Americans and an end to the war. And for that, we have much to thank Benedict Arnold."
--*Seattle Times*

"Benedict Arnold takes center stage in Nathaniel Philbrick's vivid and in some ways cautionary tale of the Revolutionary War. The near-tragic nature of the drama hinges not on any military secrets Arnold gave to the British but on an open secret: the weakness of the patriot cause….Arnold's betrayal still makes for great drama, proving once again that the supposed villains of a story are usually the most interesting."
--*New York Times Book Review*

“Philbrick wants his readers to experience the terror, the suffering and the adrenaline rush of battle, and he wants us to grit our teeth at our early politicians who, by their pettiness and shortsightedness, shape military events as profoundly as generals and admirals do. Finally, he reveals the emotional and physical cost of war on colonial society. He succeeds on all fronts.”
--*Washington Post*

“Philbrick has the ability to take seemingly dry facts of history and turn them into exciting prose. The players come alive and their motivations are clear. The people he chronicles are legends, so revealing to the reader what makes them human, foibles and all, helps make sense of the events that transpired and why they acted the way they did.”
—*Associated Press*

"Philbrick's deep scholarship, nuanced analysis, and novelistic storytelling add up to another triumph."**—***Publishers Weekly, starred review*

“A lively account of our Revolutions’ most reviled figure.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

"An engrossing narrative of the war’s most difficult years... Philbrick argues that the quarrelsome, divided Americans needed Arnold’s perfidy as much as they did Washington’s greatness to unify their new nation. He pushes aside the patriotic myth to unveil the war’s messy reality—and it’s still a rousing adventure.”**—***BookPage*

“As another American summer crawls toward the Fourth of July, and with a presidential election creeping up like Freddy on Elm Street, Nathaniel Philbrick offers some beach reading to remind us that outsized egos and a dysfunctional Congress were as much at issue in 1776 as they are now — if that’s any comfort...Valiant Ambition colorfully reconstructs the character-driven battles that defined the Revolutionary War.” –USA Today

“Look, you’re not getting tickets to Hamilton. If he were alive, George Washington himself couldn’t get tickets to Hamilton. Here’s a cheaper alternative…a new look at the first American president and contrasts him with our most famous traitor.” –The Miami Herald

Praise for *Bunker Hill*

"A masterpiece of narrative and perspective."—*Boston Globe*

"A tour de force . . ."—*Chicago Tribune*

"Popular history at its best—a taut narrative with a novelist's touch, grounded in careful research."—*Miami Herald*

"A story that resonates with leadership lessons for all times."—Walter Isaacson, *The Washington Post*

"A gripping book."—*The Wall Street Journal*

About the Author
Nathaniel Philbrick is the author of *In the Heart of the Sea*, winner of the National Book Award;

Mayflower, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; *Bunker Hill*, winner of the New England Book Award; *Sea of Glory*; *The Last Stand*; *Why Read Moby Dick?*; and *Away Off Shore*. He lives in Nantucket.

Users Review

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