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James and Dolley Madison: America's First Power Couple

Bruce Chadwick

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This revealing new portrait of James and Dolley Madison introduces the reader to America’s first power couple. Using recently uncovered troves of letters at the University of Virginia, among other sources, historian Bruce Chadwick has been able to reconstruct the details of the Madisons’ personal and political lives.

Chadwick argues that Madison was not a boring, average president, as other historians have characterized him, but a vibrant, tough leader—and a very successful commander in chief in the War of 1812.

He contends that Madison, the architect of the Constitution, owed much of his success to the political savvy of his charismatic, much younger wife, whose parties and backdoor politicking make for remarkable stories. And Dolley, through her many social skills, created the dynamic role of First Lady that we know today.

Despite their glamorous lifestyle, behind the scenes, the Madisons struggled with family drama: James and Dolley’s constant funding of their charming but sociopathic son’s misadventures ultimately led to their own financial ruin.

Blending the personal and the political, this is a fascinating profile of a couple whose life together contributed so much to the future course of our nation.

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