



Great Bastards of History

Juré Fiorillo

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For much of history and across most of the world, being born out of wedlock—a love child, a bastard—was a serious impediment to success. Illegitimate offspring were subject to neglect, abandonment, disinheritance, and social exclusion, and often found the usual routes to education, wealth, and status blocked. Surmounting these obstacles required tremendous fortitude and persistence.

Great Bastards of History brings together the captivating and stirring stories of fifteen remarkable and influential people who overcame the disadvantages of illegitimate birth to rise to positions of power. As well as providing insights into the personalities of many world-changing figures, it highlights the extraordinary courage, drive, and resolve that ordinary individuals can summon when faced with extreme adversity. Among its subjects are powerful political players including Alexander Hamilton, the abandoned son who became a founding father of the United States, and cultural figureheads such as Leonardo da Vinci, who, despite being denied entrance to trade guilds and universities, was proclaimed one of the greatest men of his day in courts throughout Europe. Equally affecting are some of the less well-known but no less fascinating figures, such as James Smithson, the disinherited son of an English duke, whose bequest to a country he never visited founded the largest museum in the world, the Smithsonian Institution.

Deftly blending biography and history, political intrigue, melodrama, and psychological analysis, this is a collection that will uplift, entertain, and inform, while yielding fresh perspectives on some of the most significant events from our past.

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