Chapter IV

American Independence and the Myth of the Founding Fathers

1. Why the Founding Fathers?

> Who Fathered America?
> TIM LAHAYE, *FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS*

> When in doubt, in American politics, left, right, or center, deploy the Founding Fathers.
> JILL LEPORE, *THE WHITES OF THEIR EYES*

The myth of the Founding Fathers constitutes an American master narrative which has enshrined a group of statesmen and politicians of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period as personifications of the origin of American nationhood, republicanism, and democratic culture. More so than with the previously discussed individuals and groups, the Founding Fathers epitomize a *political* myth of origin that is phrased in a language of kinship. The term 'Fathers' suggests tradition, legitimacy, and paternity and creates an allegory of family and affiliation that affirms the union and the cohesion of the new nation. When the colonists in the revolutionary decade argued that they were no longer subjects of the British King and that they could now govern themselves (cf. Declaration of Independence), they claimed not only the maturity of the colonies and its ruling elite but also their capacity to produce progenitors in their own right. The construction of 'new world' authority and the logic of reproduction went hand in hand.

Second, in contrast to the myths previously discussed, which date back to the era of exploration and colonization, the chronology of the Founding Fathers coincides with the actual founding of the nation, beginning (roughly) with Ben-

jamin Franklin's birth (1706) and ending with James Madison's death (1836). As a myth, founding fatherhood would only be installed firmly much later though – arguably only in the 20th century, as we will see. The Founding Fathers denote a secular myth that in its hegemonic version claims that the US evolved from the Puritans' Mayflower Compact to the political maturity of republicanism. It also constitutes a myth of a new beginning effected through a revolution. Even though this revolution has been interpreted in many different ways, it certainly carries that "specific […] pathos of the absolutely new, of a beginning which would justify starting to count time in the year of the revolutionary event" (Arendt, *On Revolution* 29-30). In many ways, the American calendar begins with the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the Revolutionary War, and this new beginning is commemorated each year on the Fourth of July. The myth of the Founding Fathers is also intimately connected to the first explicit articulations of an American civil religion. In his Farewell Address of 1796, George Washington refers to the bonds among the US states as 'sacred ties' to be preserved and cherished on the basis of the Constitution and thus translates the European religious idiom of the 'holy union' into a civil religious framework that would be particularly influential in constructions of the American nation (cf. Spalding and Garrity, *Sacred Union*).

Third, the myth of the Founding Fathers (like that of the Pilgrims and Puritans) focuses on a group of historical actors; it symbolizes cooperation and interdependence by toning down internal conflicts among those actors and by erasing the contingency of their plans and actions, their local and regional (rather than national) interests, and all sorts of major and minor disagreements. Even though members of this group have been heroized individually (George Washington, above all), they still form a collectivity whose military, political, intellectual, and diplomatic talents and efforts have led it to perform what has been referred to in hegemonic versions of the myth as nothing less than "a miracle" (Schachner, *Founding Fathers* vii), or "almost a miracle" (cf. Ferling's book of the same title). It also strongly personalizes the origins of American nationhood, republicanism, and democracy by presenting them as the results of the political genius, virtue, and audacity of extraordinary individuals. The myth has been affirmed by American and European writers, critics, and scholars alike, ranging from Richard Hofstadter to Clinton Rossiter and from Alexis de Tocqueville to Hannah Arendt.

Who exactly is or is not to be included among the Founding Fathers is a matter of scholarly debate, as this term has only been applied retrospectively and inconsistently. Technically, the Founding Fathers were the delegates of the Thirteen Colonies who signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, and

later the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Some of those "164 Patriots," as Jack Stanfield calls them (cf. *America's Founding Fathers*), are little known today, while others figure prominently in memorial discourses. Richard Brown looks at the "ninety-nine men" – the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the members of the Constitutional Convention (between whom exists some overlap) – and identifies the Founding Fathers as the "uppermost layer of the Revolutionary leadership" ("Founding Fathers" 465). Richard Bernstein even more inclusively describes the Founding Fathers as

> those who, by word or deed, helped to found the United States as a nation and a political experiment. Thus, beyond the "seven who shaped our destiny" named by Richard B. Morris, the term includes those who sat in the Congress that declared American independence; it even includes a delegate such as John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, who opposed independence and refused to sign the Declaration but fought for the American cause in the Revolutionary War, and a polemicist such as Thomas Paine, who only briefly held political office but was an extraordinarily effective educator and mobilizer of public opinion. It also encompasses others who fought on the American side in the war, or played important roles (as framers, ratifiers, opponents, or effectuators) in the origins of the Constitution of the United States and the system of government it outlines. (*Founding Fathers* 7-8)

Gore Vidal in contrast singles out Washington, Adams, and Jefferson as the Founding Fathers of the American republic, even though he refers to Alexander Hamilton as often as to the three aforementioned figures, and quite frequently also to John Jay and James Madison (cf. *Inventing*). As Bernstein's reference to Morris's 1976 book *Seven Who Shaped Our Destiny* in the above quotation shows, the epithet 'Founding Fathers' often refers to seven individuals, namely Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison; it is by and around these quite iconic figures that the Founding Fathers myth of origin has been predominantly constructed (even if there are other suggestions and additions such as Harlow Giles Unger's rather laudatory appraisal of James Monroe as *The Last Founding Father* [2009]). So whether there were three, seven, ninety-nine, or 164 founding fathers (and some accounts come up with still other numbers) is contentious, and has been subject to processes of canonization and revision time and again.

While we may refer to the American elite of the late 18th century as Founding Fathers (alternatively: framers, founders) and while the group later referred to as the Founding Fathers was already commemorated in early American popular print culture, the phrase 'Founding Fathers' as a label became a fixed expression only in the early 20th century after it was used for the first time in 1916 by War-

ren G. Harding in a talk at the Republican National Convention (cf. Bernstein, *Founding Fathers* 3; cf. also Lepore, *Whites*). Harding again used this phrase in his 1921 inaugural address:

> Standing in this presence, mindful of the solemnity of this occasion, feeling the emotions which no one may know until he senses the great weight of responsibility for himself, I must utter my belief in the divine inspiration of the founding fathers. Surely there must have been God's intent in the making of this new-world Republic.

Harding's speech may well be considered a founding moment of the Founding Fathers discourse even though group portraits and images of those American politicians and statesmen had, of course, been circulating much earlier.

My aim in this chapter is neither to provide a full-fledged discussion of the merits of American republicanism and constitutionalism as debated and created by the Founding Fathers, nor to present in-depth analyses of the foundational documents, nor to address each of the Founding Fathers as private and public figures, but rather to reconstruct the processes through which the myth of the Founding Fathers developed. In this chapter I will first revisit the historical moment of the American founding; second, trace the affirmative, i.e. foundational memorial culture surrounding the founders in the 19th century; third, consider American slavery in the context of the Founding Fathers myth and the role of Abraham Lincoln as a belated Founding Father, or, more specifically, as the Founding Father for African Americans; fourth, address the long-neglected role women played as 'Founding Mothers' in the metaphorical paradigm of procreation; fifth, direct our attention to the memorial practices of the 20th century, more specifically to the Founding Fathers of Mount Rushmore, a prestigious and very controversial project that, among other things, sheds light on Native American perspectives on the founders; sixth, discuss the latest revisions of the Founding Fathers myth in the context of the Tea Party movement and 'founders chic,' which seem to re-affirm the exclusivity of the Founding Fathers as, again in a civil religious vein, the American 'apostles of freedom;' seventh, and in conclusion, consider the mutable meanings of this myth in the 21st century in national as well as transnational contexts.

2. SEVEN FOUNDING FATHERS – AN OVERVIEW

> Politicians are an integral part of "the mysteries of national formations."
> ROBERT A. FERGUSON, *READING THE EARLY REPUBLIC*

> America's founding fathers, the men who engineered a constitutional convention and drafted a new form of government for the loosely-joined states in 1787, succeeded through the force of personal authority.
> JOYCE APPLEBY, *INHERITING THE REVOLUTION*

Despite never-ending debates of who should or should not be considered a member, some definitions of the Founding Fathers have remained more or less constant in American historiography; thus, in order to sketch the dominant version of the myth, let me name and very briefly introduce those who are most often included in the Founding Fathers canon: Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) is the oldest member of the Founding Father group and still holds a central place among their ranks as a supposedly multi-talented politician, public educator, and scientist, and as a major representative of the American Enlightenment. In his autobiography, which has issued powerful self-representations of the *homo americanus* and has become a highly canonical text, Franklin fashioned himself as the "good parent" who "treats all Americans as his offspring" (Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* 127). Due to his participation in the campaign for colonial unity, he was often referred to as "the first American" (cf. H.W. Brands's book of the same title). Benjamin Franklin's self-concocted and self-declared combination of frugality, hard work, community spirit, intellectualism, and democratic participation was highly influential in later mythmaking. He was famously portrayed by Joseph Siffred Duplessis and is commemorated on the one hundred-dollar bill. During his lifetime, the Franklin cult was already international in scope and garnered a substantial transatlantic following. More recently, James Srodes has re-affirmed his centrality by calling him the "essential founding father" (cf. *Benjamin Franklin*).

Somewhat different are the grounds on which *George Washington* (1732-1799), one of the three Virginians in this group, has been elevated as a Founding Father. Washington was commander-in-chief of the Continental Army from 1775-1783 (and as such successful against the British military); he then oversaw the writing of the Constitution in 1787, and was later unanimously voted the first President of the United States (1789-1797). During his presidency many aspects

and rituals of the US government were established that are still being practiced today, among them the presidential inaugural address. Washington has often been given the epithet 'Father of his Country' and thus holds a particularly prominent place among the founders. In affirmative versions of the founders myth, he is often referred to as "a modern-day Cincinnatus" (Furstenberg, "Washington's Farewell Address" 122; cf. Wills, *Cincinnatus* 35-37, 248-9) because he allegedly did not strive for political power and planned to return to his plantation after the war for independence was won. As a Virginian, Washington was also "a staunch advocate of American expansion" (Taylor, *Writing* 176) and was among those Founding Fathers who owned slaves. Foundational Washington iconography includes the famous portraits by Charles Willson Peale and Gilbert Stuart, the biographies by John Marshall (cf. *Life*), Washington Irving (cf. *Life*), and Mason Locke Weems (cf. *History*), as well as the sculptures by Jean Antoine Houdon and Horatio Greenough. Washington's Birthday is a federal holiday celebrated on the third Monday of February. Karal Ann Marling has comprehensively documented Washingtonia in her book *George Washington Slept Here* (1988), and François Furstenberg has tried to show that the "freely given," voluntary worship of Washington effectively created a civil religious, national consensus among Americans (*In the Name* 70).

Like Washington, *Thomas Jefferson* (1743-1826) was a member of the Virginia planter elite and thus a slaveholder; he served as delegate from Virginia to the Continental Congress and later on became the third President of the United States (1801-1809). On his gravestone, Jefferson allegedly wished to be remembered for three things: as the author of the Declaration of Independence, as the author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and as the founder of the University of Virginia. He purchased the Louisiana territory from Napoleon in 1803, thus doubling the size of the US territory, and supported the Lewis and Clarke expedition (1804-06) to explore it. The ideal of Jeffersonian democracy is often described as an agrarian vision of an imagined "empire of liberty," which is formulated in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (query 14). The neoclassical Jefferson Memorial on the National Mall in Washington D.C. was completed in 1947, and he is depicted on the rare two-dollar bill. Because of the inconsistencies and contradictions of Jefferson's contribution to the national founding, Joseph Ellis has called him the "American Sphinx" (cf. his book of the same title). In biographical appraisals, he has been given credit for his contribution and successes by Merrill Peterson (cf. *Jefferson Image*) and others, yet he has also been cast quite negatively as "the greatest southern reactionary" (Lind, *Next American Nation* 369) and as an influence on the Ku Klux Klan (cf. O'Brien, *Long Affair*).

James Madison (1751-1836) is the third Virginian plantation owner in the ranks of the Founding Fathers. As a member of Congress (1780-3), he urged the revision of the Articles of Confederation in favor of a stronger national government. As the primary author of the Constitution, he is often called 'Father of the Constitution' and 'Father of the Bill of Rights.' In co-authorship with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay he wrote the *Federalist Papers*. Power must be divided, Madison argued, both between federal and state governments, and within the federal government (checks and balances) to protect individual rights from what he famously called "the tyranny of the majority" ("Advice"). With Jefferson, Madison formed the Republican Party. As the fourth President of the United States (1809-1817), he entered a war against Britain which is often referred to as the War of 1812 (also called 'Mr. Madison's War'); it ended inconclusively but was considered a success by Americans and is thus often also labeled the 'second war for independence.'

Although he is considered one of the key Founding Fathers, *John Adams* (1735-1826) never became the object of any large-scale national individual personality cult, which he seems to have anticipated himself:

> The essence of the whole will be that Dr. Franklin's electrical Rod, smote the Earth and out sprung General Washington. That Franklin electrified him with his rod – and henceforth these two conducted all the Policy, Negotiations, Legislatures and War. These underscored lines contain the whole Fable, Plot, and Catastrophe. (qtd. in Ferguson, *Reading* 1)

Adams was a lawyer, a political theorist, and the author of "Thoughts on Government," which early on promoted "a checked, balanced, and separated form of government" (Bernstein, *Founding Fathers* 51) and suggested a bicameral legislature anchored in the Constitution. As delegate for Massachusetts to the Continental Congress he nominated George Washington as commander-in-chief and supposedly prompted Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence. He served as Washington's vice president and later became the second President of the United States. Adams is often considered in relation to various famous family members – his wife, Abigail Adams, his son John Quincy Adams, who was the sixth President of the United States, and his great-grandson Henry Adams, a historian and novelist.

Like Franklin and Adams, *John Jay* (1745-1829) was from the North and the delegate to the First Continental Congress from New York; he also drafted New York's first state constitution. At first, Jay was, in John Stahr's view, somewhat of a "reluctant democrat" (*John Jay* xiii) and apparently always favored a strong national government. Next to being one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers*,

he wrote the voluminous pamphlet *Address to the People of the State of New York*. As head of the Federalist Party, Jay became Governor of the State of New York (1795-1801), and in this function effected the abolition of slavery in this state. Jay also was involved in what is often referred to as the Jay Treaty (1794), which, for a while, secured peace between the US and Britain. In contrast to other Founding Fathers, Jay has no monument or memorial on the National Mall dedicated to him. It has been repeatedly noted that Jay's legacy has been somewhat overshadowed by that of other Founding Fathers and that he is often "forgotten and sometimes misrepresented" (Stahr, *John Jay* xiii) due in part to his less than exciting lifestyle; Stahr quips somewhat polemically: "He did not die in a duel, like Hamilton, or sleep with a slave, like Jefferson" (ibid. xiv).

Alexander Hamilton (1755/57(?)-1804) is, according to Gore Vidal, "the one true exotic" (*Inventing* 17) among the national founders. Born and raised in the West Indies, Hamilton came to North America for his education (he attended King's College, now Columbia University). He was a delegate to the Congress of the Confederation from New York, a delegate to the 1786 Annapolis Convention to revise the Articles of Confederation, and one of New York's delegates at the Philadelphia Convention that drafted the new constitution in 1787. Hamilton wrote most of the *Federalist Papers* and is often considered a nationalist who emphasized a strong central government. In his political maneuvering, Hamilton has often been cast as authoritarian, even "monarchizing," and has been considered by his political opponents as a "closet Caesar" (Knott, *Alexander Hamilton* 215). Hamilton resigned from office in 1795 but remained influential in politics; he supposedly helped Jefferson defeat Adams in the 1800 presidential elections and had a notorious rivalry with Aaron Burr, who eventually killed Hamilton in a duel. Foreign born, and, we can assume, without the proper habitus of either the Southern planters or the New England intellectuals, Hamilton has often been considered the odd one out among the inner circle of the Founding Fathers – a mere "upstart," an immigrant of illegitimate birth, even "un-American" (ibid. 7; 11). Jefferson once noted that there was a somewhat "faintly alien […] odor of (his) character and politics" (qtd. in ibid. 230). He has been memorialized in paintings by John Trumbull and Charles Willson Peale, outdoor statues by Carl Conrads (1880), William Ordway (1893 and 1908), and Adolph A. Weinman (1941) in Manhattan as well as a statue in Chicago's Lincoln Park, and, most recently, the PBS production *Rediscovering Alexander Hamilton* (2011).

From these short biographical sketches we can already gather, first, that most sources on the founders have a tendency to affirm the Founding Fathers myth and to contribute to their mythologization (even when they are scholarly publica-

tions); and second, that the founders had pronounced differences in background and upbringing, in political vision and experience, in temperament and in career. These differences suggest that their group identity is anything but stable. Benjamin Franklin had a clear sense of the differences among them when he reminded his peers: "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately" (*Works* Vol. 1 408). Franklin's admonishment to "hang together" and to pursue the independence of the colonies as a common cause reveals what was perceived as the danger of factionalism at the time. What many of the elite of the founders indeed had in common is that they were authors – of farewell speeches, pamphlets, constitutions, declarations, bills, essays, autobiographies, letters, etc. – who engaged in at times heated debates and exchange. In the historical context, Robert Ferguson notes:

> In the 1770s the Founders are competing propagandists who trade in treason for an uncertain cause and a mixed audience. Confused and divided, they face enormous problems in deciding what to say to whom and when. Neither the British nor the French but factionalism is and remains their clearest enemy. Indeed, the possibility of collapse through internal dissension continues to haunt both political considerations and the literary imagination for generations. ("'We Hold'" 4)

Based on their writings on republicanism and constitutionalism, Hannah Arendt lauds "the thoughtful and erudite political theories of the Founding Fathers" (*On Revolution* 16) and their "deep concern with forms of government" (ibid. 50). This political myth has provided a cohesive national discourse for the United States at a time when it still was characterized by strong local and regional interests. Still, the conflicts among the Founding Fathers and their different political trajectories have led Robert Levine to suggest in hindsight that there was "no single 'American ideology'" or "national narrative" at the time of the founding (*Dislocating* 67).

3. REMEMBERING THE FOUNDERS IN THE 19TH CENTURY: JOHN TRUMBULL'S PAINTING *THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE*

> [A]n Olympian gathering of wise and virtuous men who stood splendidly above all faction, ignored petty self-interest, and concerned themselves only with the freedom and well-being of their fellow-countrymen.
> STANLEY ELKINS AND ERIC MCKITRICK, "THE FOUNDING FATHERS"

> [A] staid group of white men, frozen in time.
> RICHARD B. BERNSTEIN, *THE FOUNDING FATHERS RECONSIDERED*

When discussing the iconography of the Founding Fathers, one has to turn once again to the United States Capitol in Washington D.C. and to the rotunda, where crucial scenes from US foundational mythology are exhibited. Whereas George Washington appears in the rotunda in the Trumbull painting *General George Washington Resigning His Commission* (1824) as commander-in-chief, the focus here will be on the representation of the group of founders in *The Declaration of Independence* (1818), also by Trumbull, who painted a series of four rotunda paintings. The painting titled *The Declaration of Independence* is one of the most canonical renderings of the foundational moment of the 'exceptional union' called the United States; its title does not reference the founders' names but their performative act of declaring independence as well as the document confirming that act. It is one among several iconic renderings of foundational moments in US history displayed in the rotunda today, including Howard Chandler Christy's *The Signing of the Constitution* (1940) as well as Barry Faulkner's murals *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution of the United States* (1936, exhibited in the National Archives Building).

John Trumbull, who is referred to by Irma B. Jaffe as the "patriot-artist of the American Revolution" (cf. *John Trumbull*), was well acquainted with Thomas Jefferson (who he also painted), and regularly met with him in Paris in 1786. Clearly, the scene in Trumbull's *The Declaration of Independence* depicts not the July 4 meeting of the founders, but an earlier one – probably the June 28 meeting at which the committee appointed to present a draft of the document offered it up for consideration by the US Congress (cf. Cooper, *John Trumbull* 76). At the center of the composition, Jefferson submits the parchment to John Hancock, then-President of the Continental Congress and the first signer of the Declaration. Jefferson is surrounded by the other members of the drafting committee, some of which are more readily considered Founding Fathers than others: John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Benjamin Franklin. In the

background, 48 congressmen are clustered in groups of varying size, most of them with their heads turned attentively to the committee. Contemporaneous criticism of this painting held that it was static and repetitive, unoriginal, lacking in refinement, and historically inaccurate. Regardless of these critical responses, the painting has forcefully impacted the way the political founding of the US has been viewed and remembered, even if the Founding Fathers discourse has shifted to include George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay and to exclude Sherman, Livingston, and Hancock, who are less prominent today.

Illustration 1: Signing the Declaration of Independence

John Trumbull, *The Declaration of Independence* (1818).

And for all the criticism of Trumbull's image, art scholar Irma B. Jaffe has reminded us that there was no precedent for a painting such as the *Declaration of Independence* at the time:

[H]ow was one to show a large group of ordinary-looking men, dressed not in the glamorous costumes of European courts or the crimson robes of English lords, but in everyday American garb; placed in a room undistinguished by any architectural elegance; seated not on crimson and gold but plain wood Windsor chairs; leaning not on marble and ormolu tables but desks covered with dull green baize; watching not the collapse of a national leader but a committee presenting a report to the president of their body. How was one to

take these elements and make a painting that would speak to a nation's people as long as that nation survived? (*John Trumbull* 108-109)

Thus, we need to take into account that Trumbull (who had previously painted mostly religious scenes and battle scenes) tried to work out an iconography (and hagiography) of American democracy by focusing on what he considered to be the central aspects of its foundation: the Founding Fathers and the foundational document in a situation of rational contemplation and ceremonial order (cf. Christadler, "Geschichte" 321).

In 1818, Trumbull's iconic painting (still on the back of the US two-dollar bill today), which was recognized to be of "enormous national interest and historical significance" (Cooper, *John Trumbull* 78), was displayed in New York in the American Academy of the Fine Arts, where some 8.000 people came to see it in only one month; it then toured Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore before it arrived in Washington in December 1819 and was presented to Congress. "The tour was a tremendous success" and "the high point of Trumbull's career" (ibid.).

That this image, which attempts to balance the "silence and solemnity of the scene" with the wish for a "picturesque and agreeable composition," as Trumbull himself phrased it in the catalogue of an early exhibition (qtd. in Cooper, *John Trumbull* 76), is highly stylized appears to be obvious. Many scholars have emphasized the chaotic state of affairs and the uncertainty of the outcome of any political action at the time. Furthermore, there was a lack of protocol in the constitutional sessions that often led to a less orderly conduct than is portrayed in the Trumbull painting. Here, "the impression prevails that Congress united faces the central group, intent on what is occurring" (Jaffe, *John Trumbull* 105). Asked whether to exclude those delegates from the painting who did not sign the declaration and argued harshly against it, both Jefferson and Adams advised Trumbull not to do so for reasons of accuracy and authenticity. The result is a piece of art that was supposed to start "a great national artistic tradition" (Burns and Davis, *American Art* 102).

Trumbull's iconic image is an example of affirmative 19th-century memorial culture in regard to the US foundational narrative. Even if Trumbull's painting does not visualize all the dimensions of the Founding Fathers myth, it does serve as a classic commemoration of the founding and, in many ways, is an instance of cultural nationalism in a state-dominated memory system (cf. Bodnar, *Public Memory* 251); in what follows, it will serve as a backdrop against which different representations of and perspectives on the Founding Fathers will be discussed. For now, we will take it as a point of departure for discussing

questions of legitimacy and authority connected to the foundational moment so powerfully portrayed in this image.

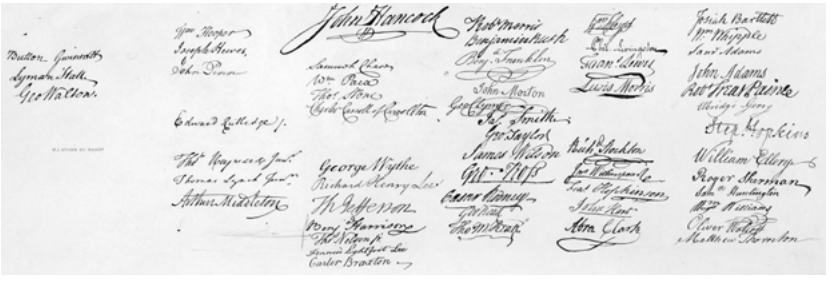
4. EXCURSUS: THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY

> Government requires make-believe. Make believe that the king is divine or that he can do no wrong, make believe that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Make believe that the people *have* a voice or that the representatives of the people *are* the people. Make believe that the governors are the servants of the people. Make believe that all men are equal, or make believe that they are not.
>
> EDMUND S. MORGAN, *AMERICAN HEROES*

I began this chapter by pointing out how the myth of the Founding Fathers partly relies on their authorship of foundational documents and how these documents, in turn, have enhanced, time and again, the fame of the Founding Fathers, particularly when it comes to discussions of original intent. Thus, the Founding Fathers and the founding documents continually reinforce each other's mythical status. Today, a visit at the National Archives on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. easily demonstrates the civil religious dimension of those founding documents. Upon arrival, visitors to the National Archives Building are led through airport-like security to stand in line and slowly work their way forward to the repository in the dimly-lit Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom in which the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are displayed. Military guards ask the tourists to line up in single-line files and to stand shoulder to shoulder with their feet touching the stairs at the bottom of the last steps one has to climb in order to enter the sacrosanct center. Visitors are also reminded that the chewing of gum is not allowed and that "proper reverence" for the place and the occasion is required. The fact that one can hardly read the documents due to the physical distance visitors have to maintain, the high security vaults, the dim, shadowy lighting, and the constant admonishment from the attending guards to continue moving along, make it clear that it is not the content of the documents one is supposed to take in, but their auratic quality – to imagine being present at the historical moment of founding among those who wrote and signed the Declaration and the Constitution. Pauline Maier has criticized this "imprisonment" of the founding documents "in massive, bronze-framed, bulletproof glass containers filled with inert helium gas" because in her view this ironically

contradicts the sense of a "living" constitution that is actually quite "dead" (*American Scripture* ix, xiv). One may argue that this sacralization of beginnings camouflages the absence of authority and legitimacy at the very core of the founding enterprise.

Illustration 2: Signatures on the Declaration of Independence



Declaration of Independence (1776).

One of the defining acts of the Founding Fathers certainly is the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It constitutes a moment that has been thoroughly mythologized in spite of (or maybe because of) its in many ways precarious status that is incommensurate with its foundational quality but also presents a particular problem in terms of legitimacy, both overlooked by Trumbull and by the presentation at the National Archives. How did the signers become the Founding Fathers of a new nation? What kind of authority did they have as signers? The various commemorations or presentifications of the signing have been critiqued by revisionists to uncover their ideological investments as well as overall biases in American historiography. The most radical critique has been brought forward by Jacques Derrida, who in his essay "Declarations of Independence" (1986) revisits the scene of the signing and asks:

> [W]ho signs, and with what so-called proper name, the declarative act which founds an institution? Such an act does not come back to a constative or descriptive discourse. It performs, it accomplishes, it does what it says it does: that at least would be its intentional structure. (8)

Derrida goes on to ponder the question of authority and of representation in relation to signatures. In the historical drama of the founding, Jefferson is the "draftsman" "drawing up" the declaration (ibid). The representatives of the people of the future state are "the ultimate signers" (9). Of course, contrary to his claims Jefferson was not the sole author of the Declaration of Independence, as

he took much from George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights and also borrowed freely from other sources (cf. Taylor, *Writing* 197); yet, Derrida follows Jefferson's own version of text production:

> But this people does not exist. They do not exist as an entity, it does not exist, before this declaration, not as such. If it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer. ("Declarations" 10)

Michael Schudson – in referring to the Constitutional Convention – calls it somewhat less formally "a complex chicken-and-egg problem" (*Good Citizen* 51): The whole event of the Declaration of Independence (along with, following Schudson, the subsequent Constitutional Conventions) thus is in the future perfect. Derrida deconstructs the notion of a foundational moment; he not only addresses the contingency of the historical moment of a/the founding, but in revisiting that moment dis-covers the absence that is gaping at its core and that remains implicit. The declaration is "performative" (not "constative") in nature: it is not the people who create the Declaration, but the Declaration that creates the people (cf. de Ville, "Sovereignty" 89). "Language [and the Signing] in this model is [thus] understood as simply 'supplementing' presence;" there is no "break in presence" but a "continuous, homogenous modification of presence in representation" (ibid. 93). Thus, declarations inevitably have a repetitive or citational structure (cf. ibid. 103). Signatures do not carry with them the legitimacy they claim; it is this slippage, this fundamental uncertainty that is covered up by and transposed into a heroic discourse of paternity, legitimacy, and founding; and it is the very "firstness" of the Founding Fathers (Bernstein, *Founding Fathers* 40) that in precluding any doubt at the same time provokes it.

In the historical context, this doubt was significant. To gain acceptance for the founding documents among the states and their delegates, i.e. the people, Edmund Morgan suggests, it was necessary "to persuade Americans to accept representation on a scale hitherto unknown" (*American Heroes* 240) – namely on a national rather than on a local or regional level. To achieve this goal, the Founding Fathers created a "new fiction" (ibid. 239) – i.e., an "American people capable of empowering an American national government" (ibid). It seemed uncertain for quite some time whether Americans would accept this new fiction arguing for a national union of the individual colonies as a matter of survival. How can a small group of individuals speak for "the people"? How could the delegates claim to be "at the point of origin?" (Schudson, *Good Citizen* 52). Numerous pamphlets as well as the *Federalist Papers* were written to produce

the much needed consent among the 'American' people and to encourage them to consider themselves as such: American.

The founders themselves, I should add, were well aware at least of the *legal* problem of their actions and procedures, even though many historians of the founding and worshippers of the Founding Fathers were not. Derrida's text provides a perspective from which to explore the 'foundational momentum' of US democracy/democratic culture in terms of authority, legitimacy, and genealogy, and the problem of an absence retroactively occluded and tacitly installed as a presence. It is this sense of crisis and this struggle for legitimacy that provide a point of entry for reviewing the narratives and counter-narratives of the foundational moment of the Declaration.

To see the Founding Fathers as having little legitimacy to begin with and as being propelled by their own political, social, and economic interests rather than by abstract ideals is now part of a tradition of revisionism that includes Charles Beard's *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) and John Franklin Jameson's *The American Revolution* (1926), in which the author considers "the American Revolution as a social movement" (8); much of Progressivist historiography until 1945 and the new social history of the 1970s and 1980s has focused on that claim with varying results (cf. Herbert Aptheker's study of slave revolts). Class, race, and gender, as we will see, have been the variables in revisionist, critical readings of the political founding by scholars such as Gary Nash (*The Forgotten Fifth*), Linda Kerber (*Women of the Republic*), and Woody Holton (*Forced Founders*), who reconsider "the radicalism of the American revolution" (cf. Wood's book of the same title) and inquire about alternative narratives of American beginnings. Even as it has been affirmed and reinvigorated time and again, the myth of the framers has come under scrutiny (particularly in the 20th century) for its omissions, falsifications, and one-sidedness, and for celebrating slavery along with the national beginning. Thus, we find very different interpretations of the historical events commemorated by Trumbull and others in counter-narratives that include individuals and groups left out of conventional representations of the founding (Black Founding Fathers, Founding Mothers, as well as forgotten founders of all kinds). We will consider some of these revisionist perspectives in the following sections.

5. CONTRADICTIONS AND OPPOSITION: BLACK SLAVES AND BLACK PROTEST VS. THE FOUNDING FATHERS

> The simultaneous development of slavery and freedom is the central paradox of American history. […] George Washington led Americans in battle against British oppression. Thomas Jefferson led them in declaring independence. Virginians drafted not only the Declaration, but the Constitution and its first ten amendments as well. *They were all slaveholders*.
> EDMUND S. MORGAN, *AMERICAN SLAVERY, AMERICAN FREEDOM*

> There is a painting in Philadelphia of the men who signed it. These men are relaxed; they are enjoying the activity of thinking, the luxury of it. They have the time to examine this thing called their conscience and to act on it. They need not feel compromised because they do not need to compromise. They are wonderful to look at. Some keep their hair in an unkempt style (Jefferson, Washington), and others keep their hair well groomed (Franklin). Their clothes are pressed, their shoes polished; nothing about their appearance is shameful. Can they buy as much land as they like? Can they cross the street in a manner that they would like? Can their children cleave to their breasts until death, or until the children simply grow up and leave home? The answer is yes.
> JAMAICA KINCAID, "THE LITTLE REVENGE"

Even if in the context of the American Revolution, 'slavery' often referred metaphorically to the political situation of being colonized (cf. Foner, *Story* 29), the continued existence of *real* slavery in the young republic has to be seen as one of the most glaring contradictions at the heart of the new political system created by the Founding Fathers. Despite the anti-slavery imperative of the Declaration of Independence, the founding documents not only do not abolish slavery, but the Constitution ultimately affirms it by way of the Fugitive Slave Clause and further regulations concerning the representation of the slave states in the federal government (such as the Three-Fifths Compromise), which has led Paul Finkelman in his *Slavery and the Founders* to refer to the Constitution as a "proslavery compact" (34); even if "the word 'slavery' is never mentioned in the Constitution," "its presence was felt everywhere" (ibid). Thus, the articulations of independence, freedom, and liberty in the founding documents cast a dubious light on some of the Founding Fathers and their status as slaveholders. As mentioned previously, Jefferson, Madison, and Washington were among those Founding Fathers who owned slaves, i.e. they held human beings as property, like chattel.

Edmund Morgan has analyzed the "ordeal" of Virginia regarding its racial politics (cf. *American Slavery*). To be sure, many Founding Fathers (defined in a broad sense) owned slaves, including practically all of the Virginia delegates. Whereas we have little or no information about most of these slaves, individual slaves have become modestly well-known in the context of the American Revolution: these include Jefferson's slave Sally Hemings and her brother James, both of whom accompanied Jefferson as servants to Paris (Sally was also Jefferson's mistress); Washington's slave and groom Henry/Harry Washington, who later escaped from slavery; Hercules, who was Washington's chef at the White House; and James Madison's manservant and 'factotum' Paul Jennings (cf. Dowling Taylor, *Slave* xx), who gained his freedom many years after Madison's death with the help of then-senator Daniel Webster at the age of 48 (cf. ibid. xxi). Jennings composed what became known as the first White House memoir, in which he recounts his time in the White House with the Madisons and which has recently been reprinted in Elizabeth Dowling Taylor's careful study of Jennings's life and career within the larger context of politics, abolitionism, and African American culture.

It is also recorded that Harry Washington, who was born around 1740 in Africa, after repeated attempts to escape from slavery eventually managed to do so and became part of the group of black loyalists who sided with Britain in order to gain their freedom and boarded a ship to Nova Scotia; his name (along with those of many other fugitive slaves of the Founding Fathers) is recorded in the "Book of Negroes" that lists all of those who escaped to the North. Jill Lepore records Harry Washington's path to Nova Scotia and back to Africa in 1792, where he was one of many to build a colony in Sierra Leone and thus became a founding father of sorts in his own right. By 1799, the colony was plagued by disease und unrest; after Harry Washington briefly became the leader of a group of exile rebels, he ultimately died not far from where he had been born (cf. Lepore, "Goodbye Columbus"). The histories of those black American fugitives who tried to gain their freedom at the same time yet in dramatically different ways than the American colonies have long been neglected. For many slaves, "the vaunted war for liberty was […] a war for the perpetuation of servitude" (Schama qdt. in Davis, *America's Hidden History* 159). Cassandra Pybus and Simon Schama have traced the fugitive slaves' paths to many places, including Africa and Australia (cf. Pybus, *Epic Journeys*; Schama, *Rough Crossings*). Lepore suggests that we may want to think about those fugitives as "honorary Founding Fathers" (cf. "Goodbye Columbus").

Hercules, Washington's cook, was more than a mere provider of warm meals; historical sources refer to him as "a celebrated artiste" and "as highly

accomplished a proficient in the culinary art as could be found in the United States" (Custis, *Recollections* 422). He earned money on the side by selling leftovers from his kitchen. Given the freedom to walk the city by himself, he eventually failed to return and made the black community of Philadelphia his new home. His former owner, George Washington, assumed that it would discredit him as President of the US in the North to aggressively try to recapture one of his slaves, an estimation that worked to Hercules's advantage – he was never caught.

Singularly prominent by now is the story of Sally Hemings and her family at Jefferson's Monticello estate. Recent scholarship, such as Annette Gordon-Reed's study *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (2009), as well as popular cultural productions have dealt with the relationship between Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings; her descendants, proven to be indeed descendants of Jefferson by DNA tests in 1996, may now also be interred on the burying ground of the Jefferson family at Monticello. The fate of their children was already the topic of William Wells Brown's sentimental novel *Clotel, Or the President's Daughter* (1853), published in London and considered to be the first novel by an African American; Clotel, the protagonist, time and again escapes enslavement, yet ultimately cannot protect herself or her daughter, who becomes Clotel's former white lover's servant and commits suicide by jumping into the Potomac River near the White House, where her father had once lived. The 2012 exhibition *Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty*, held at the National Museum of American History (which is part of the Smithsonian Institution), detailed the lives of six slave families (among them the Hemingses) living at Monticello as slaves of Jefferson. Of all the slaves he owned, Jefferson only ever freed four: Sally Hemings, and three children he had with her.

The stories of Paul Jennings, Harry Washington, and Sally Hemings not only evidence the complicated and close relationships some of the Founding Fathers had with some of their slaves who yet did not figure in their scheme of independence and emancipation, but also what canonical historiography has ignored for a long time and what has only recently been addressed: the symbolic significance and cultural authority of the slaves' and fugitives' stories for creating newly foundational and anti-foundational narratives regarding the myth of the Founding Fathers. American fugitives like Harry Washington not only left America, they also disappeared from American historiography, as Jill Lepore notes (cf. "Goodbye Columbus"), and need to be put back into the picture. And Saidiya Hartman contends that whereas "assertions of free will, singularity, autonomy and consent necessarily obscure relations of power and domination," any "genealogy of freedom, to the contrary, discloses the intimacy of liberty,

domination, and subjection" (*Scenes* 123). Thus, a genealogy of the myth of the Founding Fathers reveals the dialectic of free and unfree, of master and slave that is at the core of that myth. The mixed-race heritage explicated by Clarence E. Walker in his study *Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings* (2009) renders Hemings a black founding mother, and Jefferson and Hemings "founding parents" (29) of an (albeit often unacknowledged) American "mixed-race state" (17). Of course, we must not romanticize the Jefferson-Hemings union, as it took place in a context of glaring asymmetries between a master and a slave, i.e. a person considered property and used for profit (cf. e.g. Henry Wiencek's 2012 study *The Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves*). The stories of the slaves of the Founding Fathers serve to disqualify once and for all statements such as Arthur Schlesinger's that "to deny the essentially European origins of American culture is to falsify history" ("When Ethnic" A14).

The African American revolutionary experience has often been left out of history books, from which "it would appear that the British and the Americans fought for seven years as if half a million African Americans had been magically whisked off the continent" (Nash, *Forgotten Fifth* 4). Important contributions to black revolutionary historiography were made by Herbert Aptheker, Benjamin Quarles, and, most recently, Gary Nash, who chronicles, among other things, the many "freedom suits" in which African American individuals sued successfully for their freedom from slavery in the courts of New England in the revolutionary era (cf. *Forgotten Fifth* 18), as well as the repercussions of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) that led to Haitian independence from the French colonial empire and to the first black republic in the Americas. In particular, Nash stresses the very different conditions that black Americans faced in the revolutionary moment:

> [T]he black American people, who composed one-fifth of the population, had to begin the world anew with only the rudimentary education and often with only the scantiest necessities of life. […] They [their emerging black leaders] could not write state constitutions or transform the political system under which white revolutionaries intended to live as an independent people. But the black founding fathers embarked on a project to accomplish what is almost always part of modern revolutionary agendas – to recast the social system. (*Forgotten Fifth* 50)

Slavery has repeatedly been referred to as the unfinished business of the American Revolution by which a system of bondage was continued that ran counter to

the ideals of liberty and freedom supposedly at the core of American independence, even as a substantial number of slave-owning Southerners freed their slaves "to the extent that one of every eight black Virginians was free by the year of Washington's death, 1799" (ibid. 105). It has also to be noted that the Northern states, one after the other, legislated for the gradual emancipation of slaves. Northern abolition came into increasingly stark contrast with Southern slaveholding and plantation life. By 1810, 75% of all blacks in the North were free, and in 1840 virtually all of them had been emancipated (cf. Kolchin, *American Slavery* 81). Of course, abolition in the North did not imply racial equality, quite the contrary – free black people were subjected to racism in all matters of daily private and public life.

The paradoxes, contradictions, and (negative) dialectics in the Founding Fathers' political vision revealed by slavery and racial inequality did not remain uncommented on by those who suffered from exclusion on the basis of race. Black protest continually addressed the grievances of disenfranchised African Americans, slaves and free, in the US, and the rise of the black press in the 19th century created new platforms for these articulations. Among the early, most vocal voices of opposition is David Walker (1785-1830), the author of *David Walker's Appeal* (published in 1826), which Robert Levine considers "one of the most influential and explosive black-nationalist documents authored by an African American" (*Dislocating* 70). Walker was the son of a free black mother and an enslaved father; born in Wilmington, North Carolina, he apparently traveled quite a bit before he went to live in Boston in the 1820s. He was a member of the Methodist Church and an active abolitionist. In 1827, he became an agent and writer for the newly founded *Freedom's Journal*. In 1829, one year before his death, he published his famous *Appeal*, which expresses as much anger and despair about racial hatred in the North than about the system of slavery in the South, and articulates an open attack on American society and the founders. Many in the South wanted him dead, and in fact Walker did die shortly after the publication of his *Appeal* under somewhat mysterious circumstances.

It is particularly Thomas Jefferson whom Walker takes to task for his views on race and for what Walker sees as his feeble attempts to justify slavery and racism; the *Appeal* elaborately chides him for his writings on race, African Americans, and slavery, particularly in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and offers a harsh and biting critique of Jefferson's pseudo-scientific findings, abstractions, and generalizations concerning black people. Walker claims natural rights for African Americans – "nothing but the rights of man" (qtd. in Levine, *Dislocating* 66) – and repeatedly accuses slaveholders of cruelty and barbarity. Walker ends the four articles of his *Appeal* by quoting from the Declaration of

Independence's list of grievances addressed to the British King, and challenges his white readers:

> Do you understand your own language? […] Compare your own language above, extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and yourselves on our fathers and on us […]. Now, Americans! I ask you candidly, was your suffering under Great Britain, one hundredth part as cruel and tyrannical as you have rendered ours under you? (75)

Walker's strategy is twofold: on the one hand, he identifies the gap between the vision of freedom and the reality of black people in the republic in no uncertain terms; on the other hand, he uses the Declaration as a model of resistance and empowerment for African Americans by enlisting Jefferson's revolutionary and liberatory rhetoric for his own cause (cf. Levine, *Dislocating* 96f.).

Clearly, David Walker is one of the more militant voices of black opposition and nationalism, particularly by early 19th-century standards. Another rhetorical masterpiece which engages the political legacy of the Founding Fathers from the perspective of a former African American slave is Frederick Douglass's famous text "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (1841). In this text, Douglass debunks the myth of the American founding by addressing his white audience as "you" (celebrating "your National Independence" and "your political freedom") and as "fellow citizens" at the same time, which marks the paradox that he is invited to give a speech at an event commemorating American independence while at the same time being excluded from what is celebrated on the Fourth of July:

> What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour. ("What")

The myth of American 'independence' crumbles under Douglass's harsh criticism. What indeed is there to be celebrated for African Americans on July 4, 1841? For Douglass, the patriotic rhetoric of Fourth-of-July festivities mocks

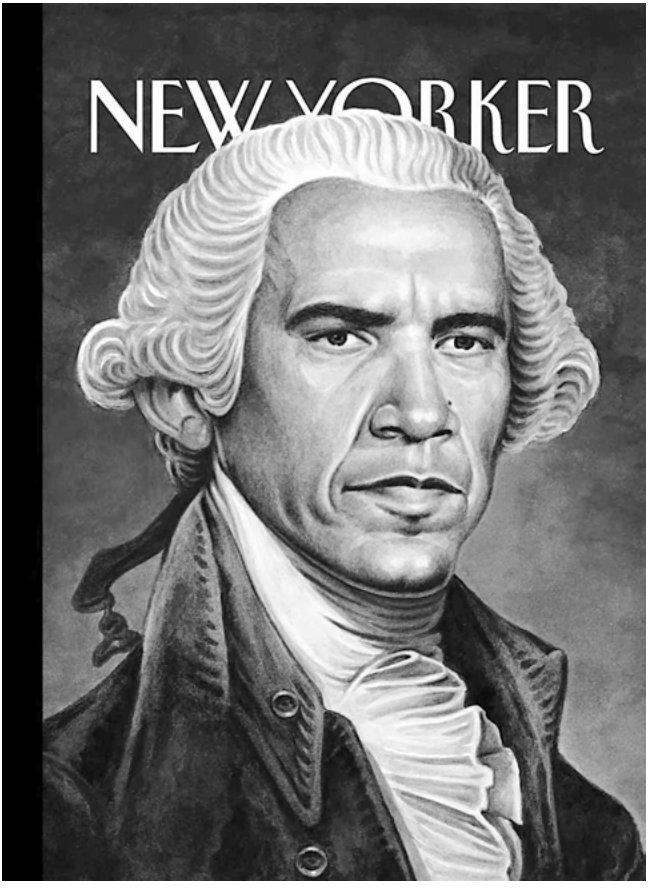
African Americans in their continued plight by "veiling" the injustices perpetrated in the name of American independence and democracy, and he describes slavery as a singularly barbaric aspect of American exceptionalism. With Douglass, we may consider the slaveholding Founding Fathers as savages who led a nation of savages into independence on the backs of enslaved blacks who cooked their meals, groomed their horses, and took care of all aspects of their physical wellbeing. The sentimentality of the festivities appalls Douglass, who considers them hollow and hypocritical.

The texts of both Walker and Douglass thus hold the founders up to the egalitarian ideals articulated in the founding documents and present a stark contrast to the image of sober reflection and cultural refinement attached to the Founding Fathers in many representations; John Trumbull for instance certainly did not represent "savages" or "barbarians" in his painting. Yet, from the perspective of African Americans, the founding of the US with its continued tolerance of and acquiescence to the system of slavery may very well be considered a barbaric act, as it consolidated some people's freedom at the expense of the freedom of others.

In many ways, the Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, has been viewed as the founding document for African Americans. The Proclamation along with the defeat of the Confederacy and the end of the Civil War is often called a "second founding" or a "re-founding" (cf. Quigley, *Second Founding*; Kantrowitz, "Abraham Lincoln") with regard to the preservation of the national union, the abolition of slavery, and the granting of citizenship to blacks, whereby nearly four million people were freed from lifelong bondage. Quigley introduces the term "Second Founding" in his 2004 study and suggests that "[b]ack in 1787, America's first founding had produced a constitution profoundly skeptical of democracy. James Madison and his coauthors in Philadelphia left undecided fundamental questions of slavery and freedom. All that would change in the 1860s and 1870s" (*Second Founding* ix). For many scholars "the 'Second Founding' marked the beginning of constitutional reforms that aimed at establishing an interracial democracy" (Twelbeck, "New Rules" 179). Much of the discourse on these efforts at reform still crystallizes in the figure of Abraham Lincoln as a symbol of integration, even if the historical accuracy of this assessment is debatable. Lincoln has been referred to as the founding father for African Americans, particularly in the context of civil rights in the 20th century. Stephen Kantrowitz even calls him "the only, the lonely founding father of the modern United States that emerged from the ashes of the civil war" also (but not only) with regard to racial politics ("Abraham Lincoln") and also regards him as the author of a "New American Testament" (with refer-

ence to Pauline Maier's "American Scripture" metaphor for the founding documents of the 18th century; cf. her book of the same title) (ibid.).

Illustration 3: Barack Obama as Founding Father



Drew Friedman, cover ill. for *The New Yorker* (Jan. 26, 2009).
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Barack Obama has invoked Lincoln's presidency and his legacy for African American political culture both as presidential candidate and as elected president. Like Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson before him, Obama takes up Lincoln's place in a collective black imagination and affirms the great role of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution passed during and after the Civil War. Obama's 2008 speech "A

More Perfect Union" has been compared to Lincoln's Cooper Union Speech of 1860 and his Gettysburg Address of 1863. Lincoln and Obama have also been compared because of their shared background in law and Illinois politics. Probing the visual iconography of the election of the first non-white American president, *The New Yorker* featured a picture of Obama on the cover dressed up like George Washington, i.e., a founding father; this anachronistic fashioning draws attention both to the perceived 'whiteness' of the US presidency and the Founding Fathers and to the fact that this whiteness may itself have become as anachronistic as a wig.

Within the national paradigm, the various contestations of the Founding Fathers myth discussed in this section call into question the narrow canon of (white) Founding Fathers by recognizing and reflecting upon the different roles of African Americans in the context of independence, revolution, and nation-building.

6. FOUNDING MOTHERS: GENDER, NATURAL RIGHTS, AND REPUBLICAN MOTHERHOOD

> All Men Are Created Equal – But What About the Women?
> SLOGAN OF THE 20TH-CENTURY WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

> When you hear of a family with two brothers who fought heroically in the Revolutionary War, served their state in high office, and emerged as key figures in the new American nation, don't you immediately think, "They must have had a remarkable mother"?
> COKIE ROBERTS, *FOUNDING MOTHERS*

> [I]ndeed, I think you ladies are in the number of the best patriots America can boast.
> GEORGE WASHINGTON

To identify a core group of Founding Mothers may be even harder than to identify a core group of Founding Fathers. Whereas the Founding Fathers are usually considered in light of their political activism during and after the American Revolution, the concept of 'Founding Mothers' is an attempt to come to a gender-specific correlation by way of analogy that may be skewed in a historical context in which women were not considered political actors at all and in which a private-public distinction was firmly in place. This may be one of the reasons why

Mary Beth Norton's study *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* goes back to colonial New England's gender discourse, in which structures of family and community were not yet clearly defined by a private-public dichotomy, and focuses on such foundational figures as Anne Hutchinson and Anne Hibbins, whose initiatives, deeds, and statements indeed have to be considered as a form of political participation, and a transgressive one at that. Closer to the revolutionary moment, white women of privilege were bound to their "small circle of domestic concerns" (Norton, *Liberty's Daughters* 3) even as they may have shared political ideas with their male contemporaries. In the historical context of the Revolution, women were mostly excluded from the political realm; New Jersey was the only state that permitted women to vote after the Revolutionary War, and this right was revoked in 1806 (cf. Collins, *America's Women* 83-4). Women only slowly (re)gained the right to vote in local elections (first and predominantly in New England by the end of the 19th century) and were only granted full suffrage with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920. Even though women were barred from the constitutional debates and none ever attended a single constitutional meeting, we can index their role as Founding Mothers in the revolutionary age and in the early republic and look at their contributions to the revolutionary political discourse of the time. Abigail Adams (1744-1818) for instance, the wife of John Adams, is often considered a Founding Mother in her own right. Her letters to her husband have become canonized in the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* for their political radicalism as well as for their rhetorical beauty. Most famously, in March 1776, she admonished her husband with the following words:

> I long to hear that you have declared an Independancy and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. (*Quotable Abigail Adams* 356)

Illustration 4: Portrait of Abigail Adams

Gilbert Stuart, *Abigail Smith Adams* (1815).

Abigail Adams used "Portia" as her penname (in reference to Roman senator Marcus Junius Brutus's wife), by which she implied that she was "the obscure wife of a great politician" (Gelles, *Portia* 47). Contrary to this image of submissiveness, modesty, and domesticity, Adams's writings exhibit a proto-feminist streak; she is commonly considered a radical in regard to women's rights at a time when "[m]ost founders could not imagine a society where women were free and equal, and were governed by their own consent […]. Generally, the founders took patriarchy for granted and forgot the ladies" (Kann, *Gendering* 7). John Adams outright dismissed his wife's request: "As to your extraordinary code of laws, I cannot but laugh" (qtd. in ibid. 8).

Yet, "the ladies" – at least some of them – articulated their own views, and thus we can identify female participation in the revolutionary effort on many levels and in many forms. First of all, women were authors and publicists who wrote letters, diaries, pamphlets, and commentaries; second, they were caretakers, farmers, and entrepreneurs who through their work enabled their husbands to go off to war and to conduct politics in often far-away places; third, women were considerably involved and depended upon as fundraisers for the war effort, founded associations to develop the needed infrastructure (e.g. the Ladies Association of Philadelphia), called meetings, and gave speeches; fourth, they con-

tributed in many other minor and major ways to the war effort, e.g. by sewing uniforms or by joining the military cross-dressed as men (cf. Roberts, *Founding Mothers* 125ff.). All of the individuals involved in these revolutionary activities may be considered Founding Mothers of some sort.

The different dimensions of women's activities for the new republic both affirm and contest the ideological constructions of women at the time of the political founding of the US, and reveal the ambivalences women had to navigate in their social roles. In fact, the term 'Founding Mothers' may be read, in view of biological essentialism, as a form of containment that links women to their reproductive function and not so much to some sort of authority in the public sphere. The five justifications for the exclusion of women from political life rooted in stereotypes of women in the late 18th century are reminiscent of the cult of True Womanhood that would dominate much of the 19th century: women's domesticity, women's dependency, women's passions, women's disorders, and women's consent to patriarchy (cf. Kann, *Gendering* 23). And yet, the new republic also created a new ideology of gender roles and gender relations. The discourse of Republican Motherhood (cf. Kerber, *Women*) has been particularly useful to grasp the contradictions of a doctrine that both consolidates and expands women's domestic realm. Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton have pointed out how, in the name of the republic, women were esteemed as mothers of future citizens, and how their education, as teachers of the next generation, became more relevant and more acceptable. New educational opportunities opened up, and formal schooling for women improved immensely. As Republican Mothers, women were to raise the citizens and leaders of the republic while remaining firmly confined to the domestic sphere without any direct political participation in a kind of domestic patriotism. In fact, by granting women these educational opportunities, one could claim "that women needed no further political involvement, since they already possessed the power to mold their husbands' and sons' virtuous citizenship" (Scobell, "Judith Sargent Murray" 12). In historical and feminist scholarship, the Republican Mother has alternately been considered a figure of empowerment or of confinement, and clearly remains an ambivalent role model.

At the time that this discourse is forming in the soon-to-be-independent colonies, we can find women who actively engaged in political activities despite the fact that revolutionary womanhood and Republican Motherhood often may not have been easily reconcilable. For the sake of briefly reviewing the revolutionary activism of American women, I want to turn to Judith Sargent Murray (1751-1820) and Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814). In her essay "On the Equality of the Sexes" (1790), Judith Sargent Murray proposes the idea of a companionate

marriage (such as the one she led with her second husband, John Murray), and argues for the inherent rationality of women and for women's political participation. She pleads for women's education on the basis of a subversive reinterpretation of the biblical story of Adam and Eve, in which she casts Eve as being thirsty for knowledge rather than content and complacent in the Garden of Eden (cf. Scobell, "Judith Sargent Murray" 11). Further, she criticizes women's domestic role within the patriarchal household, through which women "should at present be so degraded, as to be allowed no other ideas, than those which are suggested by the mechanism of a pudding, or the sewing the seams of a garment" (Murray, "Equality" 7). Murray further suggests that "from the commencement of time to the present day, there hath been as many females, as males, who, by the *mere force of natural powers*, have merited the crown of applause; who, *thus unassisted*, have seized the wreath of fame" (ibid. 134, 135). Murray was somewhat of a public figure of her time, and was portrayed by John Singleton Copley in 1763 (who would later paint political figures such as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere) and by Gilbert Stuart, who also famously portrayed George Washington. Murray's writings, in particular her contributions to the *Massachusetts Magazine*, were very popular and in 1798 appeared in a three-volume collection titled *The Gleaner* under the pen name Constantia. The collection has been reissued in 1992.

Along with Judith Sargent Murray, Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814), who self-identified as a "politician" (Kerber, *Women* 84), has become recognized for her contribution to American revolutionary thought, which she articulated in poems, plays, and pamphlets. Like Murray, Warren frequently adopts a satirical, farcical tone in her writings, which include very prominently female protagonists who struggle within their 'domestic economy' in much the same way the author did. Warren also sought "to live in both the world of intellect and the world of domesticity" (ibid. 256). Warren (just as Murray) did not completely reject the traditional roles of wife and mother, quite the contrary; this resulted in an ambivalence exemplified by her outstanding *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805), the first history of the American Revolution and for a long time the only female-authored one, in which Warren perhaps somewhat self-consciously and defensively pays almost no attention to women's revolutionary experiences and efforts but instead focuses on the deeds of the 'great men,' i.e. the Founding Fathers (in 1848, Elizabeth Ellet's *The Women of the American Revolution* would remedy Warren's omissions). In her lifetime, Warren was a highly esteemed publicist and, like Murray, was portrayed by John Copley; memorials in her honor were erected in many New England towns, and a US cargo ship launched during World War II, the SS

Mercy Warren, was named after her, perhaps somewhat ironically affirming her (rhetorical) power.

It is thus in the prose and dramas by early republican women writers such as Murray and Warren as well as Eliza Foster Cushing, Susan Sedgwick, and others that we find female protagonists and characters who defy women's exclusion from politics. As women were not included in the political discourse of the founding, they "were left to invent their own political character" (ibid. 269) and fought for full citizenship by creating their own foundational discourse on the basis of a natural-rights rhetoric:

> The founding fathers had used the language of natural rights to argue for the protection and preservation of their prerogatives of citizens. Women could not start from the same place. While no one was likely to deny that they were citizens, it was clear that female citizenship was not the same as male citizenship and that men and women in practice had very different civic duties and prerogatives. Woman's rights advocates, therefore, had to use Locke not to argue for the preservation of their rights but to gain their rights in the first place. (Hoffert, *When Hens Crow* 40)

American women arrived at a full-fledged feminist agenda with the Declaration of Sentiments, a document prepared for the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, which was the first convention of a national women's movement; in contemporary newspapers, it was ridiculed as "the hen convention" of "divorced wives, childless women, and some old maids" (qtd. in Clift, *Founding Sisters* 13). More than 300 people gathered on July 19, a regular weekday, in the small town of Seneca Falls in Upstate New York. With their Declaration of Sentiments, which was rhetorically modeled after the Declaration of Independence, women's rights activists fashioned themselves as Founding Mothers:

> By their act of mirroring, the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments generated a critique of the Declaration of Independence that made it impossible to read the original text in the same way ever again. The Seneca Falls Convention took aim at the Founding Fathers' ambivalence toward their own "high ideals" with the weapon Homi Bhabha describes as "the displacing gaze of the disciplined […] that liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty." (Wexler, "All Men" 352)

The small canon of revolutionary Founding Mothers that Cokie Roberts identifies for the 18th century, which includes next to Abigail Adams, Judith Sargent Murray, and Mercy Otis Warren also Deborah Read Franklin, Eliza Pinckney, and Betsy Ross, seems as exclusive and elitist as the ranks of the canonical

Founding Fathers. When considering the contributions and achievements of the women under consideration, we have to acknowledge their privileged positions in colonial and postcolonial US society. Somewhat in contrast, we have already discussed the symbolic power of Sally Hemings as a Founding Mother, and we may also note that many African American women were active in the women's movement. Most famously, Sojourner Truth delivered her speech "Ain't I a Woman" at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron in 1851, in which she demanded equality not only between whites and blacks, but specifically between white and black women.

Beyond the founding phase and the early 19th-century initiatives to organize and institutionalize women's political participation, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, Isabella Hooker, and many others, all of whom Eleanor Clift refers to as "founding sisters," worked successfully toward the passage of Amendment XIX, which they considered their victory at the end of a "seventy-two year battle" (*Founding Sisters* 4). The slogan of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s opening this section brings us to the question of gender in our discussion of the Founding Fathers, as they appear to be a paternal if not a patriarchal construction. A feminist revision of the myth of the Founding Fathers not only implies adding women to the canon of male founders, but also points to the Founding Fathers as a patriarchal and paternalistic invention that claimed to speak for women and that denied their natural rights, which – according to Lockean principle – should have been acknowledged. For more than one hundred years after the founding, Motherhood had trumped women's humanity in philosophical discourse; 'Founding Mothers' therefore remains a precarious concept.

7. DISPOSSESSION AND EMPIRE: THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF MOUNT RUSHMORE (AND BEYOND)

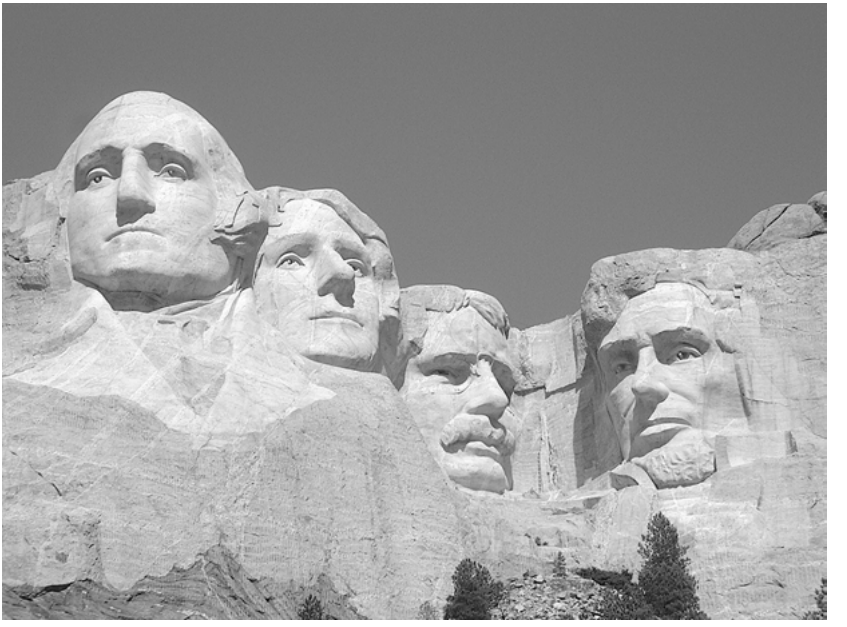
> Why are those four men up there?
> WILLIAM ZINSSER, *AMERICAN PLACES*

Beyond discussions of who in the context of the War of Independence and the early republic is and should be commemorated as a founder of the US, there have also been discussions of which more recent historical figures should be added to the canon of the most important founders and preservers of the nation. One of the most extraordinary examples concerning these ongoing discussions is the controversial Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota. While

South Dakota's state historian Doane Robinson originally planned to boost state tourism by having figures from local history carved into the Black Hills, sculptor Gutzon Borglum gave the project a national rather than regional focus and turned it into "a colossal undertaking commemorating the idea of union" (Borglum qtd. in Bergman, "Can Patriotism" 92). Construction began in the 1920s and was concluded in 1941 by Borglum's son, aptly named Lincoln. The sculpture consists of the faces of four presidents carved into Mount Rushmore: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt, who signify the "founding, growing, preservation, and development" (ibid.) of the United States of America; Washington clearly symbolizes the nation's founding, Jefferson its expansion (via the Louisiana Purchase), Lincoln the 'preservation' of the Union, and Roosevelt, again, expansion of American hegemony. Thus, each in his own way contributed to the existence and expansion of the US as empire. Simon Schama refers to Mount Rushmore as a "landscape myth" (*Landscape* 15) which in sheer scale suggests the "sculptor's ambition to proclaim the continental magnitude of America as the bulwark of its democracy" (ibid. 15-16), and many other scholars have also described the monument more or less critically along those lines: as a patriotic icon and "a site of national symbolism" (Bergman, "Can Patriotism" 89), as "patriarchy fixed in stone" (cf. Boime's article of the same title), or as a "commemoration of US expansionism" and "a monument to imperialism" (Bergman, "Can Patriotism" 94). Tom Saya considers Mount Rushmore a "glittering billboard of imperial supremacy" ("Whiteness" 145). Blair and Michel regard Mount Rushmore as a "shorthand for patriotism" ("Rushmore Effect" 156) and "as constituting a dwelling place of national character, a construction of the national *ethos*" (ibid. 159). Alfred Runte sees US national parks as compensating for the absence of castles, ancient ruins, and cathedrals in the US, and Mount Rushmore seems to be a particularly grand example of this kind of compensation (cf. *National Parks*). Along those lines, William Zinsser refers to Mount Rushmore as "four pharaohs in the sky" (*American Places* 6). Many scholars note that it is the sheer size that creates the quasi-sublime character and aesthetic experience of the monument while diverting attention from its political implications:

> Like Disneyland, Mount Rushmore transformed history into theatre, something only a megalomaniacal actor with boundless energy and confidence could have pulled off. […] Mount Rushmore, like the Statue of Liberty, succeeds primarily through the impact of scale rather than through its aesthetic quality. (Boime, "Patriarchy" 149)

Illustration 5: The Mount Rushmore National Memorial



Photograph by Jim Bowen (2005).

Perhaps not surprisingly, for the entire duration of the construction (1927-41) and even after its completion, the monument has been a matter of contention. The logic of empire resides in its scope as much as in its location, as it is built on land belonging to and considered holy by the Lakota:

> It seems difficult to imagine now […] that there was not substantial negative reaction to the memorial's theme […]. It is especially astonishing when we take into consideration the irony of location. Here was a planned monument honouring "continental expansion," sited in a territory that, by treaty, still belonged to the Lakota, and that the local Native people considered consecrated ground. (Blair and Michel, "Rushmore Effect" 169)

The Lakota referred to the Black Hills into which Borglum carved the 'White Fathers' as the 'Six Grandfathers,' and the site for them clearly had a spiritual connection. When dedicating the monument in 1927, President Calvin Coolidge wore an Indian headdress to symbolically give credit to and appease indigenous protest and resentment. In hindsight, this form of 'playing Indian' seems to mock the protesters.

The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie limited the land ownership of the Sioux to the Great Sioux Reservation, a region west of the Missouri River which included the Black Hills. This treaty was violated during the years of the gold rush by settlers whose presence was validated by new treaties and forced requisitions of Native land through legislation enacted by the US Congress in 1877, 1889, and 1890. The 1877 usurpation of the Black Hills is still considered by the Lakota an illegal act for which they have refused compensation in the amount of $106 million in 1980, and they continue to demand the return of the land (cf. Lazarus, *Black Hills/White Justice* 38).

Thus, from its very inception, the monument has been viewed by the Lakota and other tribes as a symbol of dispossession and oppression. Throughout its construction and again with new urgency since the 1970s, Native Americans have challenged the rightfulness, validity, and legitimacy of the memorial. To Franklin Roosevelt's calling Mount Rushmore the "shrine of democracy," Dennis Bank, leader of the American Indian Movement, has responded by calling it a "hoax of democracy" (qtd. in Fleming, "Mount Rushmore;" cf. also Bergman, "Can Patriotism" 99); the sculpted faces have also been labeled "faces of killers" and "national graffiti" desecrating Native sacred ground as well the "white faces" of "the founding terrorists" (Perrottet, "Mt. Rushmore").

The resistance to the transformation of Native sacred ground into an American civil religious monument opens up a discussion of indigenous history and its presence and role in the processes of founding. In *Forced Founders*, Woody Holton has argued that indigenous peoples, usually marginalized in canonical accounts of the American Revolution, were in fact instrumental for bringing about the events of 1775. According to Holton, the revolutionary effort itself was a strategy of the white gentry to contain the pressures of Native claims. He thus holds that the catalyst of the Revolution was Native action and sees the Founding Fathers as reacting to their pressures rather than taking a "confident step" toward independence (*Forced Founders* 164). Clearly, the revolutionary events were not beneficial for the indigenous population, as its claims and pressures were contained and repelled after the founding even as it had been involved in the process: it is still little known today (and the object of controversy) that representatives of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes were asked to attend the constitutional meetings and that the Iroquois longhouse served as a model for the framing of the US Constitution (cf. Grinde and Johansen, *Exemplar*; Starna and Hamell, "History;" Johansen, *Forgotten Founders*).

In this light, the Mount Rushmore National Memorial may appear as a celebration of the (white) American triumph over the native population of North

America. Symbolically, the monument has been the "battleground for defining the very nature of American society" (Jacobson, *Place* 23).

As controversial as the Mount Rushmore National Memorial is the initiative of eight chiefs of the Lakota tribe to counter the monument by a Crazy Horse Memorial to display Native heroism in similar fashion to Borglum's project (cf. Crazy Horse Memorial website). The work on this counter-monument, which is to even exceed the Mount Rushmore monument in size and scope, began in 1948 and is ongoing. This project has been criticized by Native representatives as imitating the megalomania of white memorial culture and as giving a distorted sense of 'Indianness.'

To this day, information and orientation films at Mount Rushmore do not acknowledge Native land rights, ongoing legal disputes, and the larger history of empire and dispossession paradigmatically revealed in the monument. Instead, the self-representations in the expository material at the visiting center have moved in a mildly revisionist manner from championing Borglum and his notion of American greatness to stressing the hardships of those workers who labored in the mountain (cf. Bergman, "Can Patriotism" 104). This more recent bottom-up perspective may present a more ambiguous view of the monument by acknowledging the plight and death toll of the workers, yet it does not pose a radical critique of the foundational character of the monument itself, as it still focuses on its genesis rather than on its legitimacy. Today, Mount Rushmore still draws millions of visitors each year. In many ways, tourism of this sort – visiting this monument or any other of the numerous Founding Fathers heritage sites – is a cultural, even civil religious practice that thrives on national myths such as that of the Founding Fathers creating tourist destinations, and thus is also a form of nationalist consumerism.

Another controversy surrounding Mount Rushmore concerns the question of its patriarchal bias. Rose Arnold Powell for example campaigned for the inclusion of women's rights activist Susan B. Anthony on Mount Rushmore: "I protest with all my being against the exclusion of a woman from the Mount Rushmore group of Great Americans. […] Future generations will ask why she was left out of the memorial […] if this blunder is not rectified" (qtd. in Schama, *Landscape* 385). Even though Powell spent much of her life lobbying for Anthony's inclusion in the sculpture and was able to enlist considerable public support for her cause, she was put off time and again by Borglum and others (Borglum's compromise proposal to have Anthony's head carved into the *back* of the mountain, of course, was unsatisfactory). The inclusion of Anthony as a Founding Mother would certainly have given the monument a decidedly different twist –

so radically different, in fact, that in hindsight it seems obvious that Powell's plea had no chance of success. The Mount Rushmore National Memorial thus personifies the patriarchal myth of American genesis and continued American greatness as a group of white men, although some early visitors to the monument actually thought that a female figure was included: "[Jefferson] appears younger and more feminine than the other Presidents, partly because of his wig. Many early visitors were disappointed. They said it wasn't a good likeness of Martha Washington" (Zinsser, *American Places* 11).

The Mount Rushmore National Memorial may easily be considered the most spectacular and controversial project of commemoration in the 20th century. Its popularity was further enhanced by being included in many cultural productions, for example in the climactic finale of Alfred Hitchcock's thriller *North by Northwest* (1959). But it has also frequently become the object of caricature, parody, and ridicule, for instance in the films *Mars Attacks!* (1996) and *Team America: World Police* (2004).

Way beyond Mount Rushmore, the Founding Fathers continued to figure in narratives, plays, and films throughout the 20th century. Just to mention one more example: the musical libretto *1776* (1969) by Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards is a semi-comical and quasi-campy rendering of the events leading to the Declaration of Independence. After a steady trickle of popular commemoration in the 20th century, a new popular Founding Fathers 'cult' sets in at the beginning of the 21st century: founders chic.

8. FOUNDERS CHIC AND THE CONSUMPTION OF AN AMERICAN MYTH

> What would the Founding Fathers think?
> CAROL BERKIN, *A BRILLIANT SOLUTION*

Even though a number of critics have suggested moving "beyond the founders" (cf. e.g. Pasley, Robertson, and Waldstreicher's essay collection of the same title) in the writing of (political) history, the Founding Fathers have had a comeback in the new millennium. Of course, elite revisionism does not rule out the public commemoration and commodification of national history; ideology critique and revisionist projects to some degree have always co-existed with affirmative modes and rituals of commemoration, as was shown in the preceding chapters of this book. Still, we can observe that elite and popular discourses converge in an unprecedented way in the phenomenon of founders chic, and we

may wonder whether the recent popularity boost that the Founding Fathers myth has experienced has implications for and connections to the multicultural rewritings of 'new world' beginnings resulting from the canon debates and 'culture wars' of the post-civil rights era.

Against the backdrop of the above-referenced revisionism, the renewed interest in the myth of the Founding Fathers seems ill-timed and awkward. But what exactly is the so-called founders chic in relation to this renewed interest? Founders chic is often said to begin in 2001 with David McCullough's best-selling biography of John Adams and the HBO series based on it. The term itself was coined by a *Newsweek* journalist, Evan Thomas, in an article titled "Founders Chic: Live from Philadelphia" (July 9, 2001), and was subsequently picked up by scholars. It has been described as "an excessive fascination with the thoughts and actions of a small group of elite men at the expense of other political actors and social groups" (Cogliano, *Thomas Jefferson* 8). After decades of social history and multicultural and bottom-up approaches to the American Revolution, founders chic directs our attention back to the founders and to a "Founder-based beginning" (Nobles, "Historians" 141). The 'biographical bang' diagnosed by some historians at the beginning of the 21st century led to an upsurge in historical and fictional narratives about the founders: Adams, Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and Hamilton all became the subject of new biographies often written by scholars with little (or no) scholarly inclinations. Sean Wilentz in a review for instance harshly criticizes McCullough's biography of Adams for being adulatory ("the essential goodness of John Adams is the central theme of this long book"), for its lack of intellectual rigor – implying McCullough himself may have understood little of Adams's systematic political theory –, for its focus on domestic details, and for its lurid prose ("America Made Easy"). Wilentz furthermore sees McCullough's *John Adams* as characteristic of "the current condition of popular history in America," which he views as mere "gossip about the past" that makes history appear as a kind of "valentine" (ibid.). Wilentz is not alone in his critique of what he calls "crossover professors" who in their new biographies of the founders have left some of the standards of their profession behind; others have also severely criticized Joseph Ellis for his book *Founding Brothers*, H.W. Brands for his Franklin-biography *The First American*, which was described as "light on analysis but rich in the description of settings, personalities, and action" (Nobles, "Historians" 141), and even Edmund Morgan for his *Benjamin Franklin*.

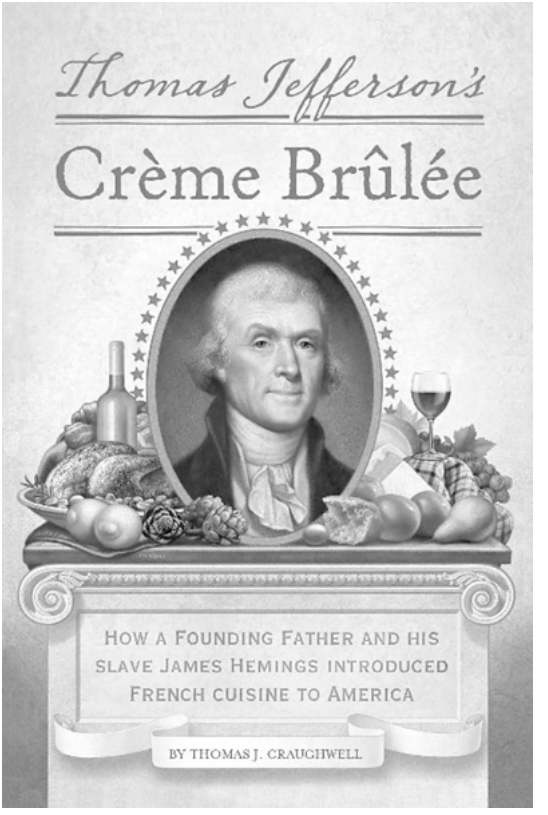
Apart from new individual and collective biographies of the Founding Fathers, we encounter a whole range of founders-chic products on the post-millennial literary market that often lack historical veracity and clearly are pre-

dominantly fictional: these include historical novels as well as books dealing with the private lives, families, love interests, and even the hobbies of the Founding Fathers. When we survey the phenomenon of founders chic, we cannot but concede that the Founding Fathers have become a best-selling brand: The founders are marketed as Founding Gardeners (cf. Andrea Wulf's book of the same title), architects (as in Hugh Howard and Roger Straus's *Houses of the Founding Fathers*), and anglers (as in Bill Mares's *Fishing with the Presidents*). For children, there is the Jr. Graphic Founding Fathers series, whereas Thomas Fleming delves into *The Intimate Lives of the Founding Fathers*, and books such as Dennis J. Pogue's *Founding Spirits: George Washington and the Beginnings of the American Whiskey Industry* show that there is hardly a thing to which the founders are not linked (more or less facetiously) in founders chic literature.

Beneath all the human interest, these products revitalize the notion of individual heroism that had already largely been dismissed in critical work on the founders. Reiterating the purposefulness and telos of the founding and reinstating the Founding Fathers as authority figures and role models at the beginning of the 21st century may be considered as an indication of some sort of crisis; founders chic, then, on one level, registers and is symptomatic of that crisis, whereas, on another level, it is an attempt to overcome that crisis.

Most of the manifestations of the founders chic phenomenon are utterly nostalgic; they pretend to return us to "an earlier era of genuine statesmen" in both private and political life (Thomas, "Founders Chic 48). Thus, they have been read as reinforcing moral standards (for instance, McCullough's comparison of John and Abigail Adams's marital union with Bill Clinton's "extramarital exploits" (Nobles, "Historians" 139). In another commentary we find references to a "post 9/11 crisis" that would endear Americans to the founders once again (ibid.). Founders chic writer Edith Gelles finds comfort in these texts herself: "Perhaps because our times are so complex and out of control it is nice to recall as well that there were dangerous times in our past, more dangerous probably, where great people were needed and rose to the occasion" (qtd. in Nobles, "Historians" 139). Gelles's wording clearly returns us to the 19th-century Bancroftian romantic-historicist approach and does away with 150 years of critical reinterpretation.

Illustration 6: Founding Father Cuisine



Cover of *Thomas Jefferson's Crème Brûlée* (2012) by T. Craughwell.

One realm in which the branding of the Founding Fathers has recently flourished particularly is the cookbook market, which in and of itself is one of the largest segments of the US publishing industry, with annual revenues of $780 million. Recent culinary publications on the Founding Fathers include Dave DeWitt's 2010 *The Founding Foodies: How Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin Revolutionized American Cuisine* (note the somewhat unconventional usage of 'revolution'); Pelton W. Pelton's 2004 *Baking Recipes of Our Founding Fathers*; and Thomas J. Craughwell's 2012 *Thomas Jefferson's Crème Brûlée: How a Founding Father and His Slave James Hemings Introduced French Cuisine to America*. Not only are there a plethora of new cookbooks such as these, but also reprints of older ones, for instance of the famed cookbook by Martha Washing-

ton, and of early American recipe collections which also invoke the Founding Fathers as a frame of reference. The list of examples is sheer endless.

For a closer inspection of cookbook founders chic I will exemplarily look at DeWitt's *The Founding Foodies*. This book offers historical trivia and recipes of dishes such as terrapin soup and salted cod; it falsely suggests that Benjamin Franklin was the inventor of popcorn, then referred to as parched corn (DeWitt fails to mention its indigenous source), and that we find the first description of grits and polenta in Franklin's papers. We learn about Paul Revere's rum punch and rum flip, Philadelphia pepper pot soup, and Thomas Jefferson's French connection; in the subchapter titled "America's First French Chef: The Culinary Education of the Slave James Hemings" (104-26), we learn that apparently "Jefferson was charged twelve francs a day" for Hemings's culinary education and lodging in Paris "in extravagant circumstances with a member of the French royal family" (ibid. 106). DeWitt suggests that "[i]ndeed, Hemings lived a charmed life," while Jefferson was apparently doing all the hard work (ibid.). We also learn that Jefferson was obsessed with maple sugar, imported waffle irons from Amsterdam to Virginia, introduced deep-fried potatoes (French fries) to America, and wrote recipes himself (one for ice cream, for example; cf. ibid. 123). Similarly edifying information is provided on George Washington, whose culinary culture according to DeWitt owed much to his slave Hercules, who made "presidential fruitcake" and lots of meat dishes before disappearing from sight when Washington relocated to Mount Vernon after his presidency. Even though many of the recipes in DeWitt's book are in fact taken from Mary Randolph's 1824 cookbook *The Virginia Housewife* (reissued in 1984 by Karen Hess), the alleged link to the Founding Fathers is always affirmed. And the author also distances himself from the so-called "fakelore" (cf. Smith, "False Memories") by which the heritage of certain dishes is falsely attributed – after all, Jefferson did *not* introduce vanilla and macaroni to the US (cf. DeWitt, *Founding Foodies* 121).

The Founding Foodies is mostly anecdotal and provides a mixed bag of insights into the Founding Fathers' culinary inventiveness, yet the author opens his collection on a pseudo-conceptual note which is worth quoting at length:

> In their never-ending attempts to fully understand American history, historians began using the phrase "Founding Fathers" to designate the men and women, mostly early politicians, who founded the United States or were influential in its founding. At first, the phrase referred to three superstar fathers, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams. That list was later expanded to include James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay. Eventually, the list of the Founding Fathers was expand-

ed further to include many of the lesser-known signers of the Declaration of Independence, members of the Constitutional Convention, and others.
Given the number of Founding Fathers, it should not come as any surprise that some of them had a very profound interest in food and drink. Some might think that by calling these people, some of the most famous and talented people in American history, foodies I am trivializing them. I don't think so. To the contrary, I am elevating them into a new dimension of humanity, one that transcends politics. Today, the Founding Fathers would be superstars of sustainable farming and ranching, exotic imported foods, brewing, distilling, and wine appreciation. In other words, they would be foodies. (ibid. xv)

Never mind that it was not historians who coined the term 'Founding Fathers,' that the women somehow disappear after the first lines of this passage, and that it contains several non sequiturs; the relevant part comes at the end, where DeWitt elevates the Founding Fathers in a way that transcends politics. How to transcend politics, one may ask, but DeWitt's logic can be succinctly analyzed with reference to Lauren Berlant's critical assessment of the sentimental nation: sentimentalism of the kind we see at work here "develops *within political thought* [or within what should be primarily a political discourse] a discourse of ethics that, paradoxically, denigrates the political and claims superiority to it" (*Female Complaint* 34); at the same time it camouflages "the fundamental terms that organize power," which remain unaddressed (ibid). The function of the cookbook in the discourse of founders chic more clearly than many other texts and practices turns the political into the domestic and the revolutionary kitchen into a "post-public public sphere" (ibid. 223) with a "displacement of politics to the realm of feeling" (ibid. xii). DeWitt and others enact a culinary white reconstruction on the backs of blacks and other nonwhites in an essentially nostalgic mode and thus re-install an image of a predominantly white nation. The "sentimental cultural politics" (Berlant, *Queen* 4) of DeWitt in particular, and of founders chic in general, separate the political from politics. Berlant argues that the political public sphere thus has become an intimate public sphere which produces a "new nostalgia-based fantasy nation" (ibid. 5), and it is in this sense that we may talk about the consumption of American democracy.

What is striking about this "fantasy nation" envisioned in *The Founding Foodies* and similar founders chic publications in which the Founding Fathers once more reign supreme, is that (1) it re-inscribes social hierarchies; (2) it re-erects and legitimates discursive systems of oppression and exclusion (it definitely flirts with past injustices such as slavery, etc.); (3) it re-establishes a European genealogy of American national culture by way of French cuisine (obviously the black slave would not be able to cook if he had not been trained to do

so in France); (4) it romanticizes consumption and obscures the conditions of production, i.e. slave labor – after all, it is slaves who put into practice all of the glorious ideas about composting, fermenting, wine-growing etc.; (5) it (re)sacralizes the Founding Fathers by giving them celebrity status – visiting Monticello or Mount Vernon in person or through the consumption of founders chic products may qualify as a kind of civil religious 'pilgrimage' as much as visiting Washington, D.C.; (6) it operates in a discourse of 'cultivating' and 'civilizing' the 'new world' palate, adding culinary refinement to statesmanship and republicanism; (7) it condones an "utterly privatized model of citizenship and the good life" (Giroux, *Public Spheres* 56) with the Founding Fathers as exemplary entrepreneurs and private agents in a public sphere (in fact, they would have thrived in any neoliberal market economy); and (8) it re-organizes a national memorial culture and re-installs the myth of a 'domestic' nation in a double sense (cf. Berlant, *Queen*). At the same time, the sentimental discourse of the "intimate public sphere" in which we find "nostalgic images of a normal, familial America" (ibid. 3-4) infantilizes and trivializes this displacement of political critique: from the perspective of a nostalgic cookbook, the Founding Fathers hardly seem controversial. Who would argue over old recipes? In getting into the kitchen with Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin, we follow and condone their immunization from political critique as well as the immunization of those who so often use them for their own political ends.

Founders chic thus clearly is part of a broader marketing of nostalgic images of a "normal," "familial" America: "Sentimental politics are being performed whenever putatively suprapolitical affects or affect-saturated institutions (like the nation and the family) are proposed as universal solutions to structural […] antagonism" (Berlant, *Female Complaint* 294). This is also reflected in the way that the Founding Fathers mythology is used for instance by the activists and advocates of the Tea Party movement.

9. CONCLUSION: THE FOUNDING FATHERS AS NATIONAL FANTASY IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS

> When I first saw a painting of George Washington framed by a toilet seat, hanging on the walls of a local junior college, I realized that the history revisionists had gone too far.
> TIM LAHAYE, *FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS*

> At a resonant 1,776 feet tall, the Freedom Tower — in my master plan, second in importance only to the 9/11 memorial itself — will rise above its predecessors, reasserting the preeminence of freedom and beauty, restoring the spiritual peak to the city and proclaiming America's resilience even in the face of profound danger, of our optimism even in the aftermath of tragedy. Life, victorious.
> DANIEL LIBESKIND, "GROUND ZERO MASTER PLAN"

The Liberty Tower at Ground Zero symbolizes a national fantasy that refers, by way of its height of 1,776 feet, to the year of the Declaration of Independence. This new architectural symbol also reinforces and re-invigorates the myth of the founding and the Founding Fathers. Particularly in the wake of 9/11, we can observe a political climate in which many Americans were protective of the Founding Fathers again. Thus, we may relate the comeback of the founders in founders chic to other political developments and movements which affirm their role for the national founding; as Jill Lepore has pointed out, the new historical revisionism initiated by the Tea Party movement and religious groups alike presents a confused discursive conglomerate that is "conflating originalism, evangelicalism, and heritage tourism" and which "amounts to fundamentalism" (*Whites* 16). In this fundamentalist discourse, the Founding Fathers serve as the historical authority for neoconservative and evangelical agendas; this imagined alliance highlights the activists' lack of historical knowledge or their willingness to purposefully misrepresent history to further their own ends. It is well-known that, in an interview with Glenn Beck on January 13, 2010, former Governor of Alaska Sarah Palin (R) invoked the "sincerity of the Founding Fathers" and yet was at first unable to name even one of them (cf. "Sarah Palin"). Similarly, Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R-Min) falsely claimed that "the very founders that wrote those [founding] documents worked tirelessly until slavery was no more in the United States […]," and went on to say that John Quincy Adams "would not rest until slavery was extinguished in the country" (Amira, "Michele Bachmann; cf. McCarthy, "John Quincy Adams"). Adams, who died in 1848,

did rest before slavery was abolished. This skewed and counterfactual version of history shows that the Founding Fathers are used here as a projection screen for the present which enables a fantasy of the nation through a retrospectively imagined original, primary moment.

The Tea Party movement has been considered by many commentators and scholars to advocate an extremist political agenda based on anti-elitism and anti-statism, even as it lacks a consistent common ideology (cf. Greven, "Die Tea-Party-Bewegung" 147). Thomas Greven refers to a "tea party-brand" (ibid. 145) that includes 'Don't tread on me' merchandize and a rhetoric of 're-founding' and 'taking back' the country that seems as regressively nostalgic as founders chic memorabilia.

In the context of evangelical popular culture, Tim LaHaye, co-author of the phenomenally successful *Left Behind* series of books, is one of the most prominent evangelical Christian ministers and speakers to have contributed to the debates around the Founding Fathers. In *Faith of Our Founding Fathers*, he champions the evangelical origins of the US, which he is able to do only by offering an alternative set of Founding Fathers: James Madison, Robert Morris, Roger Sherman, Alexander Hamilton, and George Mason. Argumentatively, LaHaye employs a revisionist rhetoric when he refers to the "untold story" of the Christian origin of the country and to the "debt owed to the Founding Fathers;" he bemoans "the distortion of history in the state-approved textbooks" and "the total absence of the Christian religion in them," whereby in his view "a whole generation of schoolchildren is robbed of its country's religious heritage" (1). Much can be said about LaHaye's claim regarding the foundational quality of Christianity as opposed to secularism (he hardly ever takes into account the American Enlightenment). According to him, "secular humanists" in the US have produced a "moral holocaust" (note the metaphor) by blindly attacking "Christianity and its moral values" (ibid. 4) and by engaging in a "deliberate rape of history" (ibid. 5). LaHaye suggests in his culture war on US-American paternity that "evangelical Protestants who founded this nation" (qtd. in Lepore, *Whites* 121) should be reinstalled whereas both Jefferson (who "had nothing to do with the founding of our nation" [ibid]) and Franklin (who in LaHaye's view was not a Christian) should be discounted. LaHaye's hagiographic fashioning of the Christian Founding Fathers explains historical events through individual achievement and character rather than through systemic forces and contingency (cf. ibid. 36). In many ways, LaHaye offers a counter-narrative to secularization and the Enlightenment by (mis)reading a civil religious discourse as religious (more specifically, Christian) and thus by projecting religion back onto the newly emergent revolutionary civil religion.

The so-called "teavangelicals," as David Brody calls them appreciatively (cf. his book of the same title), even as they present two distinct groups (i.e., Tea Party movement activists and evangelical Christians), can be considered aligned on a variety of issues. For one thing, both converge in a new embrace of the myth of the Founding Fathers under political and religious considerations, respectively, and share a unilateral, patriotic discourse that identifies outside, 'foreign' influences and US international involvement as harmful to the US. These anxieties come to the fore in discussions of Obama's birth certificate (revolving around the question of whether he is a foreigner, i.e. 'un-American'), in blaming foreign (European) influence for the secularization of the US, as well as in post-9/11 discussions of the 'terrorist threat.' LaHaye is forcefully anti-French and anti-European in general, complaining in his book that at the revolutionary moment, 'old world' forces already attempted to secularize and corrupt the American Founding Fathers. Thus, the discussion of the Founding Fathers continues to be deeply polarized, and the founders' original intent is time and again debated in political arguments that are still often quite divisive. In order to describe the social, cultural, and political chasm within American society that these debates seem to reveal, John Sperling and Suzanne Wiggins Helburn have used the framework of a conservative "retro America" vs. a liberal "metro America" (cf. *Great Divide*), and Stanley B. Greenberg similarly identifies "two Americas" (cf. his 2004 book) divided along the lines of religion and politics.

In stark contrast to the reinvigoration of the Founding Fathers myth as a national fantasy, we find much historical evidence corroborating the transnational dimension of the political experiences of men like Franklin, Jefferson, Adams, Jay, Hamilton, and Madison. From a transnational perspective, the Founding Fathers, of course, were retrospectively contained in a national paradigm that was non-existent at the time of the American Revolution and has more recently become an anachronism. A number of recent studies have addressed this conundrum: Gordon S. Wood in his *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (2004) reopens a discussion of the founders outside the nationalist paradigm by looking at Franklin as "the principal American abroad" (*Americanization* 201), who enjoyed life in France. At a time when "[c]ultural nationalism had not yet developed enough to disrupt the cosmopolitan republic of letters that made learned men like Franklin 'citizens of the world'" (Bender, *Nation* 89), many of the Founding Fathers would have defined themselves as part of a broader international culture. Similarly, Francis Cogliano has pointed out that for Jefferson "the spread of liberty was, and must be, an international movement" (*Thomas Jefferson* 264) that may have begun in the Thirteen Colonies yet should expand

to other parts of the world. It was a "global republicanism" (ibid. 265) that he had in mind: reading him as an American statesman misses "the international outlook at the heart of Jefferson's beliefs" (ibid). Similarly reading back a cosmopolitan internationalism into the founding phase of the republic, Thomas Bender has elaborated on the many ways in which the American past is not "a linear story of progress or a self-contained history" (*Nation* 60). He considers the American Revolution as, among other things, part of "a global war between European great powers" (France and England more specifically) in which the colonies in North America were caught up and in which they constituted one actor among many (ibid. 61). Any account of the American Revolution should thus also consider the French Revolution as well as the Haitian Revolution, which for Bender clearly was the most radical in the Americas in the 18th century. Regarding Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin, Gore Vidal notes that "[i]t is a triple irony that three of the principal inventors of the United States should have been abroad in Europe during the Constitution-making period" (*Inventing* 62). Heroizing the Founding Fathers has always been an attempt at keeping contingency at bay, as "[t]here is very little about the events of 1776 that, on close examination, suggests inevitability" (ibid. 33). And Thomas Bender further notes that

> [t]he new nation was independent, but very limited in its freedom of action. Far from being isolated, it was perhaps more deeply entangled in world affairs, more clearly a participant in histories larger than itself, than at any other time in its history. (*Nation* 103)

Thus, scrutinizing the complexity of the Founding Fathers myth may necessitate looking beyond the national context. The American Revolution also bespeaks a *transnational* moment, and recent scholarship has begun to reconstruct just that.

While the Founding Fathers as a collective myth have come into being relatively late, their symbolic capital in American public life and political culture today clearly exceeds that of Columbus, Pocahontas, and perhaps even that of the Pilgrims and Puritans; in fact, the status of the Founding Fathers is quite elevated among the foundational mythological personnel. It is therefore important to note the various processes in which the making, remaking and (partial) unmaking of this myth has unfolded.

10. STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Define the 'Founding Fathers' 1) in a narrow and 2) in a broader sense.
2. In retrospect, what unites the Founding Fathers as a group and what differences can we discern between them in the historical context?
3. Discuss the notion of a "second founding" of the US. What does it refer to?
4. Give an interpretation of the *New Yorker* cover showing Barack Obama as a Founding Father.
5. Crispus Attuck, Richard Allen, Barzillai Lew, Peter Salem, Prince Whipple, Jenny Slew, Mum Bett, Harry Hosier, Daniel Coker, and James Forten have been to varying degrees referred to as Black Founding Fathers and Mothers. Research and discuss their stories!
6. Eliza Pinckney, Deborah Sampson, Lydia Darragh, Emily Geiger, Sybil Luddington, Catherine Littlefield Greene, Margaret Beekman Livingston, and Annis Boudinot Stockton have been to varying degrees referred to as Founding Mothers. Research and discuss their stories!
7. In her book *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt argues that "[n]o revolution has ever taken place in America" (17). Daniel Boorstin in *The Genius of American Politics* (1953) refers to the historical event as a "revolution without dogma." Discuss!
8. When Horatio Greenough's statue of George Washington (modelled after a statue of Zeus) was displayed in the rotunda of the US Capitol in 1841, responses were quite mixed. Discuss the role of Classicism in the depiction and self-fashioning of the Founding Fathers.
9. Watch and discuss the HBO miniseries *John Adams*. How are the Founding Fathers represented?
10. What does a transnational perspective on the Founding Fathers entail and why is it useful?

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