



Founding Martyr: The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, the American Revolution's Lost Hero

Christian Di Spigna

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A rich and illuminating biography of America's forgotten Founding Father, the patriot physician and major general who fomented rebellion and died heroically at the battle of Bunker Hill on the brink of revolution

Little has been known of one of the most important figures in early American history, Dr. Joseph Warren, an architect of the colonial rebellion, and a man who might have led the country as Washington or Jefferson did had he not been martyred at Bunker Hill in 1775. Warren was involved in almost every major insurrectionary act in the Boston area for a decade, from the Stamp Act protests to the Boston Massacre to the Boston Tea Party, and his incendiary writings included the famous Suffolk Resolves, which helped unite the colonies against Britain and inspired the Declaration of Independence. Yet after his death, his life and legend faded, leaving his contemporaries to rise to fame in his place and obscuring his essential role in bringing America to independence.

Christian Di Spigna's definitive new biography of Warren is a loving work of historical excavation, the product of two decades of research and scores of newly unearthed primary-source documents that have given us this forgotten Founding Father anew. Following Warren from his farming childhood and years at Harvard through his professional success and political radicalization to his role in sparking the rebellion, Di Spigna's thoughtful, judicious retelling not only restores Warren to his rightful place in the pantheon of Revolutionary greats, it deepens our understanding of the nation's dramatic beginnings.

Founding Martyr: The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, the American Revolution's Lost Hero Details

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From Reader Review Founding Martyr: The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, the American Revolution's Lost Hero for online ebook

Erica says

FTC disclosure: I would like to thank Penguin Random House for providing me with an uncorrected proof via access to the galley for free through the First to Read program. All opinions are my own. Not sponsored.

I enjoyed this book! I would highly recommend it to anyone who enjoys reading biographies and non-fiction wartime, as well those interested in learning what life was like during the 18th century. More specifically, those who would like to know about events surrounding the American Revolutionary War/American War of Independence and the life of Dr. Joseph Warren.

The author, Christian Di Spigna, did a wonderful job presenting the story of Dr. Joseph Warren who held multiple titles and roles as a well-respected physician and key political activist during the early days of the American Revolution. It's presented in a well-constructed, well-organized, semi-chronological timeline that preserves several historical dates of interest. This was balanced with excerpts from Dr. Warren's personal life, excellent scene descriptions, and insight into the fascinating social norms of the time, which made for a pleasurable read that wasn't overwritten or boring. As someone who is familiar with Dr. Joseph Warren, I appreciated the level of detail that was contained in this historical account. The beginning chapter did contain a few long-winded bits, but the sentences made for case in point and weren't overly distracting.

The author was able to cleverly depict interesting differences in the knowledge and culture of the time to a more common worldview of today without interjecting loads of personal bias/opinions or unnecessary embellishment to the storyline. I enjoyed the careful placement of 18th century prose by use of direct quotes along with the occasional summarization. I also really liked the inclusion of words that were used for certain items at the time instead of substituting them with overly descriptive imagery and explanations. Though I had to reach for my dictionary a couple times, I found it refreshing to learn the names of objects that are not common in today's daily life and language.

As far as the storyline is concerned, people familiar and unfamiliar with it will find it intriguing and the writing compelling. It would make a great addition to anyone's historical or medical biography literary collection.

Casey Wheeler says

I received a free Kindle copy of Founding Martyr by Christian Di Spigna courtesy of Net Galley and Crown Publishing, the publisher. It was with the understanding that I would post a review on Net Galley, Goodreads, Amazon, Barnes and Noble and my fiction book review blog. I also posted it to my Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google Plus pages.

I requested this book as I am an avid reader of american history and the description of the book sounded interesting and covered a subject about which I have not previously read. This is the first book by Christian Di Spigna that I have read.

The subtitle of the book "The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, the American Revolution's Lost Hero" is a very good summation of the book. It covers the brief life of Dr. Warren from a child to his death at the end of the Battle of Bunker Hill. He was a leader of revolutionary thought in the Boston area and was well liked or at least admired by both sides of the conflict. Although, towards the end the Tories and the British both despised him as indicated by the desecration of his body after it was found by them.

I found the book to be well written and researched. The author does an very good job of showing how Joseph Warren is one of the forgotten early heroes of the American Revolution.

I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in American history and the events leading up to the Revolutionary War in particular.

Rama says

Joseph Warren, the forgotten American revolutionary

During American bicentennial celebration, patriotic zeal and nostalgia swept the country and President Ronald Reagan delivered his first inaugural address calling Joseph Warren as "the greatest among the founding fathers." The Broadway musical Hamilton in 2015 captured the thoughts of American revolutionaries. Warren is remembered on the Bunker Hill Day but for most Americans he remains in the shadow of his revolutionary brothers. His work prior to 1776 laid a foundation for the declaration of independence. The role he played in the decade prior to Bunker Hill battle illuminates a human story in a political and military landscape. Warren's life was an inspiration for American revolutionaries and he had chosen his life to the virtues of honor and liberty. Although Warren's fate was sealed in 1775, the values and principles he championed has endured

In this book the author has chronicled the life and times of a true American champion. The book reads effortlessly and the chapters leading to number 13 that describes the brutalities of English army against brave freedom fighters. Even after the fighting ended, horrific acts of violence were committed upon Warren's body. It was desecrated and butchered by the British colonial army under General Gage before his remains was handed over to his family. Chapter 10-12 sets the tone for American revolutionaries against the corrupt British colony. On June 17, 1775, early in the Revolutionary War, the Battle of Bunker Hill in Massachusetts was lost, but their loss was minimal since the inexperienced colonial forces inflicted significant casualties against the enemy, and the battle provided them with an important confidence boost. Subsequently, the battle discouraged the British from any further frontal attacks against well defended front lines. American casualties were comparatively much fewer, although their losses included General Joseph Warren and Major Andrew McClary.

This detailed biography of Warren rescues the figure from obscurity and reveals a remarkable revolutionary who dispatched Paul Revere on his famous ride and was the hero of the battle of Bunker Hill. Warren comes to life in this comprehensive biography meticulously grounded in original scholarship. Warren's insistence on the strict separation of representative government from a subordinate military is an enduring contribution to the American experience. He advocated for a military accountable only to elected government.

Literary Soirée says

FOUNDING MARTYR is a must-read for anyone interested in the American Revolution. Well-researched and compellingly written, this essential biography resurrects the life of Dr. Joseph Warren — a “lost hero” until now, largely neglected by historians, even though he might have been an early President if not killed at Bunker Hill. Highly recommended.

Thanks to NetGalley and Crown Publishing for an advance copy. Opinions are mine.

FoundingMartyr #NetGalley

George says

I grew up with Dr. Joseph Warren: my father and brother were named for him, his dressing table, candle stand, and medicine chest were in our living room and copies of the Copley portrait and Trumbull's Death of General Warren hung on our wall. I am thrilled whenever his long neglected but vitally important role in America's founding is recognized; especially in President Reagan's inauguration speech.

Founding Martyr by Christian DiSpigna, a summa cum laude Columbia University graduate in history, represents a ground-breaking historiographical approach to Warren. With the skills of a professionally trained historian, DiSpigna reveals a stunning new vision of this mysterious and fascinating man. Warren is mysterious because so few primary sources remain from which to analyze his life. His early death at 34, intentional destruction of personal papers, and later house fires left few documents for historians.

With his exhaustive 20 year search of primary sources to fill in many blank pages of Warren's life, DiSpigna has made an invaluable contribution to early American history. Such discoveries include additional facts as well as corrections to previously held beliefs. For example, DiSpigna's comprehensive and thoroughly documented research reveals that Warren did not dispatch Dawes and Revere on their historic rides from the Green house on Hanover Street as formerly believed. DiSpigna discovered that it was in fact from a house owned by a neighbor named Chardon. His biography is filled with such discoveries that the reader will find fascinating.

The reader is stunned to discover a man so young, so accomplished, and yet so unrecognized. DiSpigna's enthusiasm for his subject may initially appear overblown until seen in its entirety. Warren was a young man, less than halfway into his thirties, who, as author of the Suffolk Resolves, penned the first statement of principles approved by all thirteen colonies which became the first cornerstone of agreement leading to the Declaration of Independence. He was simultaneously the chief executive of Massachusetts, heads of its Committee of Correspondence (equivalent to Secretary of State), Committee of Safety (equivalent to Secretary of Defense), a spy network, and was nominated to be a Major General in the Provincial forces. Maybe even more remarkable is that he was able to earn the respect and loyalty from the prominent men of an earlier generation and established veterans of the French and Indian wars. He has no equivalent in the Revolutionary generation.

How does a historian deal with errors found in earlier works? He can challenge each fact one by one in a polemical argument that quickly becomes personal, opinionated and unappealing to a general audience. Or the historian can present his facts, and his interpretations of those facts, and let his analysis stand on its own

merits. DiSpigna chose the latter, more professional approach by opting to present his own narrative. He does not explicitly point out significant errors found in earlier works or crow about his own discoveries. In fact, DiSpigna explicitly praises earlier works as “extensively researched” and “more informative than previous works,” professional courtesies deceptively ignored in some reviews of his work. As a trained historian, DiSpigna sticks to the standards of his discipline and eschewed filling empty portions of the record with digressions into the genre of historical romance.

DiSpigna has made considerable contributions to Warren scholarship. His book should be read and discussed by academics, government and military leaders, business men, and all scholars of the American Revolution.

Cian O hAnnrachainn says

History is written by the winners, it is said, but it's the winners who survive that live to tell their tale.

FOUNDING MARTYR is the biography of one who died early in a conflict, a work that brings to light the many contributions of Dr. Joseph Warren. By rights, he was one of America's founding fathers, and Christian Di Spigna does a fine job of illuminating the life and times of a man who has been largely forgotten.

Dr. Warren had a comfortable life and a booming medical practice, yet he did not hesitate to join the resistance to British interference in colonial self-government. To read about a man's dedication to what he thought was right and just makes for fascinating reading. Imagine yourself, with young children to provide for, but you are so incensed about unfair taxation that you organize resistance, even at risk of imprisonment or death.

The man was an intriguing character, and the narrative lays out a timeline of events that show how one thing led to another until the first shots of the American Revolutionary War were fired. Readers will come away with a strong sense of what made a gentleman in those trying times, and what was expected of those who dared to step forward and lead.

Well worth reading for history buffs or anyone enjoying the liberty bought at a high price.

As always, thanks to Penguin Random House for the review copy.

Margaret Sankey says

With extensive citations, Di Spigna reconstructs the tragically short life of Dr. Joseph Warren, central to the decade preceding the revolution, but dead on Bunker Hill near its opening shots. Warren is the prototypical Whig son of New England--from a farming family, but the product of Harvard's social stratification and his own charming upward mobility, builder of a network of patients, allies and in-laws supporting his politics and financial success, always anchored by the Great Awakening's fervent religious enthusiasms. The epilogue covers the many ways in which Warren (and his physical body) were invoked for various reasons--reburial before the Civil War, use in early Republican histories, as well as the ways in which Congress quickly forgot his orphaned children and the woman who was nearly his second wife.

Derek says

Biased and Lacks Scholarly Judiciousness

I received an advanced copy of the book for a review at the Journal of the American Revolution. See the full review at <http://allthingsliberty.com/2018/08/f...>

(the editors there gave a slightly higher score than I wanted, hence the discrepancy)

A summary of that review:

As a fan of Dr. Joseph Warren and having researched him thoroughly for my own two Revolutionary War books (available on Amazon), I was interested to see what new research there could yet be. The book's introduction repeatedly declares this is Warren's "untold story", that "Warren has largely escaped attention", and the back cover proclaims that "Little has been known about... Warren." In fact, much is known. Di Spigna's book is the now the fifth Warren bio. (My books also include extensive details about Warren.)

Di Spigna's book is written well overall, but it fails to provide new insights. However, the real issue is that it suffers from major problems that can be broken down into the following categories: 1) falsely bolstering of Warren's importance (Di Spigna repeatedly conflates Warren's roles with those of George Washington); 2) undeserved bias against the British (making them one-dimensional villains and cherry-picking evidence to do so); 3) lack of scholarly judiciousness (example below); 4) academic dishonesty (example below).

Without repeating my entire review here, examples of the two most important problems are as follows.

Lack of scholarly judiciousness (p. 188 ff.): Di Spigna writes that after Warren was killed in battle, "a small group of seething redcoats circled the body of the 'murdered worthy ... Doctr. Warren'... His Majesty's executioners repeatedly bayoneted his corpse in a violent butchering. Lt. James Drew of the Royal Navy, it was later claimed, returned to the redoubt, walked over to Warren's body, and spat in his face before cutting 'off his head and commit[ing] every act of violence upon his Body.'" Di Spigna adds that Warren's body was continuously mutilated for some time thereafter.

Here we see bias against the British tied with lack of scholarly judiciousness. The above description likely never happened (or if it did, Di Spigna has the burden of proof but fails to deliver). Di Spigna provides only one source for this sensationalized story: a rumor reported by Abigail Adams a month and half later.

However, Di Spigna conveniently ignores a part of this source which is known to be false. That false part is that Warren's head, according to the rumor, was taken in triumph into Boston. Except, it wasn't, and Warren's body was identified by his teeth after the British evacuated Massachusetts. If half of a piece of evidence is known to be false, the entire piece of evidence becomes suspect and must be doubted without further supporting information. Instead, Di Spigna cherry-picked the rumor and claimed it as truth, and ignores evidence to the contrary.

Academic dishonesty: Di Spigna's introduction concludes (p. 8) that his is "the first completely nonfiction book writing about Dr. Joseph Warren in almost sixty years." He repeats similar claims in various places. But it is false. He knows it too, and made an overt decision to dismiss Samuel A. Forman's "Dr. Joseph Warren" (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 2011). Note Di Spigna's words: "first completely nonfiction book." His argument is that Forman's book, which has a fictional account (that Forman twice explicitly notes

as hypothetical), is therefore not a biography. Yet Forman's book remains the best researched to date.

Beyond this dismissal, there is quite a bit of overlap between Di Spigna's book and that of Forman. I am certain of it in one case (p. 273-274), where Di Spigna writes at length about Sally Edwards, a possible mistress of Warren's. This mistress idea is really first put forth by Forman and soon after another author (Nathaniel Philbrick, who repeatedly cites Forman), but while Di Spigna spends a page refuting the mistress idea, he refuses to cite Forman as the source of the material he is refuting. The conscious attempt to ignore a biography that is at least in some part used by the author is suspicious to say the least.

Bottom line, there seems to be an overt effort to make Warren more important, more the hero, and then make his death more tragic than it was. And this is done by use of false or dubious information and by dismissing the recent scholarship on the subject while in fact using it at times but without citation.

I cannot recommend this book. Consider Forman's book instead.

PS: I'm a little surprised at all of the relatively positive reviews staged by Amazon Vine and other early readers ahead of the publication process. Their reviews are mostly without knowledge of the content. The book is written well enough, but the content itself is the problem.

Brian says

Founding Martyr by Christian Di Spigna follows the life of Dr. Joseph Warren and the early days of the revolution. Joseph Warren is one of the often unsung and forgotten heroes of the revolution. He served as a catalyst for unifying the many splintered cells of patriots that were forming in Boston into a cohesive group and although unproven is likely one of the strong voices and architects of the Boston Tea Party. His role as a physician of all sides allowed him to establish one of the early spy rings and formulate plans against the British and he was one of the last patriots to remain in Boston leading up to Lexington and Concord. Following the dissolution into war with Great Britain he would go on to organize many of the early actions and serve at Bunker Hill where he would be killed and have his body desecrated in a fit of rage by the British. Not knowing of his death in Philadelphia a flurry of letters were headed towards Massachusetts employing Dr. Warren to prepare for George Washington and setting him up to be a key point person in the coming war for independence. Alas we will never know the role he might have played had he lived but this book does a great job of showing his importance in the early struggle for independence and helping to serve as a catalyst for the American Revolution.

Amy says

Although I knew about Joseph Warren and political outlook and death at Bunker Hill, that is about all I knew. I really enjoyed this book and learned a lot about both Warren and Boston politics prior to the start of the American Revolution. Although personal information is limited due to the lack of sources, his public life is fairly well documented through official records and personal letters and remembrances of his contemporaries. Yes there are always biases contained in letters and remembrances, but considering the lack of source materials and the practically nonexistent documentation in Warren's own hand I think the author did a good job of elucidating his life. I was somewhat surprised at how controversial Warren was during his own lifetime. I suppose we are taught a very one sided view of both the revolution and our founding fathers.

We tend to forget how controversial the revolution and all that occurred before it was to the people then living and the Tories are sometimes universally condemned in this country. The author brought out Warren's views and that they were considered radical even among some revolutionaries. He clearly pictured the extreme partisan arguing which occurred which reminded me of today's politics, especially the way both sides demonized their political opponents. It has given me much to think about which is why I enjoy reading history.

Shoshana says

“Founding Martyr” is about Doctor Joseph Warren, a man who was very influential in the years before the American War for Independence, but whose untimely death at Bunker (Breed’s) Hill on June 17, 1775 robbed the nascent nation of a unique voice. Dr Warren of Boston was radicalized earlier than most Americans, and was in the mix with Samuel Adams and his cousin John, John Hancock, and other Whigs and radicals.

Joseph Warren was the eldest son of a Roxbury, Massachusetts farmer, and attended Harvard, after which he apprenticed with a Doctor Lloyd in Boston, before setting up his own practice. He soon became rich and prominent, having Whigs and Tories among his patients. He also ministered to poor people, and accounts of his show that he was often paid in kind.

If Joseph Warren had not died so young, and so early in the fight for Independence, he would have been remembered as one of the most influential Founders. His loss was a grave one, and came at a horrible time. I would have liked to have seen more discussion about Warren as a person; Di Spignia is excellent at recounting what happened, and when, but there is not really enough why. This may be no fault of the author as Warren is known for having burned a lot of his papers in order to keep them from falling into enemy hands. Still, a really great biography helps the reader to get under the skin of the biography’s subject, and this “Founding Martyr” fails to do.

So often in history we look back and think of what might have been. If Joseph Warren had not been killed in battle he would have undoubtedly been accorded a place with the greatest of the Founders; who knows, he might even have become president or vice-president himself. The country and posterity lost a great man on that summer day in Boston, his contemporaries knew it at the time, and it is good to see Warren recalled from obscurity.

Steve says

An interesting book on someone who I never heard of before. Dr. Joseph Warren started the colonial revolution against the British that started the American Revolution. Warren took part in the Boston Tea Party and the battles of Lexington and Concord. He later was killed during the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Jenny says

Joseph Warren was an honest, intelligent, upstanding doctor and orator in Boston during the Colonial and Revolutionary period. This man whom author Christian Di Spignia calls The Founding Martyr rose from

humble beginnings to attend Harvard and become an outstanding physician and leader in the Whig Party. His persuasive writing and oratory skills would lead to his influencing the Suffolk Resolves, inciting the citizenry to resist Crown policies..Unfortunately Warren did not live to see the end product of his efforts. On June 17, 1775, Major General Joseph Warren was killed in battle.

I cannot explain what drove Warren to risk his family, fortune and life but I didn't get to know him. The book chronicles all his achievements but not with angst or emotion. Everything Warren does he does well, and with seemingly little pain and discomfort. When his family is in danger in Boston, he packs them up and sends them to the country under the care of his brother. He remains in Boston and continues giving speeches. British soldiers threaten assassinations but he is never harmed nor worried.

I wish more attention had been paid to human interaction than to achievements. A page and a half of the book is denoted to Mrs. Warrens death. The painting of Dr. Warren by Jonathan Singleton Copley is extensively detailed for over three pages of the book. I know more about the painting than about Warrens relationship with his wife and her views.

The book is well researched and very detailed. Dr. Warren is not an unknown Colonial patriot but unfortunately this book does not raise his to the rank of outstanding leader of the Revolution.

I give this book 2.5 stars. I received an advance copy of this book from Netgalley,. My reviews are unbiased and completely my own. #Netgalley #FoundingMartyr

Katie says

I got a digital uncorrected proof via First To Read. This was really my first proper sit down with nonfiction, and I finished it! (Unlike that economics book you'll see on my shelf of shame.) That being said, if you're a nonfiction buff, you can take my review with a grain of salt because I'm coming at it under the gauze of little experience with great nonfiction writers. The writing style was engaging, the structure was sound, the use of resources was extensive (though I couldn't appreciate it until the end in my proof as there weren't any links to notes so I didn't get the full picture of quite how expansive). There was not much to go off for Joseph Warren's life, but I felt the extrapolations were logical and not suspect. I would've liked perhaps a brief timeline summary at the start to have a quick overview before diving in. Di Spigna paints a very good picture of what the area would've looked and felt like, which was great to visualise the Revolutionary world. Recommended!

Amy says

I found *Founding Martyr: The Life and Death of Dr. Joseph Warren, the American Revolution's Lost Hero* a fascinated read. I recommend it! 4 stars.
