

Richard Hofstadter: The Intellectual Odyssey of a Public Historian

Richard Hofstadter was one of the most influential American historians of the 20th century. His work on populism, McCarthyism, and the American character helped to shape our understanding of American history.

Hofstadter was also a gifted writer and teacher, and his insights continue to resonate with readers today.



Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography

by David S. Brown

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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Michael Kazin's biography of Hofstadter is the definitive account of the historian's life and work. Kazin traces Hofstadter's intellectual development from his early days as a Marxist to his later years as a leading critic of American conservatism. Along the way, Kazin explores Hofstadter's groundbreaking work on populism, McCarthyism, and the American character.

Kazin's biography is a must-read for anyone interested in American history or intellectual history. It is a well-written and engaging account of the life

and work of one of America's most important historians.

Hofstadter's Early Life and Education

Richard Hofstadter was born in New York City in 1916. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Hofstadter's father was a tailor, and his mother was a homemaker. Hofstadter attended public schools in New York City and graduated from City College of New York in 1936.

Hofstadter then went on to study at Columbia University, where he received his MA in 1937 and his PhD in 1942. Hofstadter's dissertation, "The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, and Parrington," was a groundbreaking study of the three most influential American historians of the early 20th century.

Hofstadter's Career as a Historian

Hofstadter began his teaching career at the University of Maryland in 1942. He moved to Columbia University in 1946, where he remained for the rest of his career. Hofstadter was a gifted teacher, and his lectures were always packed. He was also a prolific writer, and he published over 20 books and 100 articles during his lifetime.

Hofstadter's first major work was *The American Political Tradition* (1948). This book was a study of the development of American political thought from the colonial era to the early 20th century. Hofstadter argued that American political thought was characterized by a tension between two opposing tendencies: individualism and collectivism.

Hofstadter's next major work was *The Age of Reform* (1955). This book was a study of the Progressive Era in American history. Hofstadter argued

that the Progressive Era was a time of both great promise and great peril. He praised the Progressives for their idealism and their commitment to social justice. However, he also criticized them for their naiveté and their tendency to oversimplify complex social problems.



Hofstadter's most famous work is *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963). This book was a study of the anti-intellectualism that has been a

persistent feature of American culture. Hofstadter argued that anti-intellectualism is a dangerous force that undermines democracy and progress. He warned that anti-intellectualism could lead to the rise of fascism in America.

Hofstadter died of a heart attack in 1970 at the age of 54. He was at the height of his powers, and his death was a great loss to the world of scholarship.

Hofstadter's Legacy

Richard Hofstadter was one of the most influential American historians of the 20th century. His work on populism, McCarthyism, and the American character helped to shape our understanding of American history.

Hofstadter was also a gifted writer and teacher, and his insights continue to resonate with readers today.

Hofstadter's legacy is complex and controversial. Some historians have criticized him for being too pessimistic about American society. Others have accused him of being too elitist. However, there is no doubt that Hofstadter was a brilliant historian who made a major contribution to our understanding of American history.



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