



# Great Bastards of History: True and Riveting Accounts of the Most Famous Illegitimate Children Who Went on to Achieve Greatness

By Jur'e 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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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Though informative, this volume profiling famous figures were born out-of-wedlock is an example of hodge-podge history at its most head-scratching; tackling the entire length of Anglo-Saxon history, it's understandable that some well-known bastards won't make the cut, but why include Alexander Hamilton and not Thomas Paine? Why Eva Peron, but not Confucius? Why Billie Holiday, but not Edith Piaf? Among those he does cover, beginning with William the Conqueror and ending with Fidel Castro, Fiorillo labors unconvincingly to make illegitimacy a meaningful part of their stories (on da Vinci: "It is unlikely his achievements would have been so spectacular if he weren't trying to overcome the stigma caused by being a bastard"). Human psychology isn't so clean cut as Fiorillo would like to imagine: subjects like Alexandre Dumas and Jack London enjoyed a relatively peaceful existence with single parents; Billie Holiday and Alexander Hamilton were haunted more by poverty than by illegitimacy; and Queen Elizabeth I was beloved by her father, mother and stepmothers all (and, as her parents had been married when she was born, doesn't actually qualify as a bastard). A handsome design doesn't make up for clumsy writing, a narrow scope and some questionable editorial decisions. 125 color photos.

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### Review

A ripping good read. Fiorillo provides fresh perspective on some of history's iconic figures—and introduces us to some lesser-known players whose 'illegitimacy' only fueled their ambition to leave their mark on world events. In the words of the immortal Bard of Avon: 'Now gods, stand up for bastards!' —*Robert Schnakenberg, author of Distory: A Treasury of Historical Insults*

Combining history with biography, Jure Fiorillo has written *Great Bastards of History*. Being born out of wedlock has long been a burden to those whose birth was no fault of their own. Throughout history illegitimacy often involved neglect, abandonment, disinheritance, and social exclusion. The usual routes to education, wealth and status were often blocked. Thus, it is come as a surprise to readers that many famous and accomplished persons were, in fact, bastards. They included our own Alexander Hamilton, one of the most brilliant of the Founding Fathers, and Leonardo Da Vinci, one of the greatest men of his age. In America we owe the Smithsonian museum to James Smithson, the disinherited son of an English Duke. In chapter after chapter, history emerges in an entirely new way in this quite interesting book.

—*Bookviews by Alan Caruba*

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