The Society of the Four Arts

The Founders & Us:

The Relevance of Our Origins

Alicia Parks, M.A. & Robert Watson, Ph.D.

Curriculum Guide
“We ought not to look back, unless it is to derive useful lessons from past errors, and for the purpose of profiting by dear bought experience.”

- George Washington (March 26, 1781)

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ABOUT THE SERIES

The Founders & Us

Joseph J. Ellis

“The Founders & Us: The Relevance of Our Origins” is a new five-part program that aims to begin a broader conversation about America’s revolutionary generation, those political leaders “present at the creation” who first framed the arguments that continue to echo through the ages and into our own time. It is a story for all of us, and about all of us.
We have chosen to focus on the American Founding because it is the Big Bang in American history from which our core ideas, values, and political institutions radiate. It is the time we must periodically revisit to rediscover our original intentions as a people and a nation.

There are several truths, as Jefferson said, we hold to be self-evident: that the legacy of the founders does not fit neatly into our current political categories (i.e. Republican/Democrat, liberal/conservative); that their story is both triumphant and tragic; and that our goal is not to provide answers to our current dilemmas so much as to create a framework in which more cogent and productive discussions can proceed.

We must also acknowledge the problems of our present-day American society: our citizens lack knowledge about history; the scholarly world has largely abdicated its responsibility to communicate beyond the cloistered groves of academe; political correctness is at epidemic levels in many colleges, making serious engagement with controversial issues virtually impossible; and our political culture has become so polarized and partisan that communication across ideological lines is virtually non-existent.

This series aims to bridge those gaps. We hope to walk away with a greater understanding of our origins as a people and a nation, and a keener sense of the expansive implications of “We the People” from then to now. Our fondest hope is to launch a vital conversation that helps to generate a national dialogue.

The series presents speakers of unquestioned distinction with a proven capacity to bring a high degree of intellectual sophistication and contagious enthusiasm to the audience. Our list includes four winners of the Pulitzer Prize, and a former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

**Curriculum Guide**

Alicia Parks, Historical Society of Pennsylvania  
Robert P. Watson, Lynn University

As educators, you are on the front lines of the battle to keep history alive. The challenge of engaging students in ways that both motivate them to develop a passion for history and foster their intellectual curiosity is a difficult one. But it is made all the more challenging by the current political climate, one plagued by hyper-partisanship and polarization as well as the absence of civility and dialogue.

We know that the past is prelude to the future. However, the late, great writer George Orwell warned us that the present can shape the past, as those in political power can reimagine and rewrite history. It is thus vitally important to reclaim an accurate account of the nation’s founding, especially in a day and age when sound-bites and tweets somehow pass as news and where much of the political debate and media coverage of it is fact-optional.
On behalf of the Society of the Four Arts and Professor Joseph Ellis, we are delighted to offer this companion curriculum guide to the series on the Founders. We hope you will find it to be a helpful tool for your classrooms. Videos of all the lectures and interviews are available on the website of the Society of the Four Arts. They provide an opportunity for students studying history, government, and civics to hear from some of the most important voices in our lifetimes on the issue of America’s founding.

As Professor Ellis noted in the introduction, the series and the accompanying curriculum guide do not endeavor to answer all the questions before us or address the pressing policy issues of the day. However, they do attempt to prompt a meaningful conversation about our origins as a people and as a nation, and to then use our understanding of and appreciation for the founding to guide a more meaningful, constructive, and civil dialogue about the state of the American political experiment today. As your students will note, many of the challenges facing the founders are still present and there are important lessons to be learned from their accomplishments.

PROGRAMS

Joseph J. Ellis
January 5, 2017

The author of 11 books, Joseph J. Ellis was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation and won the National Book Award for American Sphinx: A Biography of Thomas Jefferson. His in-depth chronicle of the life of our first president, His Excellency: George Washington, was a New York Times’ best-seller. Ellis’s newest book, The Quartet: Orchestrating the Second American Revolution, 1783-1789 (2015), was released to great praise.

Ellis is the Ford Foundation Professor Emeritus at Mount Holyoke College and most recently taught in the Leadership Studies Program at Williams College. He lives in Amherst, Massachusetts with his wife Ellen Wilkins Ellis and is the father of three sons and, so far, grandfather of two girls and a boy.

**Gordon S. Wood**

*January 12, 2017*

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Gordon S. Wood is Alva O. Way University Professor Emeritus at Brown University. He received his B.A. from Tufts University and his Ph.D. from Harvard University. He taught at Harvard and the University of Michigan before joining the faculty at Brown in 1969. Wood is the author of many works, including *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969), which won the Bancroft Prize and the John H. Dunning Prize, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992), which won the Pulitzer Prize and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Prize, and *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (2004), which was awarded the Julia Ward Howe Prize.


In 2011, Wood was awarded a National Humanities Medal, the Churchill Bell by Colonial Williamsburg, and the Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Award from the Society of American Historians.
In 2015, he received the Centennial Medal from the Harvard University Graduate School. Wood is a fellow of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society.

Ron Chernow
February 9, 2017

Chernow has been hailed as “one of the preeminent biographers of his generation” by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and “American’s best business biographer” by Fortune Magazine. His book The House of Morgan won the National Book Award as the best nonfiction book of 1990 and is considered a modern classic, while The Warburgs won the prestigious George S. Eccles Prize for the best business book of 1993 and was cited by the American Library Association as one of the year’s ten best works.

Chernow’s biographies of John D. Rockefeller (Titan, 1998), Alexander Hamilton (Hamilton, 2004), and George Washington (Washington: A Life, 2010) have all been met with critical acclaim and won numerous awards. Titan and Hamilton both received nominations for the National Book Critics Circle Award. In 2010, Washington: A Life was honored with the Pulitzer Prize and the American History Book Prize, endowing him with the honorary title American Historian Laureate.

Chernow was the historical advisor to the Tony award-winning musical “Hamilton,” which was inspired by his best-selling biography. Chernow is the recipient of six honorary doctorates, recently served as president of PEN American Center, and sat on the executive board of the Society of American Historians.

David McCullough
March 9, 2017
McCollough has been acclaimed as a “master of the art of narrative history.” He is twice winner of the Pulitzer Prize, twice winner of the National Book Award, and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian award.

McCollough’s most recent book, the widely praised *The Wright Brothers*, was a #1 New York Times’ best-seller and remained on the list for nine months. *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris*, also a #1 best-seller, has been called “dazzling” and “history to be savored.” His book *1776* is considered an instant classic, while *John Adams* (2001), remains one of the most praised and widely read American biographies of all time. In the words of the citation accompanying his honorary doctorate from Yale, “As an historian, he paints with words, giving us pictures of the American people that live, breathe, and above all, confront fundamental issues of courage, achievement, and moral character.”

McCollough is also twice winner of the Francis Parkman Prize and has been honored by the National Book Foundation with the Distinguished Contribution to American Letters Award, the National Humanities Medal, and the Gold Medal for Biography given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has received 54 honorary degrees.

**Lynne Cheney**

*April 11, 2017*
Lynne Cheney holds a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin and was a member of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.

Cheney, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, has spent much of her professional life writing and speaking about the importance of knowing American history. As chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1986 to 1993, she wrote and spoke about the importance of teaching children about the leaders, events, and ideas that have shaped our world, and she worked to provide opportunities for educators to gain in-depth knowledge that lies behind outstanding teaching.

Cheney has worked to bring tales of the American past to a wide audience, writing articles about history for numerous publications on topics ranging from women’s suffrage in the West to the way Americans celebrated the country’s centennial. She has also turned her attention to children and their families, writing six best-selling history books for them, including *We the People: The Story of Our Constitution* (2008). Her most recent book, an in-depth biography titled *James Madison: A Life Reconsidered* (2014), is a New York Times best-seller.

Each noted historian is interviewed by Robert Watson

Robert P. Watson
Watson has published 40 books and hundreds of scholarly articles and essays on topics in politics and history. He also serves as the series editor for SUNY Press’s popular book series on the American Presidency and has edited two encyclopedia sets on the presidents and first ladies. Dr. Watson has co-convened a half-dozen national conferences on the American presidency, moderated political debates, hosted hundreds of civic education workshops, voter registration drives, and town halls, and is a frequent commentator for numerous media outlets including WPTV 5 NBC in south Florida. He has appeared on hundreds of media outlets, including CNN, Fox, MSNBC, the BBC, and C-SPAN.

Professor Watson has won numerous awards for his teaching, community service, and scholarly contributions to the study of the presidency and politics. His recent books include Affairs of State (2012), The Presidents’ Wives (2014), The Nazi Titanic (2016), the forthcoming The Ghost Ship of Brooklyn (2017), and America’s First Crisis (2014), which won the Gold Medal in History at the Independent Publishers’ Awards. He is Professor of American Studies at Lynn University.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

We the People
• Students will be able to understand the ideals of the Founding

• Students will gain an appreciation for the great personal conviction it took to support the Revolution, Founding, and new experiment in democracy

• Students will be able to discuss the differences among the Founders, in terms of their vision for the nation, their ideology and inspiration, and their personalities

• Students will be able to assess how the Founders worked through the many interpersonal hurdles and political obstacles to America’s Founding

• Students will be able to give examples of how American history is often misunderstood and interpreted differently, and is a challenging and ongoing process of discovery

• Students will be able to demonstrate how the work and vision of the Founders is still relevant today and helpful in addressing current political problems

LEARNING EXERCISES

Many of the challenges facing the Founders and the ways in which they sometimes did and sometimes did not address them are still applicable today. Consider the following questions and exercises and examine the primary source documents.

1. How do the Founding Fathers represent the American dream? How do they not represent the American dream?

2. How did John Adams deal with immigration and immigrants? How does this related to immigration today? Identify an important lesson you learned.
3. Compare and contrast the election of 1796 and 1800 to the election of 2016. How were they run? Were there political parties and what was their function in elections? What were the key issues for voters?

4. Read George Washington’s famous Farewell Address. Did we follow his advice? Why or why not? Are his words still relevant?

5. The first abolition society in the United States was founded in 1775. How is slavery a contradictory institution even before we claimed our independence?

6. How did the relationship with the Native Americans shape our nation’s founding?

7. How do countries fund wars? How do you fund a war if you are in direct rebellion with your government? How did the Founders address the problem of funding the Revolution?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
1. Who is your favorite Founder? Why?

2. How did the Founders overcome their sometimes bitter differences?

3. What are some common misconceptions of the Founders?

4. Is there a part of the Constitution you would change? Why and how so?

5. If you were to propose an amendment to the Constitution, what would it be?

**BIOS OF THE FOUNDERS**

Who were the Founders? The term “Founding Father” generally refers to the leaders present at the beginning – the revolutionary period. They were the men who fought for independence, served in the First and Second Continental Congresses, and cobbled together the initial documents of freedom. The First Continental Congress met in the summer of 1774 and was followed the next summer by the Second Continental Congress. This Second Congress would later sign the Declaration of Independence.

On the other hand, the “Framers” were those who gathered at the Pennsylvania State House (now known as Independence Hall) in the hot, humid summer of 1787 to frame a constitution. These terms have been used throughout American history, but do not neglect the contributions of the many women who served in various capacities and sacrificed much for the cause of freedom.

The Framers selected George Washington to be the presiding officer and behind closed doors they toiled from May to September to produce the framework for a new type of government. These extraordinary leaders came from all the original colonies with the exception of Rhode Island. Many of them had fought in the Revolutionary War and others had served in the Continental Congress. Nearly all of them had experience in colonial government and had held local political offices. In the winter and spring of 1786 and 1787, the states selected a total of 74...
delegates to attend the convention in Philadelphia. Nineteen delegates decided not to attend, including Patrick Henry of Virginia, who would later claim “I smelled a rat.” Of the 55 original delegates, there were only 41 present on September 17, 1787, the date we now celebrate as Constitution Day. John Dickinson of Delaware was unable to attend, but gave fellow delegate George Reed his proxy vote and Reed signed the Constitution on behalf of Dickinson. Three delegates refused to sign what they believed was a flawed document (Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts and George Mason and Edmund Randolph of Virginia), for a total of 39 signers.

Click here for the National Constitution Center’s page on the Framers:

http://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/founding-fathers/

Click here for the National Archives website “Meet the Framers”

https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/founding-fathers

FOUNDING TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 5, 1764</td>
<td>Sugar Act passed by British Parliament</td>
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<td>March 22, 1765</td>
<td>Stamp Act passed by British Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 24, 1765</td>
<td>Quartering Act passed by British Parliament</td>
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<td>September-October 1768</td>
<td>British troops occupy Boston</td>
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<td>March 5, 1770</td>
<td>Boston Massacre</td>
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<td>December 16, 1773</td>
<td>Boston Tea Party</td>
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<td>March 23, 1775</td>
<td>Patrick Henry delivers “Give me liberty or give me death“ speech</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 19, 1775</td>
<td>Battles of Lexington and Concord</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 1, 1776</td>
<td>Declaration of Independence is signed</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 4, 1776</td>
<td>Declaration of Independence adopted</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 25, 1776</td>
<td>George Washington begins the crossing of the Delaware River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 19, 1777</td>
<td>Washington’s army winters in Valley Forge</td>
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October 19, 1781  Battle of Yorktown
September 3, 1783  Treaty of Paris ends Revolutionary War
August 1786  Shay’s Rebellion
May 25, 1787  Constitutional Convention begins
June 19, 1788  Inauguration of President George Washington
June 21, 1788  Constitution is ratified
March 4, 1789  Official date for US Congress and government to convene
September 25, 1789  Bill of Rights approved by Congress
September 19, 1796  Washington’s Farewell Address
August 19, 1803  Marbury vs. Madison court case

AMERICA’S FOUNDING DOCUMENTS

Declaration of Independence
https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration

Constitution
https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution

Bill of Rights
https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights

SUGGESTED READING

The following books are discussed in the series:

By Joseph J. Ellis