

Hofstadter Reading Guide

The American Political Tradition

Chapter 1: "The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism"

Quiz Questions, Notes, and Discussion Questions

Overarching Questions

What national myth is Hofstadter challenging in this chapter? Be specific.

In what sense is the Constitution "based upon the philosophy of Hobbes and the religion of Calvin?"

How would you describe the founders' view of human nature?

Hofstadter writes that "no man who is well abreast of modern science... believes any longer in unchanging human nature" (21). What do you think about this argument? Is there such thing as "human nature?"

I (5-9)

What did men such as Henry Knox and Edmund Randolph think about the masses and democratic government, in general?

What classes are typically fond of democracy?

II (9-13)

Federalist 51 / Balanced Government / Montesquieu

What did the framers fear about majorities?

What is the concept of "balanced government" and how does it apply to the framing of the Constitution?

How would a strong central government deal with popular uprisings?

III (13-21)

Democracy / Liberty / Property

Why would someone advocate property requirements for people who want to participate in the government?

What kind of relationship did the Constitution end up creating between *property* and *government*?