



The Noblest Minds

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Ever since Douglass Adair convincingly demonstrated that a love of fame was central to the American founding, political scientists and historians have started to view the founders and their acts in a new light. In *The Noblest Minds*, ten distinguished scholars examine this passion for fame and honor and demonstrate for the first time its significance in the development of American democracy. The first two-thirds of the book is devoted to essays on individual founders, as the contributors consider the role of fame in the lives and political characters of Washington, Franklin, Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton, Adams, and Marshall. The remaining chapters analyze the founders' theoretical accomplishment in reviving political science, and explore the problem of honor in the modern world. Political scientists and American historians alike will find this book to be valuable and illuminating. What made the founding generation of American statesmen so outstanding? To answer this question, *The Noblest Minds* brings together a distinguished group of historians and political scientists to evaluate a neglected but compelling theory advanced nearly four decades ago by Douglass Adair. Adair argued that it was the "love of fame" that moved many of the leading lights of the founding generation. Adair's thesis is the starting point for a series of searching essays on the role of fame in the lives of Adams, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, Marshall, and Washington. These profiles also provide wide-ranging historical and philosophical reflections on the question of fame. What emerges from these essays is a more complex picture of the founding generation than that presented by Adair. While acknowledging the role of the love of fame, *The Noblest Minds* argues for the influence of other concerns such as honor, virtue, and the cause of liberty. This more complex picture of the founding generation provides a unique and rewarding vantage point from which to consider the question of "character" in politics, which

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Patrick O'Neil:

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