



## Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, the Rake Who Wrote the Constitution

*Richard Brookhiser*

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## **Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, the Rake Who Wrote the Constitution** Richard Brookhiser

Since 1996, Richard Brookhiser has devoted himself to recovering the Founding for modern Americans. The creators of our democracy had both the temptations and the shortcomings of all men, combined with the talents and idealism of the truly great. Among them, no Founding Father demonstrates the combination of temptations and talents quite so vividly as the least known of the greats, Gouverneur Morris.

His story is one that should be known by every American -- after all, he drafted the Constitution, and his hand lies behind many of its most important phrases. Yet he has been lost in the shadows of the Founders who became presidents and faces on our currency. As Brookhiser shows in this sparkling narrative, Morris's story is not only crucial to the Founding, it is also one of the most entertaining and instructive of all. Gouverneur Morris, more than Washington, Jefferson, or even Franklin, is the Founding Father whose story can most readily touch our hearts, and whose character is most sorely needed today.

He was a witty, peg-legged ladies' man. He was an eyewitness to two revolutions (American and French) who joked with George Washington, shared a mistress with Talleyrand, and lost friends to the guillotine. In his spare time he gave New York City its street grid and New York State the Erie Canal. His keen mind and his light, sure touch helped make our Constitution the most enduring fundamental set of laws in the world. In his private life, he suited himself; pleased the ladies until, at age fifty-seven, he settled down with one lady (and pleased her); and lived the life of a gentleman, for whom grace and humanity were as important as birth. He kept his good humor through war, mobs, arson, death, and two accidents that burned the flesh from one of his arms and cut off one of his legs below the knee.

Above all, he had the gift of a sunny disposition that allowed him to keep his head in any troubles. We have much to learn from him, and much pleasure to take in his company.

## **Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, the Rake Who Wrote the Constitution** Details

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Wrote the Constitution Richard Brookhiser**

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## From Reader Review Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, the Rake Who Wrote the Constitution for online ebook

### Daniel says

Morris is a man worth knowing.

I found it interesting that the author felt the need to explain how Morris had changed his mind on issues throughout his life. I wonder if Morris would have been called a "flip-flopper" today... To me, a person might change his mind as time, information, and circumstances change--a sign of intelligence, I believe.

I liked learning about Morris, and I wish I'd learned more about this founding father sooner.

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### Lauren Albert says

An interesting and an admirable man. Author of the Constitution, promoter of the Erie Canal, he was involved in many of the important events of the Revolution and early Republic.

When young, he was burned terribly, losing much of his arm. Those who knew him said he bore the pain and the loss with great stoicism. Later, as an adult, he endured an amputation of one of his legs and then learned from his doctor (who had been absent) that it could probably have been saved. But he never complained or bemoaned his fate. Brookhiser speculates that his rakishness may have stemmed from his need to prove he was still attractive.

When much older he married a younger woman who had been stigmatized by scandal--ignoring people's reactions. One of the last things we learn about him tells us much about him--when writing his will, believing he was to die soon, he left his wife an annuity which increased if she got married because he believed it was more expensive to live as a married couple. He had his flaw and he apparently said some unwise things, but how can you not like a man that does that?

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### Richard Blake says

I did not know that Gouverneur Morris drafted the Constitution, in particular the Preamble; "We the People. . ."

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### Vince Ciaramella says

I seem to always read a book about a Founding Father around this time of year. I found this book at a used bookstore and I have always wanted to learn about Gouverneur Morris. \$7.99 later, I had my book and my founding father.

Let me start with the positives. Brookhiser is an excellent mainstream historian. He doesn't fill his works with unnecessary fluff or filler which I can appreciate. He also writes in a fair and balanced way that doesn't

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praise or demonize his subject. His writing is crisp and I enjoy his work. So why only two stars.

Well, that isn't something Brookhiser could control. I found the life of Morris boring and for the most part uninteresting. Yes, he was important with his contributions to the Constitution and the French government after Louis XVI was taken from Versailles but that's about it. The rest is the tale on a playboy on the prowl in both the new and old world. The times he lived in were interesting but he himself wasn't. In the end I think I could have read an article on Morris and been okay.

I picked up Brookhiser's new book on John Marshall but I think I am going to take a break from this time period for a bit and revisit it at a later date.

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### **G. says**

A fascinating read about a relatively unknown but important patriot. Brookhiser makes the point he was in the middle of everything in his times.

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### **Ryan Houck says**

Brookhiser lacks the story telling and humanity that Chernow and McCullough have. Morris was a wild character with so much influence on this country. I wish they made a movie about him. Saving people in the French revolution, arguing in Congress, having illicit love affairs, establishing the grid of NYC, working to make the Erie canal, he shaped the world.

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### **Christy Amatos says**

Morris is a fascinating character who deserves more attention for what he accomplished. But Brookhiser's style is at times very difficult to slog through. I'm not sure this book covers Morris' signature achievements in enough depth.

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### **Joe Chernicoff says**

Brookhiser's biographies should be part of our schools' history classes (or whatever they call them these days). Gouv. Morris would fit in well with today's politicians, although maybe he was a bit too intelligent(?), too much a visionary(?), too many ideas, both good and bad(?), and maybe he would be called a "flip-flopper", like some of our current politicians are labeled these days - but any man who cannot rethink ideas, even his own, would surely be a demagogue.

I'm just waiting for the book to be made into a screen play - Except for Morris's missing leg, burnt arm, and height, he could probably be played by Newt Gingrich.

Great book - excellent reference material, and so forth. A valuable edition to one's library. I have also recommended this work in on eof my discussion comments at my FreedomConnect.org An Informed Conservative page.

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## Grady McCallie says

Gouverneur Morris sits in the second rank of Founding Fathers, along with his friend John Jay and colleague Robert Morris. It's not obvious from this biography why he isn't in the front line, except that his elite New York family background, wide open social habits, and tendency to let his rhetorical gifts outrun his judgment may all have undercut his chance to become an idol of the early Republic. Nonetheless, his life makes for an amazing story: young heir, last in line for a considerable fortune; lost his leg and the use of an arm in two different accidents; helped keep the Continental Army supplied; supplied the critical literary talent in drafting the US Constitution; carried on numerous (and often adulterous) love affairs throughout his life; witnessed the French Revolution firsthand and helped save a number of fleeing aristocrats; and worked to promote construction of the Erie Canal. I haven't read other biographies of Morris to compare, but this one presents a straightforward narrative that keeps moving and doesn't get bogged down, and balances the professional with the personal, which seems particularly important for getting an accurate read of Morris.

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## bup says

Well, it was good, and it's the only bio of Gouverneur I've been able to get my hands on. There's nothing that makes this really sing, but as the guy is the author of such phrases as "We, the people of the United States of America," and the guy who laid out the street plan of Manhattan, he deserves a little time and effort.

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## Elizabeth says

What a great used bookstore find! This biography of Gouverneur Morris, one of the founding fathers we don't often hear about, is informative and entertaining. Morris (whose estate Morrisania, is one of the sections of the Bronx), wrote the Constitution, was our ambassador to France, and, despite having a peg leg, was quite the womanizer.

This well-written biography will give you another view of the founding of our country--the arguments about its creation, slavery, and the rise of the two party system. Morris was a charming man, one who didn't hold grudges, and used his talents for our country--and his own amusement.

Read it.

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## Bruce says

Gouverneur Morris was a writer but also the editor of the Constitution. He took some of the prolixity that was proposed and condensed it to something relatively understandable. This is a biography of the gentleman and thus covers more than the period of the Constitution's writing and 'endorsement' by the requisite number of states. Morris kept a diary while he was in France so Brookhiser provides such ideas as France situation before it's Revolution "resembled the United States's at the opening of the Constitutional Convention--war

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debt; a political system that blocked any revenue stream; a call for change." The biographer quotes Morris's advice to DeWitt Clinton after the death of VP George Clinton "[I]n the degenerate state to which democracy never fails to reduce a nation, it is almost impossible for a good man to govern, even could he get into power, or for a bad man to govern well." It seems an apt description to the current political situation. What I find extremely interesting for a gentleman of his era was Morris's treatment of his wife in his will. He gave her "a life interest in his property, plus an annuity of \$2,600 a year (\$32,500 today). If she married again, her annuity would be increased to \$3,200, 'to defray the increased expenditure, which may attend that condition.'" In an era when women were considered chattel more openly than they are now this was an interesting facet to his philosophy.

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### **Renn Daniels says**

Without Morris and his financial backing, the break from Great Britain would not have happened.

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### **Lee says**

An interesting biography of Gouverneur Morris one of the architects of the constitution. Brookheiser examines his upbringing, his time in Continental Congress during the Revolution when he came under the sway of Robert Morris and helped sort out the finances. His friendships in politics and business and his time as ambassador to France during George Washington's Presidency at the height of the Terror. Also covered is his myriad of love affairs and his final days in New York. Good read.

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### **William J. says**

Gouverneur Morris is often overlooked as one of the Framers of our Constitution however he is the man who wrote the Preamble and edited the results of the Constitutional Convention into the document originally ratified by the 13 original States. He did not spend his life in public service nor did he seek fame but Gouverneur Morris made significant contributions to the establishment of the United States. For historians and those who enjoy reading history and biography this is a good book.

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