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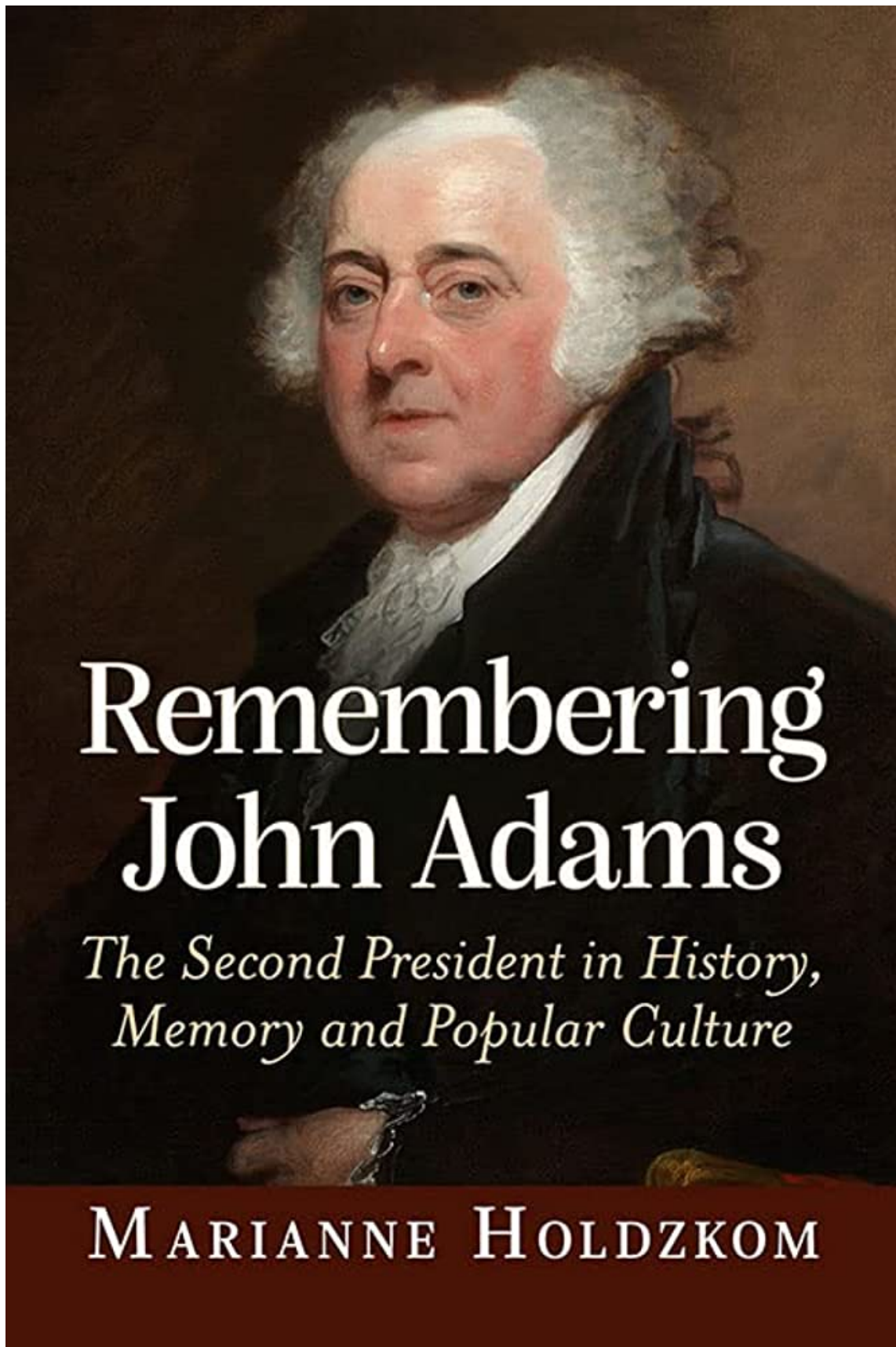
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# REMEMBERING JOHN ADAMS

by Timothy Symington(<https://allthingsliberty.com/author/timothy-symington/>)



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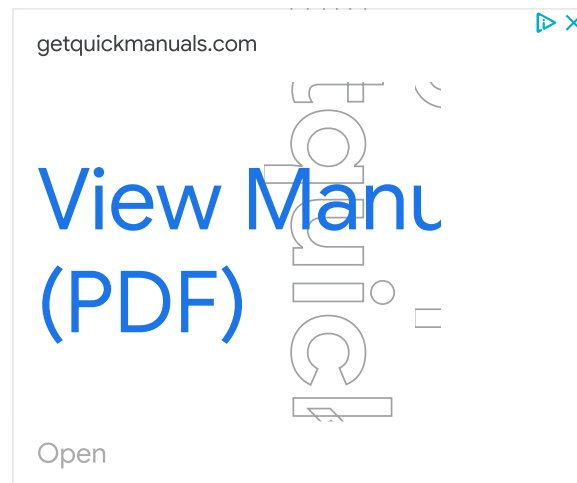


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**B**OOK REVIEW: *Remembering John Adams: The Second President in History, Memory and Popular Culture* by Marianne Holdzkom (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2023)

Marianne Holdzkom does not hide her fascination with John Adams anywhere in her book, *Remembering John Adams: The Second President in History, Memory and Popular Culture*. She starts off in the Preface explaining how her exposure to William Daniel's famous portrayal of Adams in the movie version of the Broadway musical *1776* led to a strong desire to learn as much as she could about the second president. Her educational and professional journey has culminated in perhaps the most extensive study of how Mr. Adams has been presented over the years since his death. Her book serves as a guide for readers, historians and students to discover the many facets of John Adams through the many interpretations of his accomplishments and failures.



space on the National Mall with these other “demigods”? It is clear that Holdzkom believes so. His accomplishments on behalf of the fight for independence, the end of the Revolution, the Massachusetts constitution, and the Quasi-War with France all demonstrate that he should be given his due.

John  
Adams  
was  
perhaps  
the  
most  
unusual  
of the



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Founding Fathers because he kept most of his correspondence. Martha Washington burned her husband’s letters after his death, and Jefferson and Madison carefully edited their letters and papers. Not so with John Adams. He knew his role in history needed to be documented, so he wrote voluminously. His letters to his wife Abigail and his friend and rival Jefferson are amazing records of his beliefs and feelings. Because of his efforts to protect his legacy, Adams has become the most transparent of the Founders. Washington’s image is of a stoic, disinterested public servant, while Jefferson maintained his image as a naturalist and philosopher. Their negative emotions and inner thoughts are mostly absent for today’s historians and scholars to explore. But John Adams has detailed his life in a much more intimate way, and we are lucky to see the man in all respects: both the greatness and the foibles.

Since there is so much about Adams available, the question for Holdzkom has become: what is the most accurate way to portray and remember Adams? After giving a brief summary of Adams’ life, she explores how historians have viewed Adams, starting with the writings of John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams. The findings of other historians (familiar names like Bailyn, Smith, Butterfield, and Morgan, among others) show that the many aspects of Adams’ life make it difficult to pin down one image of the man. The third chapter examines the historiography of John Adams from the Bicentennial to the present. A good deal of



many stanzas to Adams in his *Eleven New Cantos*. All these works give different interpretations of who John Adams was.

Chapters five through seven describe the portrayal of John Adams through the musical *1776*, various television series, and the work of David McCullough, whose immensely popular biography of John Adams led to an HBO miniseries about the second president. Many Americans know about John Adams through these different media. This reviewer grew up learning about John Adams as “obnoxious and disliked,” a man whose impatience with the Continental Congress made his compatriots loudly sing “Sit down, John!” Even the musical *Hamilton* makes a reference to *1776*. David McCullough had a tremendous effect on the popularity of John Adams with his excellent narrative about him. The public’s interest in Adams was rising, and so HBO took advantage and produced “John Adams,” a dramatic showcase of McCullough’s book, starring Paul Giamatti and Laura Linney. Did all these popular forums really capture Adams? Holdzkom does not think so, and she carefully details what they all missed about him.

The true portrayal of John Adams, and the most effective memorialization of him, seems to be the town of Quincy, Massachusetts. Adams was born there, lived on his farm Peacefield there, and passed away there, where he is also buried. There was no other place on earth that was so connected to John Adams, and his relationship with the community was very intimate. The homes and lands that make up the Adams National Historical Park are in a state of flux as more things are discovered about Adams’ life. The entire city now serves as a true monument, including several statues and his burial place.

*Remembering John Adams: The Second President in History, Memory and Popular Culture* is a unique and interesting book. Perhaps some day Marianne Holdzkom will add an extra chapter if John Adams gets his due in Washington, DC with a proper national monument. Until then, students and scholars will have to continue wrestling with the best and most effective way to interpret the memory of the brilliant, vain, insecure, loyal, and incredibly loving John Adams.

**PLEASE CONSIDER PURCHASING THIS BOOK FROM AMAZON [IN PAPERBACK](https://amzn.to/42VqKWx) or in [KINDLE](https://amzn.to/3Owc23V).** (As an Amazon Associate, JAR earns from qualifying purchases. This helps toward providing our content free of charge.)





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