The administration of John Adams was a period of rapid change, internal discord, and the continual threat of war. Few of the nation's chief executives have been subjected to such immediate and ever-present danger of foreign involvement and national destruction, to such bitter animosities and serious cleavages within their administrations, or to such constant need for decision making as was John Adams. In the face of such adversity Adams successfully pursued a policy of neutrality and consiliation and, in so doing, provided time for the country to grow strong and to prosper. Yet, despite the seriousness of the country's problems and the contributions of his administration, he is seldom designated as one of the great American presidents. In this volume, Ralph Adams Brown presents a new evaluation of John Adams and of his four years in the presidency. The portrait drawn by Adams' enemies disappears and the second president emerges as a world citizen whose insight, judgment, and perseverance held the young nation together in a critical period. Brown focuses closely on the most significant aspect of Adams' presidency, foreign affairs. He examines the country's increasing concern with matters of defense and Adams' successful efforts to evade foreign entanglements. Describing the vicious personal attacks to which Adams was subjected, and the devious and disloyal maneuvers of his cabinet members, Brown traces Adams' difficulties with Timothy Pickering, James McHenry, Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Alexander Hamilton, and others. He documents Adams' steadfastness to his ideals and principles, despite the hostility, exaggerated accusations, and perfidy that surrounded him. This book is part of the American Presidency Series.

My Personal Review:
All U.S. presidents must confront and solve problems, some more unique than others. There are a few whose difficulties are unprecedented and will never recur again. John Adams was such a president and his effectiveness
as a chief executive is often underestimated. When he took the oath of office, the nation was still young and in many ways not yet a nation. Regional differences, which sixty years later would explode into civil war, were powerful and could have led to a similar event during his administration. The governmental structure was idealistic, novel and untested. There were many who felt that it was unworkable, and with minimal communication infrastructure, it was difficult for the central government to project its' power quickly and effectively.

The framers of this government were highly talented, ambitious men, who were now faced with the task of governing. As history has shown us so many times, the talented revolutionary is often mediocre at governing. Political parties began to form and like all births, involved a great deal of fits and starts. George Washington commanded such respect that no one could reasonably hope to challenge his authority, and yet he was wore down by the political battles. Succeeding such a towering figure would have been difficult for anyone. Europe was also currently engaged in a general war as a consequence of the revolution in France, and there were strong forces driving the United States towards involvement.

Into this horrendous mix of conflicting forces, John Adams became president. There is no question that the crises he faced rank in the top five of all presidents. Forced to face and solve these problems, he performed admirably. There is no more telling measures of his success in that he angered many in both parties and one of his strongest enemies, Thomas Jefferson, continued his policies when he succeeded Adams.

Brown does an outstanding job of describing these circumstances, for without this knowledge it is impossible to understand how successful Adams was. He also describes many of the details of John Adams' relationship with his wife Abigail. Although the times dictated that women play secondary roles in society, it is clear that many women wielded substantial power behind the scenes, if only to provide the strength for her husband to do what was right. After reading this book, you cannot help but be impressed with the power and intelligence of Abigail Adams, one of the most talented first spouses that this country has ever had.

This book serves a necessary and overdue purpose. It shows John Adams as more than just an adequate successor to Washington, but as a president who stood firm and always placed the interests of the nation first. He was a great man, showing that many of the men who made the American revolution were also, and perhaps even more skilled, at making and executing a government. I will forever be in awe of their political genius.

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