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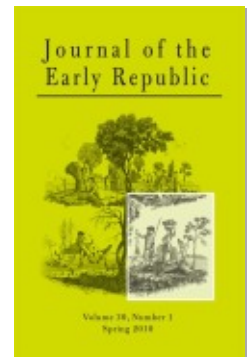
*Founders: The People Who Brought You a Nation , and: The  
Making of the American Republic, 1763–1815 (review)*

Ryan Petersen

Journal of the Early Republic, Volume 30, Number 1, Spring 2010, pp.  
150-153 (Review)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.0.0133>



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***Founders: The People Who Brought You a Nation.*** By Ray Raphael. (New York: The New Press, 2009. Pp. 608. Cloth, \$35.00.)

***The Making of the American Republic, 1763–1815.*** By Paul A. Gilje. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005. Pp. 352. Paper, \$53.80.)

*Reviewed by Ryan Petersen*

Ray Raphael's *Founders* and Paul Gilje's *The Making of the American Republic* both cover roughly the same period of early American history. Raphael begins in 1754 with Washington's ill-fated mission to the Ohio country and essentially ends with the ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791. As indicated in the title, Gilje's narrative starts approximately a decade later, after the end of the French and Indian War (though he draws on earlier events), and continues through to the conclusion of the War of 1812. Despite the similarity in scope, these are two very different books, with decidedly different approaches, different emphases, and very different target audiences.

As with two of his previous books, Raphael once again approaches a familiar subject from a slightly different angle than that usually presented in historical narratives targeted at general audiences.<sup>1</sup> Rather than focusing solely on well-known political and military figures, *Founders* presents Revolutionary America as viewed through the experiences of seven individuals and underscores five themes. Providing something of a representative sample, his cast of characters includes George Washington, Joseph Plumb Martin, Mercy Otis Warren, Robert Morris, Timothy Bigelow, Henry Laurens, and Thomas Young. Throughout the book (and consistent with his earlier work), Raphael focuses on the themes of popular sovereignty, inclusion and exclusion, exchanges of power, constraining authority, and expansion.

Though Raphael ostensibly begins in 1754, and the title of his book (at least to this political scientist) seems to convey an emphasis on the events surrounding the Constitutional Convention and ratification debates, he is clearly most interested in the events leading up to and during

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1. *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence* (New York, 2001) and *The First American Revolution: Before Lexington and Concord* (New York, 2002).

the Revolutionary War. Sixteen of twenty chapters focus on the period between 1765 and 1783. Events before 1765 are covered in a single chapter, as are both the immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary War and the Constitutional Convention, with one chapter dedicated to each. The final chapter, "Lives and Legacies," completes the stories of the seven individuals Raphael follows throughout the book and reflects on their place in the retelling of the Revolutionary story.

Continuing in the theme of *A People's History* and *The First American Revolution*, Raphael clearly sees class struggle as a key element of the Revolution, and he likes to call attention to both the role of common people and the leveling effect of the "Revolution within the Revolution" on American society. Whether describing the formation of the American Political Society in Worcester, Massachusetts (and its subsequent "take-over" of the town government), the drafting of the "radical" Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, or the difficulties faced by pro-Revolution elites as they were forced to come to grips with the democratizing effects of the Revolution, Raphael seems most at home when exploring and emphasizing these themes.

Raphael is a fine writer and does an outstanding job of interweaving his themes with the lives of the individuals he follows (as well those immediately surrounding them) into a coherent narrative. Though his book is obviously targeted at a mass audience, Raphael has written a serious history based on extensive research and a reliance on primary-source documents. As popular history, Raphael's book certainly succeeds. His relatively unique approach is such that nonspecialists will learn a great deal about Revolutionary America. Particularly noteworthy is his bringing to light the centrality of Robert Morris to the Revolutionary cause. Even for specialists, *Founders* warrants attention. While few will encounter any new material on George Washington or Joseph Plumb Martin, many will learn a considerable amount about Henry Laurens, Robert Morris, and Mercy Otis Warren. And I, for one, knew nothing of Timothy Bigelow or Dr. Thomas Young prior to reading Raphael's book. Any scholar not already possessing extensive knowledge of all seven individuals profiled by Raphael would certainly gain from reading *Founders*.

Paul Gilje's *The Making of the American Republic* was written as an upper division undergraduate textbook, primarily for use in courses on the early republic. His approach is to place the historical narrative in the context of an underlying interpretive theme centered on "how the cre-

ation of the United States helped to foster an aggressive individualism and the dynamic economic patterns that we associate with American capitalism” (vii).

First and foremost, Gilje’s work deserves praise for being so thorough and yet so concise. Only a scholar with Gilje’s mastery of early American history could produce such a complete and concise narrative of early America (not to mention one combined with a thematic argument). I was continually struck while reading *The Making of the American Republic* by how comprehensive Gilje’s treatment was; a truly remarkable feat in such a short volume (indeed, Gordon Wood’s comments on the back cover refer to this, but one must really read Gilje’s book to believe it).

Though designed for a course on the early republic and with self-described “focal point” on the period, *The Making of the American Republic* nonetheless does an excellent job of covering the Revolutionary period as well, making this a wonderfully complete treatment of early American history. Gilje begins and ends utilizing Benjamin Franklin’s life to tie his theme together. Intervening chapters cover Revolutionary America, the formation of the early republic, the competing Hamiltonian–Jeffersonian visions, the election of 1800, westward expansion, early trade and diplomacy, and the War of 1812. Chapter 4, “Revolutionary Visions Unfulfilled,” focuses specifically on the roles of Native Americans, African Americans, and women.

Though written and marketed as an “interpretive text” based on its underlying approach linking the formation of the republic to the development of American capitalism, those considering adopting *The Making of the American Republic* should know the interpretive theme is somewhat more subtle throughout the larger narrative than one might anticipate. This is not a problem in terms of using the book as an undergraduate text; indeed, I think it actually increases the versatility of the book, as instructors wishing to emphasize Gilje’s theme could easily assign additional readings (by Gilje or others) reinforcing the capitalism–early republic argument.<sup>2</sup> Instructors preferring a more straightforward narrative could simply rely on the book as is, with additional readings chosen according to their own preferred emphasis. I point this out only as there seemed to be something of a disconnect between the description

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2. For example, *Wages of Independence: Capitalism in the Early Republic* (Madison, WI, 1997).

of the book, which made it seem as though the interpretive theme would be much more explicit and forceful than it actually was, and the rather subdued argument in the text itself.

Both Ray Raphael and Paul Gilje have written books that fit nicely into their respective niches. Raphael's *Founders* will undoubtedly broaden the horizons of the general reader with an interest in the American Revolution, but it manages to offer something for historians and political scientists as well. Gilje provides instructors with an accessible, thorough, and remarkably concise narrative of early American history that also promotes critical thinking—certainly desirable features in any undergraduate text.

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***Prodigal Daughters: Susanna Rowson's Early American Women.*** By Marion Rust. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. Pp. 328. Cloth, \$59.95; Paper, \$24.95.)

*Reviewed by Charlene Boyer Lewis*

Those of us who examine women or literature in the early republic think we know Susanna Rowson and insufficiently distinguish the novelist from her most popular fictional heroine, Charlotte Temple, who perfectly exemplified female passivity and oppression. As Marion Rust persuasively shows, however, Rowson was not the proponent of female submission that many scholars have presented. Indeed, Rust argues, Rowson wanted women to move beyond their gender limitations, but cautiously. Through her myriad works and in her own life, Rowson sought to instruct women in the ways in which they could find a successful balance between “domestic constraints” and “intellectual expansiveness” (7). Rust stresses that we need to understand not only the popularity of *Charlotte Temple* and Rowson's other works but also Rowson's own life in the context of the changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially in the lives of American women.

Rowson enjoyed popularity not because women found the message of female submission attractive in an increasingly hostile public environment (as some scholars have argued), but, as Rust explains, because she “made sense to literate, female Anglo-American inhabitants of the new