



Science and the Founding Fathers: Science in the Political Thought of Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, and Madison

I. Bernard Cohen

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This work examines the scientific education of four important figures of the American republic, looking at how they employed their knowledge in shaping the political issues of the day and how they incorporated scientific reasoning into the constitution. Thomas Jefferson, president of the United States, was able to read and comprehend Newton's "Principia". Benjamin Franklin had attained international scientific fame by 1775, his "Experiments and Observations on Electricity" having been translated into six languages before the American Revolution. John Adams underwent one of the finest educations in science that the "new" country could provide, including courses in "Pneumaticks", "Hydrostaticks", "Mechaniks", "Statiks" and "Optiks". James Madison, chief architect of the Constitution, peppered his Federalist Papers with references to physics, chemistry and the life sciences. For all these men science was an integral part of life - including political life.

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