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American Studies |

# Fighting Over the Founders

How We Remember the American Revolution

BY ANDREW M. SCHOCKET

## Reading Guide

The American Revolution is all around us. It is pictured as big as billboards and as small as postage stamps, evoked in political campaigns and car advertising campaigns, relived in museums and revised in computer games. As the nation's founding moment, the American Revolution serves as a source of powerful founding myths, and remains the most accessible and most contested event in U.S. history: more than any other, it stands as a proxy for how Americans perceive the nation's aspirations. Americans' increased fascination with the Revolution over the past two decades represents more than interest in the past. It's also a site to work out the present, and the future. What are we using the Revolution to debate?

In *Fighting over the Founders*, Andrew M. Schocket explores how politicians, screenwriters, activists, biographers, jurists, museum professionals, and reenactors portray the American Revolution. Identifying competing "essentialist" and "organicist" interpretations of the American Revolution, Schocket shows how today's memories of the American Revolution reveal Americans' conflicted ideas about class, about race, and about gender—as well as the nature of history itself. *Fighting over the Founders* plumbs our views of the past and the present, and illuminates our ideas of what United States means to its citizens in the new millennium.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Fighting Over the Founders as a Monograph*

*Fighting over the Founders* is what scholars call a monograph. Scholars use monographs to present interpretations to be understood, rather than a series of facts to be memorized. As a monograph, *Fighting over the Founders* addresses an interpretive question with a series of claims. These claims are then supported through evidence, analysis, and argument. It takes quite a bit of work to understand a scholarly interpretation. To understand Schocket's interpretation, you must read each chapter carefully. You must also read each chapter more than once. Furthermore, you will not understand Schocket's interpretation immediately. Indeed, it will require a few weeks of hard work – involving reading, writing, thinking, and discussion – before you understand Schocket's interpretation and are prepared to criticize it.

In reading this monograph your goal is understanding. To understand this monograph, begin by reading through the Introduction lightly and quickly. Use this initial quick reading to get a sense of the book's content and Schocket's concerns. Once you have done that, it is time to go back and read more carefully and more systematically. Be sure to take notes as you undertake your second reading. Be prepared, too, to read passages and even pages more than once.

- As with all monographs, the introduction to *Fighting Over the Founders* is organized in a certain way, and sets out to do certain things. Schocket uses his introduction to i)introduce an intellectual or scholarly problem ii) pose an interpretive question iii)introduce a thesis claim iv)layout the framework of the argument he will use to demonstrate that his claim is a correct one.
- As you read the Introduction systematically, try to identify i)the intellectual problem Schocket addresses ii)the interpretive question he addresses iii)his main claims or thesis concerning the Revolution iv)an outline of the arguments he will make.

I strongly suggest that you write in your book and take notes. Remember, too, that in reading a monograph the first and last sentences of paragraphs are the most important sentences. Finally, keep in mind that you will not understand Schocket's argument on your first read of the Introduction. As with all monographs, *Fighting Over the Founders* uses argument, evidence, and analysis in the individual chapters to establish that the book's thesis is a correct one. With lots of patient careful reading, as well as lots of hard work, you will understand Schocket's thesis and argument, and be prepared to criticize them.

- As with all monographs, Schocket uses his introduction to frame and introduce his thesis. Schocket uses the first two paragraphs of the introduction to introduce the ways that the American Revolution and founding permeate everyday life in the contemporary United States. In the second paragraph on page 2, Schocket

introduces a point about the American Revolution. What is that point? How does he characterize the place of the American Revolution in contemporary American life in the paragraph that runs from page 2 to 3?

- On page 4, Schocket introduces another important point. Why, in the contemporary United States, does the American Revolution still matter? How do we use our understandings of the American Revolution to evaluate our state of affairs in 2016? Can we turn this point into an interpretive question?
- At the bottom of page 4, Schocket introduces “One strand of contemporary Revolutionary memory.” In your own words, define the “essentialist” interpretation or memory of the American Revolution.
- On page 5, Schocket introduces the “organicist” interpretation of the American Revolution. In your own words, define the “organicist” understanding of the American Revolution.
- On page 6, Schocket claims that the American Revolution was unusual, and that is what makes it significant over 200 years later. What makes the Revolution unusual and significant?
- On page 7, Schocket claims that “ownership of an authoritative past provides a powerful political rhetorical weapon.” What does Schocket mean by this claim? Can you offer evidence to substantiate this claim?
- At the bottom of page 7, how does Schocket relate contemporary understandings of the Revolution with nationalism?
- On page 8, Schocket writes that “For the pluralistic nation that is the United States, the tussle over the Revolution has also become a debate about belonging.” What does it mean to claim that the United States is a pluralistic nation? How do battles over the memory of the American Revolution shape debates about who is – and who is not – a true American?
- What is Schocket’s main point in the paragraph running from page 9 to page 10?
- How does Schocket define the American Revolution on page 10? Is his definition consistent with the interpretation we developed through our reading of Bernstein?
- On pages 11 – 15, Schocket reviews previous writings on the American Revolution and situates his work in this context. He also reviews his approach, biases, and methodologies in constructing this book.
  - How have other scholars written about collective memories of the American Revolution? Be specific and cite the claims of specific scholars and authors?
  - How do historians typically write the history of the American Revolution? What do they seek and do they seek it?

- What biases and experiences does Schocket bring to his writing of this monograph?
- What methodology does Schocket use here? What evidence did he collect to analyze? How did he collect it? With what assumptions does he approach his evidence?

## CHAPTER 1

- Just as monographs contain thesis statements or claims, so do individual chapters in a monograph. Likewise, as with most monographs, Schocket begins chapter 1 with an anecdote. He uses his anecdote to introduce his chapter thesis in the second paragraph. What points or claim does Schocket make in the second paragraph? What is his chapter thesis?
- From pages 18-22, Schocket introduces his “methodology:” the methods that he uses to collect and analyze the data on which his thesis or claim rests. He also lays out his rationale for his methodology, along with the limits and uses of his methodology. Methodology is important. Schocket, like any other scholar, must rest his claims on evidence, analysis, and explanation. In this section, Schocket lays bare for the reader his methods of evidence collection and analysis. What are his methods of evidence collection? How does he analyze his evidence?
- In the first full paragraph on 22, Schocket begins stating and explaining the findings of his analysis. What are his general findings? Does the American Revolution form an important part of contemporary political discourse? In what ways?
- At the bottom of 25, Schocket states that “How candidates spoke about the history of the Revolution represented both a historical interpretation and a philosophy of history itself.” Read through the remainder of this section, and then return to this statement. What does Schocket mean by this claim? For Republicans who adhere to the essentialist interpretation, what is their “philosophy of history?”
- From 25 through 33, Schocket examines Republicans’ “essentialist view of the Revolution.” (25), along with Schocket’s claim about historical interpretations and a philosophy of history. In reading through this section, consider the following:
  - What does Schocket mean when he claims that Republicans have created an essentialist interpretation of the Revolution?
  - What are the main features of this interpretation? What claims form this interpretation? Give specific examples.
  - What specific groups does the essentialist interpretation appeal to? How does it appeal to them?
  - What philosophy of history do essentialists subscribe to? How do they understand truths about history? What assumptions do essentialists make about the past?
  - Overall, do you agree or disagree with Schocket’s claims about Republicans’ essentialist interpretation? How does Schocket’s essentialism compare to the interpretations of the Revolution we developed and examined in the first part of this class?

- Do you agree with an essentialist philosophy of history? Why or why not? Is there a single, essential, and knowable truth?
- On pages 33-38, Schocket examines the Democrats' "organicist" interpretation of history and the American Revolution.
- What does Schocket mean when he claims that Democrats have created an "organicist" interpretation of the Revolution?
  - What are the main features of this interpretation? What claims form this interpretation? Give specific examples.
  - What specific groups does the essentialist interpretation appeal to? How does it appeal to them?
  - For Democrats who adhere to the organicist interpretation, what is their "philosophy of history?" How do they understand truths about history? What assumptions do organicists make about the past?
  - Overall, do you agree or disagree with Schocket's claims about Democrats' organicist interpretation? How does Schocket's organicist interpretation compare to the interpretations of the Revolution we developed and examined in the first part of this class?
  - Do you agree or disagree with an organicist philosophy of history?
- From 38 to 43, Schocket compares how Democrats and Republicans have used their essentialist and organicist interpretations in public discourse.
  - How have the two groups used obscure, minor-Revolutionary era figures? How have they used – or ignored – female founders?
  - How have they used – or ignored – the War for Independence?
  - How have they understood and used the Revolution's emphasis on individual rights? How do these two groups differ on their understanding of individual rights? How, if at all, does the Republican essentialist understanding of the American Revolution inform their near obsessive concern with their understanding of the Second Amendment?
  - How have they misquoted and misused the founders?
  - In their victory and concession speeches in the 2012 presidential election, how did each candidate's speech reflect their particular interpretation of the Revolution?
- On 43, Schocket claims "that references to the American Revolution have become political shorthand to politicians and voters," and reflect "our collective memory's ideological divide."
  - What does Schocket mean by this claim? Do you agree or disagree with this claim?

- How have the terms “founding fathers” and “perfecting the union” become coded language?
- On 45, Schocket writes that when we look at the past in public discourse, “we are looking at the present in which we recast history as a way of shaping the future.” How do politicians use the past to shape the present? How are politicians and speechwriters different from historians?
- Watch a debate or a candidate's speech. Do these speeches conform to Schocket's categories?



## CHAPTER 2

### *Chapter Introduction, 49-51*

- In chapter 1, Schocket developed the main analytical concepts he will use throughout the book. In chapter 2, Schocket uses these concepts to analyze recent popular writings about the American founding.
- Schocket begins his chapter with an anecdote. What point does the anecdote make?
- On 49, what claim does Schocket make about the popularity of the founders, especially among conservatives? Why do organicist interpretations tend to shy away from venerating the founders?
- What is “founders chic” or “founding fathers chic?” What claim does Schocket make about founders chic on 51?
- How do the writings of academic historians and “independent writers” - authors of history books who are not trained historians – differ?
- From 51 through 53, Schocket examines the “founders chic” approach to the American founding. What are some of the characteristics of founders chic? What factors led to the emergence of founders chic in the late 1990s and the early 2000s?
- On 54, Schocket begins his analysis of founders chic. In general, what kinds of Revolutionary figures have founders chic biographers focused on?
- How does Schocket characterize David McCullough’s *John Adams*?
  - What makes it part of an essentialist interpretation of the American Revolution?
  - Is McCullough’s biography of John Adams an analysis of historical change, continuity, and significance (the concerns of academic historians)? Does McCullough seek to analyze the past on its own terms? Or, is McCullough interested in studying Adams to find lessons about morality and character? If so, what kind of book is this?
  - How did we tend to approach the founders in everyday life? Do we seek to evaluate the “character” of the founders as individuals or as a group? Do we try to understand the founders and the founding on its own terms?
- On 56, Schocket writes that McCullough’s *John Adams* “offer[s] insight into the essentialist mind.”
  - What makes McCullough’s *John Adams* part of an essentialist interpretation of the American Revolution?

- Above all else, what is McCullough interested in? What does his approach to history require?
- Please turn to the end of this reading guide. You will find a brief piece that I wrote for students in my US History survey class. How do I approach John Adams and the Federalists (a political party from the 1790s that included among its ranks, George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton?) what are my concerns in studying the past? What are David McCullough's concerns?
- What kind of history do you prefer and why? Are McCullough's books history? Or, are they books of moralisms and studies in character, drawn from the past?
- From 56 to 57, Schocket analyzes Isaacson's biography of Benjamin Franklin. How does
  - Isaacson's biography of Franklin present an essentialist view of Franklin? Again, is Isaacson interested in presenting an analysis of historical change, continuity, and significance in analyzing Franklin? Is he interested in understanding the past on its own terms? Or, is he interested in showing that Franklin is someone we should admire? Is this history or is this moralizing?
- From 57 to 58, Schocket analyzes Ron Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton. How does Chernow approach Hamilton? What is his goal? On what grounds does Schocket criticize Chernow and other founders chic biographers?
- On 59, Schocket analyzes Glenn Beck's biography of George Washington. Many Christians assert that good Christians must seek to emulate the life of Christ. How does Beck approach Washington? What does this say about the essentialist interpretation of the American Revolution?
- How do Joseph Ellis's many books on the founders demonstrate that founders chic contains an essentialist approach to the American Revolution and the founders?
- From 61 through 63, Schocket examines the gendered assumptions of founders chic. How does gender and masculinity figure into essentialist and founders chic accounts of the founders?
  - What gendered virtues do founders chic biographers ascribe to men?
  - What gendered virtues do they ascribe to women?
  - How do these gendered virtues appeal to the devotees of the essentialist interpretation of the American founding, and the demographic who purchases the great majority of founders chic literature?
  - Again, are these works scholarly history that seek to understand the past on its own terms? Or, are the books of moralisms and studies in character, using characters from the past?

- In a class discussion on this subject, a student commented that founders chic books are borderline homoerotic and older male versions of romance novels. Are they? What if anything does this say about the place of gender in founders chic literature?
- Overall, what, according to Schocket, makes founder chic literature essentialist? According to David McCullough, what is his work about? How is Cokie Roberts portrayal of “the women” of the American Revolution essentialist?
- From 65-66, Schocket examines the appeal of founders chic and the “politics of personality.” How does founders chic fit into a political culture that emphasizes personality and “principles” over policy and analysis?
  - Take what you know about the 2016 presidential campaign. Does it emphasize personality and “principles,” or policy and analysis? According to Donald Trump, why should you vote for him? In general, what party tends to emphasize personality - including character and principles, or lack thereof in their opponents? What party tends to favor policy and analysis?
- How have contemporary conservatives elevated Ronald Reagan to the pantheon of the founders? How do the efforts of Republican candidates to align themselves with Reagan speak to the politics of personality, essentialist understandings of history, and founders chic?
- From 67-68, Schocket analyzes essentialist interpretations of the Civil War and slavery. How does founders chic literature mirror the Lost Cause interpretations of the American Civil War? Do Lost Cause authors romanticize the Civil War? Do founders chic authors romanticize the founders?
- Overall, how does Schocket characterize founders chic literature? How is it connected to an essentialist interpretation of history and the American Revolution?

### ***Organicist Interpretations of the American Revolution***

- While essentialist authors focus on character and personality, what do organicist writers tend to focus on? How do they characterize the past? How do they characterize the American Revolution?
  - In general, what kinds of groups have organicist authors written about? What points do they try to make? (As an aside, does it strike you as odd that a concern about women or racial minorities is somehow or another associated with “progressive or liberal causes” in the United States in 2015? Does your generation obsess over racial, gender, and sexuality issues, or do you simply accept gender, racial, and sexual differences and equality?)
- How does David Waldstreicher approach Benjamin Franklin and the Constitution in two separate books? How is his approach organicist rather than essentialist?

- In his own words, what does Waldstreicher set out to do in his work? Does Waldstreicher treat Franklin as someone just like us who just happened to live in the past? Or, does Waldstreicher seek to analyze and understand Franklin in context, and to understand the past on its own terms?
- How does Woody Holton's background and approach to history reflect his works? What does Holton seek to do with his work?
  - For what it's worth, I think that Waldstreicher is a far better historian than Holton. Waldstreicher's political beliefs do not drive his historical scholarship, and Waldstreicher is interested in understanding the past on its own terms. Holton's works, on the other hand, are deliberately present-centered, and he wants to use the past to say something about the present. What approach to history do you prefer? Why?
- What conclusions does Schocket draw from his analysis of Alfred Young's works, and organicist historical writing for a general audience more broadly? According to Schocket, what makes Annette Gordon-Reed's books "organicist history at its best"?
- From 73 through 75, Schocket compares organicist and essentialist interpretations of the American Revolution? How do they differ? On what grounds does he criticize essentialist interpretations? What important truths are necessarily left out of essentialist writings? Why must essentialist authors avoid important truths about the founders: that they were headstrong, philanderers, politicians, and ... human?
- From 76 to 79, Schocket analyzes the historical writings of academic historians Gordon Wood and Gary Nash. Though both are university professors, both have made a career of writing for more popular audiences. How do these two approach history? According to Schocket, what are the fundamental flaws of the extreme versions of essentialist and organicist approaches to history? What – if anything – is a better approach to history than the extreme versions of the essentialist and the organicist approach?
- From 80 to 83, Schocket analyzes the controversy over Sally Hemmings and Thomas Jefferson. How does he reduce this controversy to organicist and essentialist terms? What larger points are involved here?
- In the concluding paragraph, Schocket writes that "history has always been ideological, inherently political." Do you agree or disagree? Is this all that we can have? History-writing as politics? In your estimation, how should historians and scholars approach the past?

***John Craig Hammond, "The Federalists and Republican Government,"  
excerpt from assigned readings for US History 1, Penn State New  
Kensington, Fall 2015***

Resistance during the Imperial Crisis, the War for Independence, and a prolonged period of constitution-making produced a national elite by the late 1780s, led by the likes of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams. Though rejecting Britain's system of monarchy and aristocracy, elite leaders who constituted the Federalists – led by Washington, Hamilton, and Adams - admired hierarchy and sought to institute it under a republican form government.

The Federalists who wrote the Constitution, fought for its ratification in the states, and then controlled the federal government from its inception in 1789 until the election of 1800, believed that ordinary men lacked the capacity to govern a nation, let alone a vast continental republic. Federalists believed that ordinary people were controlled by their passions, emotions, and self-interest. In turn, Federalists believed that ordinary people were unfit to influence – let alone make – important decisions about how best to govern the United States. Federalists feared that if government was left to the people, they would pursue their own narrow self-interests at the expense of the "common good," or the good of the entire United States. Because Federalists believed that ordinary people were controlled by their emotions and passions, they believed that mob rule and the tyranny of the majority were the greatest threats to Republican government. In democracies where ordinary people governed, anarchy and mob rule would ensue, and the democratic majority would use its power to take away rights from various minorities. Finally, while the Federalists believed that all sovereignty originated in the people, they believed that the role of ordinary people in government should be limited to infrequent and mostly indirect participation through elections.

Federalists understood themselves as both elites and elitists. They believed that individually and as a group, they had distinguished themselves in service to their country, and had proven themselves to be the best and brightest of their generation. They also believed that only men such as themselves possessed virtue: a commitment to the common good and the best interests of their nation rather than a commitment to their own narrow self-interests. As such, they believed that only men such as themselves were fit to govern a vast continental republic in a hostile world.

[Does the author of the above seek to evaluate the character of certain founders? Or, does the author seek to understand how certain founders understood the world in which they lived, without passing moral or political judgement on the founders? How does this approach to history differ from founders chic history?]

## CHAPTER 3

- On 86, Schocket lists the formal and informal requirements that shape museum and historical sites interpretations of the past. What are they? Do these sites simply present a “factual approach” to the past, or do they present certain interpretations?
- From 86 through 102, Schocket analyzes the epicenter of America’s historical memory of the American Revolution, Independence Park in Philadelphia. How does the National Park Service portray the American Revolution at Independence Park in Philadelphia?
- From 86 through 92, Schocket surveys the presentation of the American Revolution at various sites in Independence Hall (see below for images of the various sites at Independence Park)
  - On 88, Schocket states what a park ranger must do when a group is ushered into the Assembly Room. How do the limits of historical tours shape the presentation of the American Revolution here? Is it possible to provide a thoughtful presentation of the American Revolution under these conditions?
  - On 89, Schocket recounts the public reading ceremony of the Declaration of Independence. How does he characterize that event?
  - How does the Christ Church’s display of the Book of Common Prayer essentialize the Revolution according to Schocket?
  - In contrast, how is the Liberty Bell displayed? What about The “President’s House?”
  - Overall, how does Independence Park portray the American Revolution?
- From 93 through 96, Schocket examines the controversies and conflicts that went redesign of Independence Park. (Independence Park was first designed and built in preparation for the 1976 bicentennial. In the late 1990s, the NPS began plans to redesign the entire area).
  - How did the NPS initially plan to address the reality of slavery in the American Revolution, and the reality that President George Washington brought his slaves with him to Philadelphia while serving as president (Washington would bring slaves with him for periods less than six months to evade Pennsylvania’s gradual abolition laws. On two occasions, Washington’s slave escaped. On both occasions, Washington quietly sought to capture the slaves, on one occasion sending his nephew to Portsmouth, New Hampshire to kidnap his wife’s body servant, Oney Judge. Washington’s actions regarding his slaves in Philadelphia do NOT reflect well on him.)
  - On what grounds did various groups disagree over the portrayal of Washington, the Liberty Bell, and Washington’s slaves? How was it resolved?
  - Should the President’s House and the Liberty Bell display grapple with the

history of race and slavery in the United States? Or, in the words of one critic, did this simply “reopen old racial wounds and retell the past” as “little more than dated cultural Marxist ploys”? You can read more about the current display at <https://www.nps.gov/inde/learn/historyculture/places-presidentshousesite.htm>

- At the bottom of 95, Schocket provides a long quote concerning how the NPS plans to present the American Revolution in future exhibits. Overall, how should the NPS and other groups portray the American Revolution?
  - Should it present a simple, celebratory story of freedom?
  - Or, should it contemplate the many contradictions and struggles that mark American history (just as they mark the history of every nation)?
  - How did black Philadelphians – and black American more generally – respond to the portrayal of slavery at the President’s House?
- On 98 and 99, Schocket examines the constraints and requirements that shape the interpretations at historical sites. What are these limitations? What kind of interpretation do they encourage?
  - How did these constraints lead to the Liberty 360 debacle?
  - How does Schocket characterize the “Once Upon a Nation” tour?
  - How do these constraints shape the display at the National Constitution Center? How does Schocket characterize the NCC display?
- From 102 through 108, Schocket examines the presentation of the American Revolution at Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. How does Schocket characterize CW on 103 and 104?
  - What kind of interpretation did CW present for its first 50 years?
  - While CW is an historical heritage site, it also contains a research center linked with the excellent history department at the College of William and Mary. In short, a bevy of university historians either teach at the College of William and Mary or serve as visiting scholars at the College of William and Mary’s history department and in the excellent center for the study of American history at W&M and CW. How has the presence of so many scholars associated with CW and W&M complicated if not changed how CW presents the American Revolution?
  - How did visitors react to CW’s emphasis on the importance of slavery at CW?
  - Roughly half of colonial Williamsburg’s population would have been black and enslaved in the 1700s. Should their lives be portrayed accurately? Should sites such as CW address the realities of slavery and the complicated American past? Or, should CW focus on an unabashed celebration of freedom?



- In considering the above question, what is your “philosophy of history?” What should be the purpose of history, which we can define as the study of the past?
- Look through the websites of CW <https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.com/>; <https://www.nps.gov/inde/index.htm> and <http://constitutioncenter.org/> to draw your own conclusions about how the American Revolution is portrayed on these historic sites websites. Based on your readings and your own experiences, what is the best that historical sites such as CW and Independence Park can strive for?



Map of Independence National Historic Park, which sits smack dab in the middle of Philadelphia.





Assembly Room, Independence Hall



Christ Church, Philadelphia, Book of Common Prayer is displayed in a glass case at the front of the church.





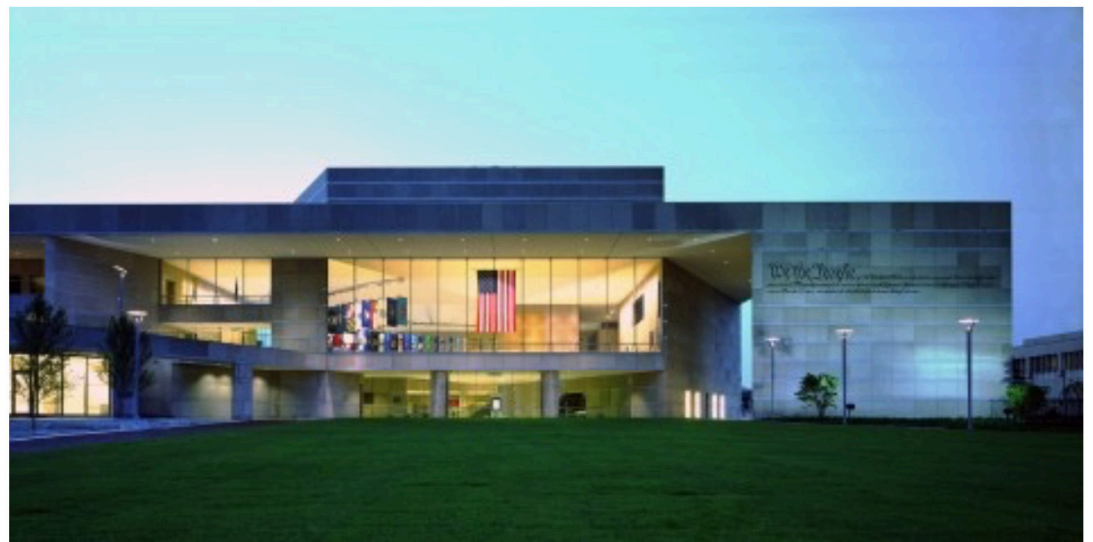
Arch Street Friends (Quakers) Meeting House, which is not part of the tour of Revolutionary Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Quakers was one of the leading antislavery groups in the United States from the 1750s through the early 1800s. In the 1790s, members frequently petitioned Congress to protect the rights of free and enslaved blacks, and to take action against slavery. Their petitions almost always set off angry debates in Congress, which met in Independence Hall



In order to see the Liberty Bell, visitors must first walk through an interpretive display on the contested meanings of liberty in the United States from the 1770s through the 1960s.



"The President's House" As visitors walk towards the Liberty Bell, they can first walk through the President's House, which includes displays on the lives of slaves, including those slaves who worked as the personal servants of George Washington and his wife, Martha.



National Constitution Center





Inside the NCC



One Portrayal of Colonial Williamsburg. What message does this image seek to convey?





Another image from CW



CW Governor's Mansion





CW Capital Building, seat of the Virginia House of Burgesses, the Virginia colonial assembly



“Discover Colonial Williamsburg and become a citizen of the Revolutionary City. Engage with the local community and experience firsthand the daily struggles of wartime. Explore our art museums, unleash your kids’ inner colonists, tee off a game of golf, or relax and unwind at the Spa. Stay at one of the official Colonial Williamsburg hotels, with a variety of opportunities to shop and dine, and you’ll never want to leave.” – From the CW website

## CHAPTER 4

- Schocket begins with a description of a 2010 commercial for the 2010 Dodge Challenger.  
The commercial can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-3HEyR-c3M>. What point does Schocket make about this commercial? How would you characterize this commercial? Is it essentialist or organicist? Cite specific evidence from the commercial to support your answer
- View this Fiat commercial from 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2KFMD5xZVE>  
How does this Fiat commercial portray the American Revolution? From an essentialist or from an organicist perspective? Again, cite specific evidence to support your answer.
  - How does the content of this add differ from the Dodge ad? To what audiences are automakers pitching these two cars? Why drives Didge Challenger muscle cars? Who drives Fiats? What gender assumptions and conventions are implicit in these two ads, and in essentialist and organicist interpretations of the American Revolution?
- According to Schocket, what constraints are imposed on any portrayal of the American Revolution in television and film? Schocket writes that “historical films are exercises in ideological narrative rather than windows into the past.” (126) What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree? What ideology is implicit in the Fiat and Didge ads?
- Schocket introduces his chapter thesis on 126 and 127. What claims does Schocket make about the portrayal of the Revolution in film and in television?
  - How are these portrayals both organicist and essentialist? How does essentialism tend to dominate the narratives presented on film and in TV? As “modes of storytelling,” What does TV and film favor? Do they favor complexity or simplicity?
- According to Schocket on 129, why are there so few “good” historical movies about the Revolution in particular, and about American history in general? Are most “historical movies” even about history? Recently, Quentin Tarantino has turned to making “historical films.” Are *Inglorious Basterds*, *Django Unchained*, and *The Hateful Eight* about a knowable historical past? What about the popular musical *Hamilton*?
- How do the *National Treasure* series portray the American Revolution?
  - What evidence backs up Schocket’s claims?
  - How does NT treat the Declaration of Independence and George



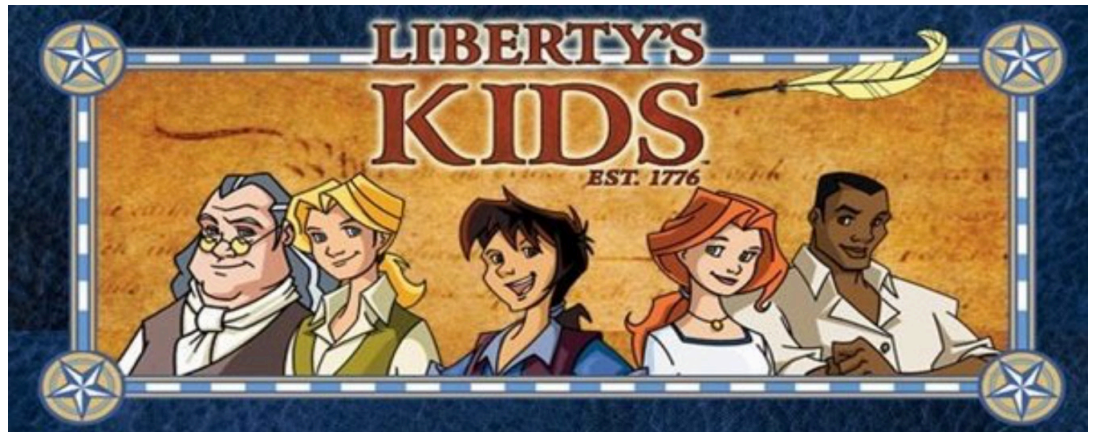
Washington's plantation (home?), Mount Vernon?

- Does NT use an essentialist or an organicist perspective to understand and present the past?
- Schocket next analyzes *The Patriot*. Schocket claims that *The Patriot* is a “product that dresses a very essentialist story in organicist trappings.” (135)
  - First, what kind of movie does *The Patriot* aspire to be? Did its producers aspire to historical accuracy? Or, did they seek to make a rousing action movie?
  - What moviemaking conventions did they abide by?
  - According to Schocket, how is this film both essentialist and organicist? Be specific, and cite specific evidence to support your answer.
  - Above all else, what channels movie producers to make films that are both essentialist and organicist? Above all else, what do producers aim for?
  - How does *The Patriot*'s portrayal of race and slavery “whitewash the racial history of the American South”? (141) How does its portrayal of race reinforce Schocket's claims that *The Patriot* is a “product that dresses a very essentialist story in organicist trappings?”
  - Earlier in the chapter Schocket claims that “historical films are exercises in ideological narrative rather than windows into the past.” (126) Does the *The Patriot* seek to understand the past on its own terms? Or, does the *The Patriot* violate the integrity of the past to present an ideological narrative about the present?





- Schocket next moves on to an analysis of the PBS children's series, *Liberty's Kids*. As with the making of a TV series, conflicting demands from various groups went into its production. What groups were involved in its productions? What demands did they bring?
  - What demands did PBS and Lupinacci place on the series?
  - How did the series wrestle with the realities of race and slavery in Revolutionary America? What American moralisms are embedded in *Liberty's Kids*'s portrayal of slavery?
  - How did the producers' vision of 21st century feminism shape their portrayal of the character Sarah? What does this tell us about the difficulties of trying to understand the past in present-day terms?
  - In the end, how does *Liberty's Kids* become essentialist and authoritative?



- Schocket next analyzes the 2008 HBO mini-series *John Adams* (based on David McCullough's biography, which is analyzed in chapter 2). Schocket claims that "*John Adams* presents a fascinating amalgam of essentialism and organicism." (154)
  - What demands went into shaping this amalgamation of essentialism and organicism?
  - What evidence does Schocket cite to support his claim about *John Adams*?
  - How is *John Adams* "great man history"? Is *John Adams* academic history or is it a combination of entertainment and moralisms. Does it seek to make its audience think about the past or to feel about the past? In the end, is *John Adams* academic history or entertainment?
  - Is it appropriate for professional, academic historians to criticize the authenticity of historical films? At the same time, is it appropriate for filmmakers to claim – or even to aspire to – historical accuracy?
  - What are the conventions of a TV show and a biopic? How does *John Adams* conform to these conventions? How do these conventions force the producers to produce a series that is essentialist? What makes *John Adams* essentialist? Again, cite specific evidence to support your claim.
  - On 163, Schocket writes that "In movies, if the history doesn't match the interpretation, then the history is what is jettisoned, rather than the other way around." Is this a necessary element of moviemaking? Does the problem here lie with moviemakers, or with Americans who want their history portrayed on film, in the simplistic format necessary to that medium? How does Schocket address this question? Why is it difficult to portray organicist interpretations on the screen?



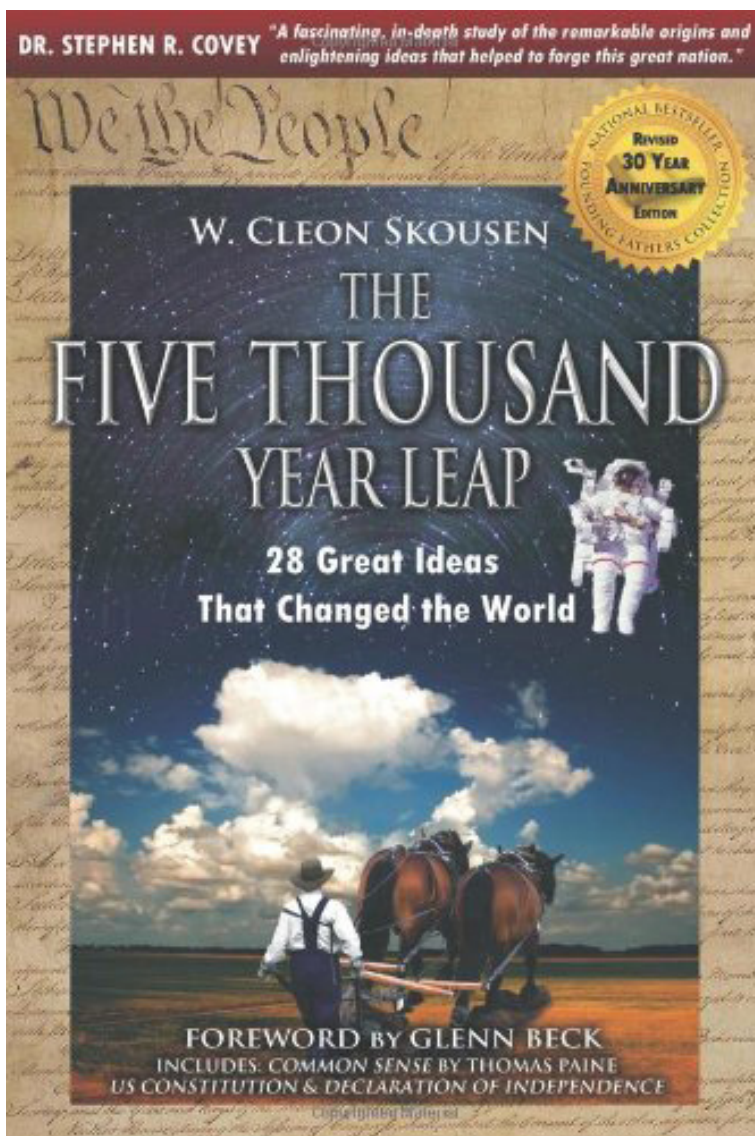
## CHAPTER 5

- In chapter 5, Schocket examines how the emergence of a unique form of American conservatism and the rise of the Tea Party have shaped popular narratives about the American Revolution over the past two decades. Schocket begins with an anecdote about a Tea Party celebration of the Constitution and a minor controversy over the three-fifths clause. The Tea Party read the Constitution in Congress to great fanfare, but left out the parts about slavery. In response, Conservative talking head Glenn Beck erroneously claimed that the three-fifths clause was included by the framers in the Constitution as a means of accelerating abolition.
  - Why did Tea Party members leave out the parts about slavery? Why did Beck make such a patently false claim about the past?
- In what areas of public and political life have the advocates of essentialism tried to push their doctrines and beliefs?
- From the bottom of 166 through 167, Schocket briefly examines how the Constitution has changed since its drafting in 1787. Is the Constitution a timeless document? Or, has it been changed – in some cases, radically – since it was first drafted in 1787? Did the nation accept the Constitution drafted by the founders in Philadelphia in 1787? Or, did they modify it substantially in the course of ratifying it? How many times, and in how many ways, has it been changed since?
- One way to think about or interpret the constitution is as a “living constitution.”
  - Where did this method of interpretation originate? What are its basic doctrines? What assumptions does it rest on? On what grounds was it criticized?
- How did originalism emerge as a method of interpreting the constitution?
  - What are its basic doctrines? How is it an essentialist mode of interpreting the Constitution?
  - On what grounds has it been criticized?
- In response to criticisms that originalism is fundamentally flawed because there existed no single, unitary intent behind the Constitution, and in reaction to criticisms that originalism was as results oriented as any means of interpretation, advocates of originalism began to reform it in the 1990s. How had originalism changed by the early 2000s?
  - What does scholar Saul Cornell’s “historical ventriloquism” criticism say about revised originalism?
  - What criticism does Schocket lodge against originalism at the bottom of 171?

- On 172, Schocket reviews Supreme Court opinions in the important District of Columbia v. Heller decision. What claims did originalists make in this case? On what grounds does Schocket and Justice John Paul Stevens criticize Scalia's originalist opinion? Was Scalia's argument "originalist," or based on history and precedent, in any meaningful way?
- In response to continuing criticism, advocates of originalism further reformulated the doctrines and assumptions of originalism. What are the basic assumptions and doctrines of this "third iteration of originalism," or "original methods originalism"?(172 – 173)
  - On what grounds does Schocket criticize this latest wave of originalism?
- You have hopefully read the Constitution on your own. Based on your reading of the Constitution and American history, how would you answer this question: Did the founders expect to interpret the Constitution for us? Did they expect that they were creating a timeless, inalterable constitution from which there could be no deviation from their original intent Or, would the founders expect us to interpret the constitution for ourselves, using evidence, argument, reason, and logic?
  - How, if at all, should the founders be used to interpret the Constitution? Should they have the last word? The first word? Any word on constitutional interpretations in the 21st century?
- On 176, Schocket issues another criticism of originalism. What is it? According to Supreme Court Justice David Souter, what basic psychological impulse lies at the root of originalism? Do originalists treat the Constitution and the founders much as fundamentalist Christians treat the Bible and Biblical prophets? How so?
- On 176, Schocket examines the Minutemen movement that emerged in the early 2000s. What issue led individuals to create a modern day Minutemen movement?
  - How did they use an essentialist interpretation of the American Revolution to understand themselves?
  - What do they believe is the essential identity of the United States, even in the 21st century?
- On 179, Schocket begins to examine the Tea Party movement, which burst onto the public and political scene almost immediately after the inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009.
  - What events accompanied the emergence of the Tea Party movement? When do essentialist movements emerge? During times of tranquility and prosperity, or during times of anxiety and uncertainty? Why?
  - Was the Tea Party movement a true grass roots movement? Who was behind efforts to harness popular outrage in 2009?



- From 181 through 184, Schocket offers a long description and analysis of the Tea Party's basic beliefs about the relationship between the meaning and significance of the American Revolution.
  - What individual's writings have most inspired the Tea Party movement?
  - How does the NCCS conduct its seminars on the Constitution? What do these seminars consist of?
  - How does the NCCS present history? Is it a series of historical problems to be analyzed and understood, based on facts and evidence, analysis and explanation? Or, does it consist of a single correct answer with no explanation?
  - Historian and scholar Jill Lepore calls this method of inquiry "historical fundamentalism." What does that term mean? Is it accurate?
  - In sum, how does Skousen, the NCCS and Tea Partiers characterize the founding and the founders?



- From 185 through 188, Schocket analyzes the appeal of the historical Boston Tea Party to the contemporary Tea Party movement
  - On 185, Schocket examines how some on the Left have constructed a narrative of American history that runs counter to the Tea Party narrative. What theme unifies this narrative? How is it different from the Tea Party narrative? How is this narrative at odds with notions of individual advancement?
  - According to Schocket, why was the historical Tea Party so appealing to Conservatives seeking an historical event to rally around?
  - On 187, Schocket examines the roots of rage that have fed the Tea Party movement. Why are so many Tea Partiers so angry? How does the Tea Party narrative of American history give meaning to their lives and their struggles? Should we dismiss Tea Partiers as ignoramuses? Or, should we recognize that they possess at least some very real grievances?
  - How is this narrative essentialist?
- On 189-190, Schocket examines the place of race in the Tea Party's essentialist narrative. What does race mean to them, and where does it fit in their narrative of the past, present, and future of the United States?
- From 190 through 193, Schocket examines how the dysfunctions of our current political system have fed the rage that sits at the base of the Tea Party's anger.
  - How does Schocket characterize the American political system as it currently operates?
  - Even if you disagree with the Tea Party narrative, can you understand why people who identify with the movement are so angry with our current political system?
- From 193 through 199, Schocket closes out the chapter by examining historical reenactors.
  - How do these reenactors understand the American Revolution? How is their understanding both organicist and essentialist? Cite specific evidence to support your answer.

