



That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing

By Michael Austin

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In 2011, Glenn Beck released a "modern translation" of the Federalist Papers and a new biography of George Washington. In the same year, Rick Perry, the governor of Texas, published a book in which he argued that the Founding Fathers intended the individual states to be more powerful than the federal government.

Each of these books, and many others published over the past few years, presents the Founding Fathers as a group of wise, philosophically indistinguishable statesmen who spoke about timeless issues with a unified voice. In the place of rigorous history, the authors substitute out-of-context proof texts; in the place of real analysis of the remarkable individuals who created America, they offer us a collective mythology of the founding era.

In *That's Not What They Meant!* Professor Michael Austin examines dozens of books, articles, speeches, and radio broadcasts by such figures as Glenn Beck, Mark Levin, Sean Hannity, Larry Schweikart, and David Barton to expose the deep historical flaws in their use of America's founding history. In contrast to their misleading method of citing proof texts to serve a narrow agenda, Austin allows the Founding Fathers to speak for themselves, situating all quotations in the proper historical context. What emerges is a true historical picture of men who often disagreed with one another on such crucial issues as federal power, judicial review, and the separation of church and state. As Austin shows, the real legacy of the Founding Fathers to us is a political process: a system of disagreement, debate, and compromise that has kept democracy vibrant in America for more than two hundred years.

Austin's carefully researched and rigorously argued book is essential reading for anyone seeking the accurate historical background to many of the hot-button political debates of today.

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That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing

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Editorial Review

Review

"A new era of critical analysis of the Founders may be at hand. If so, it makes *That's Not What They Meant!* all the more important. The book deserves to find a wide audience."--Rob Boston, *Free Inquiry*

"Remarkably free of the typical media bias, this intelligent book presents the case that our so-called Founding Fathers were not the figures bombastic politicians or newsreaders like Rush Limbaugh or Glenn Beck would have us believe."--*Monsters and Critics*

"A guaranteed argument settler."--Terri Schlichenmeyer, *The Daily News*

"Our national dialogue strongly resembles a form of political insanity. This book is part of the cure." Ray Smock, Historian, US House of Representatives (1983-1995).

"This could be one of the most important books written in recent years on the subject of Constitutional interpretation."--Holly Scudero, *San Francisco Book Review*

"Brings the Founding Fathers back to vibrancy and authenticity for a contemporary world."--Carla Hand, Wichita Bar Association *Bar-o-Meter*

"Tired of people bellowing at you about the Founding Fathers? Then read Michael Austin's quiet, good-humored, thought-provoking book. . . . A welcome breath of fresh air about a stale subject, it also captures the most important truth about the Founding Fathers - they disagreed with one another, eloquently and even bitterly, about what America should be and about how we should govern ourselves."

- R. B. BERNSTEIN, Distinguished adjunct professor of law, New York Law School, and author of *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered*

"A long-overdue critique of partisan distortions of America's Founding Fathers. Austin takes both the Right and the Left to task, but he especially castigates the Far Right for cherry-picking (or proof texting) various Founders' statements and then attributing their sentiments to the Founding Fathers as a whole, as if the Founders were a homogenous group of men who agreed on everything. . . . A must-read for anyone who wants an objective exploration of the American political and constitutional system."

- DAVID CONTOSTA, Professor of history, Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, PA, and author of *Rebel Giants*

"Provides a much-needed corrective to some of the craziness being promoted by right-wing extremists these days in the name of the Founding Fathers. . . . The real legacy of those Fathers? A political system. In Austin's words, it's 'a system of disagreement, debate, and compromise...that has kept democracy vibrant in America for more than two hundred years.'"

- DAVIS D. JOYCE, Professor emeritus of history, East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma, and author of

Howard Zinn

From the Author

The Day I Was "Review Bombed" at Amazon.com

On January 8, 2013, I was "freeped." Until 3:30 that day, I had no idea that "freep" could be used as a verb. Or even a noun. But now, and probably for a long time, "freeping" will define the Amazon page for *That's Not What They Meant!*

"Freeped," as it turns out, is a portmanteau of "Free Republic," a conservative commentary and blog site based in Fresno. It advertises itself as "the premier conservative site on the web," and I have no reason to think otherwise. At 3:52 (CST) on January 8, the following message was posted to the Free Republic Site

FREEP THIS BOOK:

Book: That's Not What They Meant!

Posted on Tuesday, January 08, 2013 1:52:09 PM by Jacquerie

Remember how the DUs trashed Mark Levin's books at Amazon? Well, here is our chance. Some English prof named Michael Austin wrote a scatterbrained hit piece that is full of cheap shots directed at the Tea Party, Mark Levin, Hannity, etc. To do this, he took teaspoons from various works of our Framers, mixed them up with some Howard Zinn, and baked them with social justice gravy at high heat.

.....

Click the link and give this radical leftist clown Austin the zero rating he deserves.

Within an hour some 15 brief, one-star reviews had appeared on my book's Amazon site, all of them, with one exception, containing boilerplate phrases that could be applied anything left of Ron Paul or Glenn Beck. The one review that actually does refer to something in the book (a story about Elbridge Gerry), actually refers to the forward that, while not actually written by me, is available in the Amazon preview.

Perhaps even worse (from my perspective) is that the few existing reviews by people who had actually read my work--not all of them positive--were sabotaged according to the instructions given on the Free Republic site: "*lower the stars on the gushy reviews by clicking NOT helpful and BUMP the 1 * star reviews by clicking HELPFUL!*"

They came, they saw, they freeped. And I am trying hard not to let it go to my head. As much as I would like to think that I was freeped because somebody considered my ideas dangerous, or radical, or worthy of rebuttal, I know that this is not the case. *That's Not What They Meant!* was chosen more or less at random because somebody who participates in a blog site stumbled across it and thought that it would be fun, or noble, or brave to crowdsource their disapproval. Apparently, somebody at another site did this to another book. And so on.

Ultimately, I can have no objection to the actions of the freepers, nor would I do anything to stop them even if I could (and I can't). I made a very conscious choice to enter the ideological marketplace with a book that criticizes some people and calls them wrong. Choices like that have consequences. And I would much rather be criticized--even by people who have read no more than the book's title and a call to action on a popular blog--than ignored. As far as I can tell, all of the reviews have spelled my name correctly, and, beyond that, there really isn't any such thing as bad publicity.

But I would also like to issue an invitation to the freepers, wherever they may be: let's really talk about the

issues that divide us--not in a tribal way, where we immediately divide into teams and dismiss the other side as intellectually and morally inferior, but as actual intelligent, responsible human beings who might disagree about some things, but who love our country and want it to succeed.

I currently maintain a blog site called Arguing as Friends where I invite people of all backgrounds and perspectives to come together and talk about current political issues without insults and without personal attacks. Your voices would be welcome there, and I would be very happy to discuss my view of the Founding Fathers--or anything else--with all of you on those terms. Really discussing controversial issues with people you disagree with can be a powerful experience that can lead to understanding, intellectual growth, and the kinds of deep compromises that led to the founding of our Republic and continue to be essential to its success.

This is a more difficult approach to political discourse than simply taking pot shots at each other on Amazon. But it is much more rewarding as well.

From the Back Cover

"A long-overdue critique of partisan distortions of America's Founding Fathers. Austin takes both the Right and the Left to task, but he especially castigates the Far Right for cherry-picking (or proof texting) various Founders' statements and then attributing their sentiments to the Founding Fathers as a whole, as if the Founders were a homogenous group of men who agreed on everything and who, if alive two centuries later, would be in perfect accord with ultraconservatives like Glenn Beck or Rush Limbaugh. Written with both clarity and elegance, *That's Not What They Meant!* is a must read for anyone who wants an objective exploration of the American political and constitutional system." --Dr. David Contosta, professor of history, Chestnut Hill College

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Vicky Moore:

What do you think about book? It is just for students because they're still students or this for all people in the world, what the best subject for that? Merely you can be answered for that concern above. Every person has several personality and hobby per other. Don't to be obligated someone or something that they don't want do that. You must know how great and important the book *That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing*. All type of book can you see on many options. You can look for the internet options or other social media.

Michael Cardona:

What do you concerning book? It is not important together with you? Or just adding material if you want something to explain what the one you have problem? How about your time? Or are you busy particular person? If you don't have spare time to perform others business, it is gives you the sense of being bored faster. And you have free time? What did you do? All people has many questions above. They need to answer that question since just their can do which. It said that about e-book. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is correct. Because start from on jardín de infancia until university need that *That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing* to read.

Gregory Goolsby:

This That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing book is absolutely not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you obtain by reading this book is usually information inside this publication incredible fresh, you will get facts which is getting deeper you read a lot of information you will get. This kind of That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing without we understand teach the one who looking at it become critical in imagining and analyzing. Don't always be worry That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing can bring when you are and not make your tote space or bookshelves' come to be full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This That's Not What They Meant!: Reclaiming the Founding Fathers from America's Right Wing having fine arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not feel uninterested in reading.

Samantha Bond:

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