A Republic of Men

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The founders agreed that “law ought to be king.” The problem was that law was a blunt instrument for resisting men’s democratic passions, reforming their morals and manners, and maintaining order among them as well as for resolving national crises and realizing historic opportunities. Law was slow, cumbersome, and rigid, but the times that tried men’s souls demanded quick thinking and creative action. Law reflected “an excess of popularity” rather than excellence in manly virtue and vision. Law mirrored the prejudices of “pygmies” who lacked the “candor and unbiased minds as becomes men,” not the integrity and charisma of “giants” who sought political “manhood” by “rigorous measures,” regarded “the public good more than their own humor,” and established hegemony to procreate a republic of men. Unfortunately, giants were rare. George Washington repeatedly asked, “Where are our men of abilities?”

The founders saw everyday politics as a matter of restraining and reforming the Bachelor, trusting the Family Man with citizenship, and entrusting leadership and lawmaking to the Better Sort; but they also felt the Republic needed truly exceptional men to lead the nation to its destiny. They sought to identify and empower the Heroic Man and thereby reinforced the contested ideal of the traditional patriarch. The Heroic Man was a national father figure who required manly independence and patriarchal discretion to defy law and resist public opinion without forsaking popular consent. Women too could be heroic, but only in a secondary sense. Judith Sargent Murray thought women’s “heroism cannot be surpassed” and Thomas Paine wanted “some Jersey maid” to emulate Joan of Arc to “spirit up her countrymen”; but Murray’s women mostly succored male warriors and Paine’s maid shamed recalcitrant men into combat. These heroines were what Teresa Brennan and Carole Pateman refer to as “auxiliaries to the commonwealth.” Ultimately, the founders’ faith in the Heroic Man completed their grammar of manhood by promoting a patriarchal discourse that lifted up a few great men...
over the democratic masses and played down women’s political potential as citizens and leaders.²

The founders consistently described their immediate circumstances in the idiom of crisis, contingency, emergency, exigency, expediency, fortune, and necessity. The urgency of their terminology informed their belief that the extraordinary threats, challenges, and opportunities of their times beckoned a few great men to step forward; assume positions of leadership, authority, and power; and preside over the course of national affairs. The ubiquitous rhetoric of liberty and equality continued to cast suspicion on concentrated power but, most founders believed, the initiative and influence of some heroic men were essential for achieving America’s destiny as a model republic and world-class nation.

American intellectuals drew ideals of political heroism from thinkers ranging from Plato to Plutarch but especially from Lord Bolingbroke’s The Idea of a Patriot King. A Patriot King was a majestic leader who governed “like the common father” whose “true image of a free people” was “a patriarchal family.” He had a “love of liberty,” and he defended and extended liberty to his national family. He displayed affection toward citizens and exhibited clemency by reforming rather than exacting retribution from his “rebellious children.” Importantly, he epitomized manhood. He acted with “decency and grace,” refused flattery and resisted factionalism, practiced manly virtues, and avoided vices “unworthy of men,” such as the libertinism and adultery associated with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Augustus Caesar. His manly efforts earned him a “true popularity” that enabled him to rule on the basis of widespread consent, ensuring that he would be “reverenced and obeyed” in life and accorded “fame after death.”³

Prior to the Revolution, Americans called on George III to play the part of a Patriot King who protected colonial liberty against corrupt officials. Initially, colonial writers approved of royal and parliamentary prerogative, even as they protested particular laws and policies. “On some emergencies,” wrote Daniel Dulany, “the King . . . hath an absolute power to provide for the safety of the state . . . like a Roman dictator.” Thomas Fitch added that “reasons of state” and “necessity” legitimized Parliament’s authority to be “supreme director over all His Majesty’s dominions.” Americans mostly assumed the legitimacy of political prerogative but pleaded with both king and Parliament to exercise
it on their behalf. When Parliament continued to enact controversial mea-
sures, colonists looked to the king to rein in Parliament. Even after blood was
shed at Lexington and Concord, members of the Continental Congress pro-
fessed to be King George’s “loyal and dutiful subjects . . . still ready with our
lives and fortunes to defend his person, crown, and dignity” when he asserted
his prerogative against “his evil ministry.”

Simultaneously, Americans questioned whether English rulers exercised
their powers properly and effectively. Did they make laws and exercise discre-
tion to achieve the good of the empire or the good of England at the expense
of the colonies? Were they proximate enough to the colonies to understand
and resolve local crises? Americans protested abuses of prerogative and in-
voked local crises to justify colonial authority. Richard Bland and Oxenbridge
Thatcher claimed that “sudden emergencies” in the colonies justified the
transfer of British authority to American officials who were more intimately
acquainted with the colonial landscape and better positioned to act with dis-
patch. When Parliament rejected these claims, Americans called on “neces-
sity” to legitimize illegal protests. Mercy Otis Warren spoke of “laws of self-
preservation” to justify a Boston Tea Party that otherwise was an unwarranted
“attack upon private property,” and David Ramsay called on “the great law of
self-preservation” to support “the destruction of the tea.” The founders regu-
larly invoked exigency to legitimize patriot prerogative to break existing laws
in the cause of defending liberty.

By 1776, Americans denounced kingship, royal prerogative, and executive
authority as tyrannical but, as Ralph Ketcham observes, “The cloud that de-
scended over executive power . . . did not entirely obscure the practices and
tradition of active leadership that had been both dominant and admired in the
more than 150 years since the founding of the first colonies.” George Wash-
ington promoted active leadership. He argued that military and civilian lead-
ers had a duty to exercise “extensive powers” in difficult times. Accordingly, he
reminded Joseph Reed that Pennsylvania had vested him with martial-law au-
thority “to take such measures as the exigency may demand.” He enjoined
Reed “to exert the powers entrusted to you with a boldness and vigor suited
to the emergency” and assured him that “the popular mind” was prepared to
comply by making “sacrifices both of ease and property.” In a republic, pow-
eful leadership was justifiable and desirable on the basis of exigency and an-
ticipated public support.

Claims of exigency often elicited public support. A declared crisis aroused
public anxiety and encouraged men to seek strong leaders to resolve the crisis
and reduce their anxiety. The public’s demand for great leadership invited am-
bitious men to prove themselves heroes by displaying the virtuous manhood needed to master fortune and make history. Katherine Auspitz reminds us that the Latin root of *virtue* is *vir*, which connotes “manliness or prowess.” The Heroic Man exhibited manly prowess. He disciplined his passions and interests “to take events into his own hands and shape them according to his own will.” Often, he sacrificed personal pleasure, family prosperity, and social respectability to protect liberty and secure order against “the flux, wildness, and frenzy of fortune.” Alexander Hamilton exhibited manly prowess by refusing to make “an unmanly surrender” to love. He left his new wife at home so he could follow the path of public service. Nathanael Greene’s military victory at Eutaw Springs also exemplified manly prowess. Washington wrote to him, “Fortune must have been coy indeed had she not yielded at last to so persevering a pursuer as you have been. I hope now that she is yours she will change her appellation of fickle to that of constant.” The Heroic Man’s prowess required his separation from women and his conquest of the disorderly female forces affiliated with fortune.7

Earning public respect was one thing; ensuring public obedience was another. The founders distrusted powerful men. They led a rebellion against a king, kingship, and consolidated authority; they framed state constitutions that limited executive authority and a U.S. Constitution that fragmented political power. They cultivated what Joyce Appleby calls “a culture of constitutionalism” that endorsed the “voluntary sphere of action” but limited the public sphere.8 Still, the founders often repressed their impulse to limit political authority. They suspended skepticism of powerful leaders whenever a crisis called forth the Heroic Man to save the nation and secure its destiny. Most notably, their distrust melted away each time that Washington agreed to assume the helm of public affairs. He was widely perceived as a man among men, a hero who avoided corruption and performed great service because, like Moses, he was inspired by God and chosen by acclaim. Washington surveyed “the road which providence has pointed us to so plainly” and led voluntary legions of American men into the republican future.9

The Heroic Man had a complex relationship to law. John Adams saw him as a patriot who sought to establish “a government of laws and not of men” but also as a leader who knew that the way to secure a government of laws was “to depute power from the many to a few of the most wise and good.” The road to impersonal politics was paved by a few heroic personalities. Thomas Jefferson agreed. A great leader supported the rule of law but recognized that exigencies and opportunities might demand extralegal initiatives: “A strict observance of the laws is doubtless one of the high duties . . . but it is not the
highest.” The Heroic Man had to ignore law and risk infamy “on great occasions when the safety of the nation or some of its very highest interests are at stake.” Jefferson took that risk to acquire the Louisiana Territory. He acted “beyond the Constitution” out of a sense of paternal duty. It was “the case of a guardian investing the money of his ward in purchasing an important adjacent territory and saying to him when of age, I did this for your good; I pretend no right to bind you; you may disavow me and I must get out of the scrape as I can; I thought it my duty to risk myself for you.” Jefferson hoped to open up farmland for family men and to secure the Mississippi Valley with “our own brethren and children” rather than “strangers of another family.” He was convinced that his actions would “confirm and not weaken the Constitution” by promoting the public good and winning men’s eventual consent.10

Most founders felt that the elevation of great leaders above legitimate laws during moments of crisis and opportunity promised multiple payoffs. First, the Heroic Man exhibited what R. W. Connell calls “the public face of hegemonic masculinity.” He modeled independent manhood.11 His public exhibition of manly prowess heightened other men’s awareness of their own masculine shortcomings and encouraged them to strive for male maturity. His manly language and masterful deeds provided criteria by which most men could measure, judge, and rate one another. His public persona as a self-disciplined man who transcended personal prejudices, parochial loyalties, and factional politics fostered a sense of fraternal solidarity and national pride that bound men together. One truly exceptional man could be crucial for curbing male licentiousness, ordering the ranks of men, and encouraging fraternal harmony.

Second, the founders’ faith in the Heroic Man who wielded extensive powers during difficult times reinforced traditional patriarchalism. Continuing a line of thought running from Plato through Bacon and Machiavelli to the present, the founders perpetuated the idea that a great leader separated himself from women and conquered antagonistic female forces. He kept women at a distance to avoid distraction, temptation, and seduction from public duty. That explained why General Howe was no great leader. Thomas Paine scorned Howe for capturing Philadelphia only to hide “among women and children” in the city rather than pursue a dispirited American army across the countryside. A manly leader left women behind; then he took the initiative to conquer effeminate vices and fickle fortune. For instance, President Washington made “manly” overtures to strengthen U.S. relations with Great Britain by issuing an extralegal Proclamation of Neutrality and by pursuing treaty options with the Crown when America’s alliance with France was unsettled by the
French Revolution. Alexander Hamilton denounced Washington’s critics for harboring a “womanish attachment to France.” The Heroic Man was a patriarch who exercised authority in opposition to women and womanhood.

Third, a few exceptional men acting in concert could procreate a new nation for posterity. The framers of the Constitution saw themselves as fertile men (demigods) who resolved a national crisis by bringing forth a new republic. They did not dwell on mundane matters of due process and lawful conduct. Edmund Randolph explained, “There are certainly seasons of a peculiar nature where ordinary cautions must be dispensed with, and this is certainly one of them.” Washington agreed. Anticipating the Constitutional Convention, he admitted that it “may not be legal” and even suggested that Congress give it legal coloring “without proceeding to a definition of the powers.” After the convention, Washington predicted that the “transient circumstances and fugitive performances which attended this crisis” would be forgotten, while the noble principles that informed the Constitution would merit “the notice of posterity.” In the interim, federalists had to legitimize the planning process and plans for a new national republic.

Federalists used the language of crisis to justify their role as heroic leaders who ended one government and originated another. John Jay explained:

They who have turned their attention to the affairs of men must have perceived that there are tides in them, tides very irregular in their duration and seldom found to run twice exactly in the same manner or measure. To discern and to profit by these tides in national affairs is the business of those who preside over them, and they that have had much experience on this head inform us that there frequently are occasions when days, nay, even when hours, are precious. . . . As in the field, so in the cabinet, there are moments to be seized as they pass, and they who preside in either should be left in capacity to improve them.

Jay argued that great leaders with significant powers and public support were needed to seize the moment to avert catastrophes and realize possibilities. Madison and Hamilton applied Jay’s reasoning to the convention and the Constitution.

Madison indicated that a national crisis forced convention delegates to disregard their charge to revise the Articles of Confederation and obligated them to reinvent national government. “If they had exceeded their powers,” he wrote, “they were not only warranted but required by the circumstances in which they were placed to exercise the liberty which they assumed.” Moreover, even “if they had violated both their powers and obligations in proposing a Constitution,” their decision was legitimate because it was “calculated to ac-
complish the views and happiness of the people of America.” Madison did not intend to suggest that all leadership initiatives focused on public happiness were justified. Rather, he suggested that extralegal initiatives were warranted when great men confronted “the absolute necessity” of defending “the great principle of self-preservation” by making “great changes of established governments.” In 1776, America had been blessed with heroic leaders who instituted momentous changes “by some informal and unauthorized propositions,” with “no ill-timed scruples, no zeal for adhering to ordinary forms.” Again in 1787, Madison argued, America was blessed with heroic men who formulated innovative changes in national government.15

Hamilton agreed that convention delegates were obliged to exercise prerogative “to provide for the exigencies of the Union” and secure “the happiness of the country.” His enduring concern was to ensure that the leaders of the new government would be sufficiently powerful to provide for all exigencies because “too little power is as dangerous as too much, that it leads to anarchy, and from anarchy to despotism.” Hamilton searched the Constitution’s words (e.g., “necessary and proper”) and concepts (e.g., “implied powers”) to support an interpretation that provided national leaders with enough authority to address “necessities of society,” which took precedence over “rules and maxims.” Necessities included “existing exigencies” and “probable exigencies of the ages.” Hamilton proposed that Americans empower their leaders “to provide for future contingencies as they may happen” rather than “fettering the government with restrictions that cannot be observed.” And because future contingencies were “illimitable,” leaders’ capacity to address them had to be illimitable too.16

Madison was more ambivalent about concentrated power but, like Hamilton, he did not want to fetter government officials with “constitutional barriers to the impulse of self-preservation.” He believed that great public leaders ought to have ample authority to “maintain a disciplined army” against potential enemies and to resist men’s “temporary errors and delusions” in order to blend “stability with liberty” and ensure domestic harmony and national security. Hamilton hoped that leaders’ ample authority would grow through informal means. The Heroic Man could accrue considerable influence by voicing words and performing deeds that captured “the esteem and good-will” of citizens. A leader with a memorable track record positioned himself to “hazard with safety” unpopular actions “in proportion to the proofs he had given of his wisdom and integrity, and . . . the respect and attachment of his fellow-citizens.” He could accumulate surplus legitimacy and oppose public opinion without provoking mass disobedience.17
Antifederalists warned Americans against so-called heroic leaders. They alerted the public to the “danger to be apprehended from vesting discretionary powers in the hands of man” and encouraged citizens “to regulate the discretion of rulers.” However, as Michael Lienesch suggests, antifederalists also “admitted the power of fortune in public affairs” and recognized the advantages of prerogative for the public good. Patrick Henry was quite willing to prescribe a strong dose of extralegal justice for one Josiah Philips, a fugitive murderer and an outlaw—a man who commanded an infamous banditti. . . . He committed the most cruel and shocking barbarities. He was an enemy to the human name. Those who declare war against the human race may be struck out of existence as soon as they are apprehended. He was not executed according to those beautiful legal ceremonies which are pointed out by the laws in criminal cases. The enormity of his crimes did not entitle him to it. I am truly a friend to legal forms and methods; but, Sir, the occasion warranted the measure. A pirate, an outlaw, or a common enemy to all mankind may be put to death. It is justified by the laws of nature and nations.18

For Henry, as for Hamilton, the Heroic Man respected law but recognized occasions when it was necessary to demonstrate manly “ability and faithfulness” by subordinating law to the more “weighty concerns of the state.”19

Patriarchal Hegemony

Several scholars identify an “erosion of patriarchal authority,” an “antipatriarchal revolt,” and a “revolution against patriarchal authority” in late-eighteenth-century America. Fathers lost authority over sons; gentlemen were scorned by commoners; and hereditary kingship was replaced by contractual politics. “Almost at a stroke,” writes Gordon Wood, “the Revolution destroyed all the earlier talk of paternal . . . government.” Wood’s judgment is premature. Just as the contested image of the traditional patriarch continued into the founding era, the image of the Heroic Man as a “common father” of a “patriarchal family” persisted in Jefferson’s justification of the Louisiana Purchase as a paternal duty and, more generally, in the founders’ belief that great leaders established hegemony by reconciling patriarchal authority and republican consent.20

The founding era was filled with the language of political fatherhood. In 1774, Gad Hitchcock addressed public officials as “honored fathers” and “civic fathers.” In 1778, Phillips Payson referred to American leaders as “civil
fathers.” In 1780, Samuel Cooper described the framers of the Articles of Confederation as “fathers of their country” filled with “parental tenderness.” In 1784, Samuel McClintock honored New Hampshire’s framers as “fathers of their country,” “fathers and guardians of their people,” and “fathers, guides, and guardians.” In 1788, Samuel Langdon called public leaders “fathers of a large family.” In 1791, Israel Evans told the nation’s political “fathers” that citizens would “be their political children as long as they are good parents.” In 1792, Timothy Stone enjoined officials to be “civil fathers” who treated citizens with the “tender care of natural parents.” In 1794, Judith Sargent Murray asserted that men wanted “the protecting hand of a guardian power” and gave their guardian “the august title—The Father of his Country.” In 1795, Peres Fobes noted that “a ruler is the father of his country” and that slandering him was “parricide.” In 1804, Samuel Kendal called on Massachusetts’s “venerable fathers” to care for the people. Patriarchal expressions of political leadership were commonplace for decades after the Revolution.

Federalists often used patriarchal language to reduce men’s fears that ratification of the U.S. Constitution would invite despotic leadership. Early in the debates, for example, James Wilson trumpeted the prospect that the new president would be not a tyrant but a father figure to “watch over the whole with paternal care and affection.” Madison, Hamilton, and other federalists felt fortunate that the nation’s greatest father figure, George Washington, was likely to become the Republic’s first president. Ministers, writers, and citizens considered Washington “the father of the country.” Zephaniah Swift Moore called him “our political father,” and Alexander Addison addressed him as “the great father of his country.” Annis Boudinot Stockton even described him in regal terms. Americans ratified a new Constitution “When lo! himse’l, / In native elegance appear’d, / And all things smil’d around / Adorn’d with every pleasant art, / Entron’d the Sov’reign of each heart, / I saw the hero crown’d.” Noah Webster praised President Washington’s patriarchal ability to inspire filial loyalty:

The long and eminent services of our worthy President have filled all hearts with gratitude and respect; and by means of this gratitude and respect and the confidence they have inspired in his talents and integrity, he has a greater influence in America than any nobleman, perhaps than any prince in Europe. This respect has hitherto restrained the violence of parties. . . . This is the effect of his personal influence and not a respect for the laws or Constitution of the United States. Americans rally round the man, rather than round the executive authority of the union.”
Six years later, Henry Holcombe eulogized Washington as a manly leader who “ruled his appetites and passions in scenes of the greatest trial and temptation” to serve as “the father, friend, benefactor, and bulwark of his country.” Washington epitomized the Heroic Man—a national father figure whose manly prowess and procreative abilities animated citizens’ confidence, consent, and compliance.

Washington was unique. Many founders worried that other potentially great leaders had difficulty establishing hegemony. After all, public censure was “the unfailing lot of an elevated station” and public envy was “the tax of eminence.” The Heroic Man who earned high public standing was vulnerable to charges of aristocracy. His motives and values were subject to public skepticism and trivializing opposition. His words and deeds were apt to be misinterpreted and used against him. Misunderstanding between heroic leaders and common citizens was predictable because great and ordinary men were divided by vast differences. A towering intellect such as James Madison relied on insights beyond the comprehension of the average man who, for example, could not understand how “inconstancy” could be a virtue for Madison (who opposed and then proposed a Bill of Rights) but a vice for others. Great leaders were not bound by the foolish consistency that hobgobbled little minds. However, they were obliged to legitimize their authority by soliciting the consent of uncomprehending citizens.

A key function of the grammar of manhood was to employ patriarchal language to transform threatening images of tyrannical leaders into friendly portraits of familiar father figures. Most Americans presumed that a father was devoted to his family. He was responsible, settled, and trustworthy. The founders used patriarchal language to convey a parallel presumption that a “civic father” was devoted to his political family and was equally likely to be responsible, settled, and trustworthy. American writers regularly used family fatherhood as a foundation for discussing public leadership. For example, Samuel Langdon drew lessons from patriarchal family life as a basis for instructing New Hampshire’s “much honored fathers” in public affairs: “Without constant care of your families, you will have bad servants, and your estates will be wasted. So [you] must pay constant attention to the great family . . . to be a free and happy people.” Patriarchal language signified that leaders were caring men who merited public obedience.

Patriarchal language also suggested that obedience to heroic leaders was consistent with manhood and citizenship. American men were accustomed to paternal authority. They honored ancestral fathers and expected sons to honor them. As such, political leaders who successfully presented themselves as civic
fathers could elicit considerable citizen deference. Although images of civic father figures put common citizens in the symbolic role of children, Reid Mitchell points out that “at least they do not make them sound like slaves or an inferior class or the dregs of society.” Generally, American men still associated paternal rule with “benign authority.” An adult son could honor his biological father with obedience without sacrificing his sense of independence; similarly, a citizen could honor a political father by obeying him without feeling he had sacrificed manly liberty. Meanwhile, patriarchal language made dissent more daunting. It was one thing to oppose a tyrant but quite another to turn against a loving father. As Mitchell puts it, “The parental metaphor made rebellion a primal sin.”

Patriarchal language had the additional advantage of stability. When George III failed to act as a Patriot King, colonists finally denounced him as a bad ruler and condemned kingship as a tyrannical institution. The terms of republican discourse changed suddenly, and only highly educated men could fully appreciate the dramatic reconceptualization of citizenship and leadership. By contrast, the terms of patriarchal discourse barely changed. Mary Beth Norton argues that they survived as elements of “a metaphorical language” that identified the norms of fatherhood as legitimate criteria for leadership. For example, “Philanthrop” explained that fears of corruption by “the head of the family” did not eliminate the institution of marriage; by analogy, fears of corruption by leaders “selected to preside at the helm of [public] affairs” should not eliminate leadership authority. A few bad fathers did not destroy fatherhood; a few bad leaders should not end assertive leadership. Extending this logic, John Smalley criticized corrupt patriarchs but supported strong patriarchal leaders. He denounced “libertine” males who acted in office like immature “children” by failing to hold the reins of government “with sufficient force” or “discretion.” He advocated replacing them with powerful father figures who would use sufficient force to secure public order.

Most founders positively celebrated the conjuncture of fatherhood and politics when they applauded ancestral fathers for pioneering the continent, celebrated colonial fathers for spearheading protests against Great Britain, commemorated revolutionary fathers for achieving independence, and honored civic fathers for procreating new states and a new nation. At times, their profuse praise for their political fathers was a prelude to expressing present fears that the age of patriarchal heroes was past and, henceforth, Americans were doomed to suffer mediocre leadership. “Where are our fathers?” cried Stanley Griswold. “Where are our former men of dignity . . . who in their day appeared like men?” Could America “bring forward another band of sages”
when, alas, American males seemed to be “more disposed to act like children than men”\textsuperscript{28}

Many founders dwelled on the “abundance of rubbish” that constituted contemporary manhood and political officialdom; but most agreed with Abigail Adams that there was still some “sterling metal in the political crucible.” John Tucker applauded manly individuals who with “great resolution and firmness” distinguished themselves by their ability “to maintain a calmness of mind and to guide with a steady hand in tempestuous seasons.” Gad Hitchcock praised men who demonstrated the ability “to lead and advise [the public] in the more boisterous and alarming as well as in calm and temperate seasons.” John Jay thought that the Heroic Man usually emerged from among those “highly distinguished by their patriotism, virtue, and wisdom in times which tried the minds and hearts of men.” And James Madison certainly expected that, under the Constitution, “the purest and noblest characters” would arise to confront the nation’s crises and restore peace, dignity, and prosperity to America.\textsuperscript{29} Adversity not only demanded great leaders and justified powerful ones; it also called forth, tested, and identified the Heroic Man who measured up to the highest standards of manhood.

The standards were diffuse but known. They included preeminence in “ability and virtue” along with disciplined passion, family responsibility, and social civility. John Adams emphasized “exemplary morals, great patience, calmness, coolness, and attention,” while Elizur Goodrich highlighted “knowledge, wisdom, and prudence, courage and unshaken resolution, righteousness and justice tempered with lenity, mercy, and compassion, and a steady firmness . . . and a sacred regard to the moral and religious interests of the community.” Whatever the particular mix of virtues, the founders felt that great leaders made themselves known by their powerful and positive impact on ordinary men. Zephaniah Swift Moore suggested that great leaders were men of “character and example” who had considerable “influence in forming the public mind.” Zabdiel Adams asserted that great leaders exhibited “exemplary conduct” and “contagious” manners, providing a “shining example” to improve men’s conduct and support public order.\textsuperscript{30}

Ultimately, the Heroic Man distinguished himself from the Family Man and the Better Sort by transcending intergenerational time and parochial space. He honored the ancestral past but acted in the present to fulfill his calling to produce a memorable legacy for the future. He was exquisitely selfless and supremely public-spirited. He also claimed an extraordinary degree of manly liberty to follow conscience and maintain “integrity” by demonstrating “fortitude” and “resolution” against “unprincipled” foes who slandered him
with “unmanly but unavailing calumny.” He asserted his right to vindicate “the dignity of men” by acting with a higher regard for the public good than for his own family and friends. He could act against both malicious enemies and misguided friends because he sought neither leadership status nor public acclaim. Like Washington, he preferred home life; like Franklin, he accepted the burdens of leadership solely to enlarge his capacity for “doing good”; and like history’s most memorable heroes, he risked fortune, fame, and immortality to procreate a better future for humankind.31

Madison wrote, “The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess the most wisdom to discern, and the most virtue to pursue, the common good of society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.” Many founders were far more interested in legitimizing and empowering manly leaders than in instituting precautionary measures. They were convinced that the Heroic Man was best qualified to pursue the public good while attracting the trust and consent of sober citizens. Most certainly, he should be applauded rather than rotated out of office. John Adams opposed mandatory rotation schemes because “the ablest men in the nation are rooted out” and people were “deprived . . . of the service of their best men and . . . obliged to confer their suffrages on the next best until the rotation brings them to the worst.” Robert Livingston called mandatory rotation “an absurd species of ostracism—a mode of proscribing eminent merit and banishing from stations of trust those who have filled them with the greatest faithfulness.”32 The Heroic Man was a huge asset. A republic treasured his presence rather than squandered his talents.

Most founders also opposed mandatory instruction schemes that invited the mediocre masses to bind talented, virtuous leaders. Noah Webster despised such schemes for fostering a “spirit of exalting the people over the . . . magistrate” and miscasting leaders in the role of “servants of the people.” Instruction schemes tended “to degrade all authority, to bring the laws and the officers of government into contempt, and to encourage discontent, faction, and insurrection.” They “unmanned” leaders by denying them conscience, integrity, and choice. Washington asserted that a public official who ignored his own convictions to follow public instructions was more slave than man: “What figure . . . must a delegate make who comes there with his hands tied and his judgment forestalled?”33 Joel Barlow urged leaders to ignore flawed instructions: “When the delegate receives instructions which prove to be contrary to the opinion which he afterwards forms, he ought to presume that his constituents . . . are not well informed on the subject and his duty is to vote
according to his conscience.” Roger Sherman added that a leader was “bound by every principle of justice” to elevate conscience over instructions. The founders subscribed to an informal creed which asserted that the Heroic Man had a paternal duty to reject errant public opinion for the public’s own good.

Could a leader reject public opinion and still attract the consent of the governed? A great leader could. When Madison asserted that a leader was not “bound to sacrifice his own opinion,” he implied that the Heroic Man was revered less for his brilliant reasoning and astute decision making than for his exceptional manhood. He epitomized the consensual norm of manly independence by exhibiting self-discipline, courage, fortitude, candor, and integrity in the midst of adversity. Most citizens would honor such noble displays of manhood with deference, even if they disputed resulting decisions. Jeremiah Wadsworth reported instances when leaders “disregarded their instructions and have been re-elected.” Conversely, a leader who chained himself to public opinion was apt to be scorned as unmanly, even though his decisions reflected public opinion. Here, Wadsworth cited instances when “representatives following instructions contrary to their private sentiments . . . have ever been despised for it.” In part, the Heroic Man’s hegemony was based on his ability to exemplify ideals of manly independence and insulate himself against charges of effeminacy, slavishness, and childishness.

Manhood above Public Opinion and Law

Most founders agreed that the Heroic Man needed extraordinary freedom to guide America to its destiny. He had to be able to forgo popularity and ignore legality, for example, when confronting the crisis that called forth the Constitutional Convention in 1787, addressing the problems that prompted the Proclamation of Neutrality in 1793, or investing in the opportunities afforded by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The Bachelor was contemptuous of people’s values and subordinated to legal restraints; the Family Man and Better Sort hoped to reconcile popular consent and political authority; the Heroic Man stood above public opinion and law to procreate a new order for the ages.

The founding generation distinguished popularity from consent. No worthy man or leader solicited a crude popularity borne of vanity, flattery, and show. Such popularity was foolish, fickle, and fleeting. It was identified with demagoguery and effeminacy. However, every worthy leader sought the consent of the sober Family Man and the reputable Better Sort along with the grateful remembrance of future generations. This enduring consent repre-
sented the stable trust and respect of solid citizens and the promise of a posi-
tive judgment by posterity. Accordingly, the Heroic Man persevered in “the
plain path of duty” and remained “unmoved by noisy opposition, undaunted
by popular clamor, undismayed by imminent danger.” He refused to sacrifice
duty to crude popularity, even though his refusal was likely to generate pub-
lic envy, enmity, and spite. John Adams felt that he had to fortify himself
“with a shield of innocence and honor” to govern against public acrimony.
Thomas Jefferson thought himself “a constant but for every shaft of calumny
which malice and falsehood could form.” Predictably, the Heroic Man suf-
fered the wrath of lesser men.

A leader’s heroism partly depended on how he addressed adverse public
opinion. First, he should recognize the inevitable conflict between manhood
and popularity. Samuel Wales observed that a great leader often had to sup-
port “a manly opposition . . . to popular prejudice and vulgar error.” John
Mitchell Mason added that a courageous leader who engaged “in a manly at-
tempt to avert national ruin” sometimes had to expose a “favorite error” of the
public only to excite its “resentment.” Alas, “none of [the world’s] benefactors
have escaped its calumnies and persecutions.” Second, a great leader ap-
proached the conflict between manhood and popularity as a challenge. For
Patrick Henry, the challenge was to demonstrate “manly fortitude” and
“manly firmness” against “an erring world.” Others defined it in terms of ex-
hibiting manly “integrity” and “intrepidity” against “public execration.” The
Heroic Man bore the weight of public antagonism; a lesser man collapsed
under it and was reduced to “a crouching and fawning disposition [that] takes
the place of manliness.”

James Madison indicated that a tension between manly leadership and
public opinion was endemic to republics. Sometimes, “public opinion must
be obeyed by the government” and other times it “may be influenced by the
government.” Who decided whether public opinion or government guidance
took precedence? Ideally, a great leader disseminated republican principles so
that the citizenry itself knew when to assert sovereignty and when to defer to
leadership. Thus, George Washington sought to secure “the enlightened con-
fidence of the people” by teaching citizens “to know and to value their own
rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish be-
tween oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority; between bur-
dens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience and those resulting
from the inevitable exigencies of society; to discriminate the spirit of liberty
from that of licentiousness—cherishing the first, avoiding the last; and unit-
ing a speedy but temperate vigilance against encroachments with an inviolable
respect to the laws.” However, most founders did not count on the “enlightened confidence of the people” because they saw men as more impassioned than enlightened. They relied instead on leaders’ prerogative to determine when to heed or lead public opinion, when to obey or overstep the boundaries of law.

The founders took their idea of political prerogative from English forebears. In the late medieval period, English jurists recognized the Crown’s prerogative to govern in matters of domestic discord and foreign relations. Henry VIII and Elizabeth expanded the scope of royal prerogative, but Stuart abuses of it culminated in a revolution that established restrictions on it. Whigs promoted liberal and republican theories that criticized abuses of royal prerogative but also retained benign versions of leadership prerogative. Locke’s liberalism affirmed an executive’s prerogative to act “without the prescription of law, and sometimes even against it” for the good of society. Locke memorialized Elizabeth for employing a proper prerogative to unite “her interest and that of her subjects.” Bolingbroke’s ideal republic was ruled by a Patriot King who exercised prerogative to “renew the spirit of liberty” among citizens. He too praised Elizabeth for having exercised prerogative to unite “the great body of the people.”

Most founders had a relatively benign view of prerogative. They applauded or at least accepted royal prerogative up to the moment of revolution. In 1774, Gad Hitchcock distinguished the abuse of prerogative from its proper use by insisting, “Prerogative itself is not the power to do anything it pleases but a power to do some things for the good of the community.” The same year, Thomas Jefferson called on George III to assert prerogative to reestablish “fraternal love and harmony through the whole empire.” After the Revolution, some founders raised leadership prerogative to the status of a sacred duty. Edmund Randolph explained at the Constitutional Convention, “When the salvation of the republic is at stake, it would be treason to our trust not to propose what we found necessary.” The framers were less prone to debate the legitimacy of prerogative than to discuss its proper application. We often remember Hamilton’s monarchical bent but we also should recall Madison’s support for a republican version of “kingly prerogative”:

A negative in all cases whatsoever on the legislative acts of the states, as heretofore exercised by kingly prerogative, appears to me to be absolutely necessary and to be the least possible encroachment on the state jurisdictions. Without this defensive power, . . . the states will continue to invade the national jurisdiction, to violate treaties and the law of nations and to harass each other with rival and spiteful measures dictated by mistaken views of interest. Another
happy effect of this prerogative would be its control on the internal vicissitudes of state policy, and the aggressions of interested majorities on the rights of minorities and of individuals.41

Convention delegates replaced Madison’s “kingly prerogative” with the Supremacy Clause, but they supported a national government that provided presidents, senators, justices, and military officers great discretionary latitude. Their collective memory was filled with the manly deeds of ancestral fathers and revolutionary leaders inspired by “the spirit of the times” to claim extensive authority to make extraordinary history.42

The founders did have a problem with articulating and justifying political prerogative. The language of prerogative, like the language of aristocracy, was discredited by its historical association with British tyranny and corruption. In 1787, Madison could speak positively but controversially about “kingly prerogative.” A few years later, he found it wiser to associate “prerogative” with “a monarchical model” and then condemn it. Nonetheless, many Americans continued to communicate the conceptual substance of leadership prerogative by employing the grammar of manhood. For example, Mercy Otis Warren praised American diplomats for maintaining an “independent attitude with manly dignity” when, in 1783, they ignored a lawful congressional directive “to be under the councils of France.”43 Most founders agreed that great leaders needed to exercise manly liberty and wield great discretionary power to govern a republic of disorderly men situated in a dangerous world.

Sustaining Hegemony

The founders invoked crises to legitimize the Heroic Man’s prerogative to rule. Did a return to “normalcy” signify that great men should retire from public life, rely on the Better Sort to make and administer law, and trust the Family Man to devote himself to provisioning his wife and children? Or was normalcy a temporary interlude when great leaders prepared for the next crisis? The founders aspired to a state of republican normalcy when a government of laws would free most men to devote themselves to their families and farms. But they saw the world as a dangerous place. Men and women were disorderly creatures and their infant republic was surrounded by hostile powers. Anticipating future crises, the founders generally expected the Heroic Man to sustain hegemony and exercise prerogative for the foreseeable future.

Sustaining hegemony, especially in peacetime, was a complex challenge. Ju-
dith Shklar observes that republics “rely on mutual trust between govern-
ments and citizens to an unusual degree.” This interdependence generates in-
tense suspicions because, “Where there is so much reliance on trust, there
must also be frequent betrayals.” The result is that republics require “a highly
personalized politics” in which leaders constantly reassure citizens that trust in
them is warranted. Murray Edelman suggests that leaders often ply the art of
personalized politics by manipulating cultural symbols, first to arouse and
then to assuage people’s anxieties. If there is no immediate crisis, leaders can
manufacture a symbolic one to legitimize their power and foster mass quies-
cence. Well aware of the need to sustain public trust amid fears of betrayal,
the founders recognized that leaders had to practice symbolic politics to en-
sure the enduring consent of the governed.

Alexander Hamilton grasped the fundamentals of symbolic politics. He
often summoned the specter of past, present, and future crises to arouse pub-
lic anxiety and then justified powerful political leadership to assuage it. He
used the prospect of “national exigencies” to justify presidents’ “great latitude
of discretion” in choosing appropriate means to achieve the public good. He
suggested that leaders had to be as concerned with “appearances as realities.”
It was crucial that “government appears to be confident of its own powers” be-
cause officials who appeared confident inspired “confidence in others” and po-
positioned themselves to make controversial decisions with minimal dissent.
Like Wadsworth, Hamilton believed that manly leaders who acted to save the
people “from very fatal consequences of their own mistakes” could “procure
lasting monuments of gratitude” by exhibiting “courage and magnanimity
enough to serve [the people] at the peril of their displeasure.” George Wash-
ington also understood symbolic politics. During the Revolution, for exam-
ple, he tried to bolster patriots’ confidence in the war effort by spreading ex-
aggerated public praise for his army’s performance and prospects, even though
he complained privately to friends, relatives, and Congress that his troops
were unreliable and ineffective.

Washington’s symbolic politics was assisted by Thomas Paine’s alchemical
transformation of an American military defeat into a symbolic victory. In 1778,
General Howe conquered Philadelphia and Washington’s army was rid-
dled with dissension. Paine explained to American readers that Howe “mis-
took a trap for a conquest.” His troops were bogged down in Philadelphia
where they were “sleeping away the choicest part of the campaign in expen-
sive luxury.” Howe was no manly leader. His character was “unmilitary and
passive”; his troop movements were motivated by fear and fickleness; and his
military prospects were dim. Indeed, America never had “so fair an opportu-
nity of final success as now.” Paine proclaimed, “The death wound is already given. The day is ours if we follow it up. The enemy, by his situation, is within our reach, and by his reduced strength is within our power.” Victory was simply a matter of Americans demonstrating their confidence by providing solid support for the Continental army. Paine understood that symbolic politics could have tangible consequences.

The founders’ symbolic politics was saturated with images of manhood, family, and friendship conducive to leadership prerogative and citizen consent. Reporting on hurricane relief efforts in the West Indies, a young Hamilton lauded the governor for having “shown himself the Man” by issuing strict but humane regulations to relieve public distress. The founders often emphasized aspects of manhood that combined strength with caring and justice with mercy above “weakness” and “connivance.” Washington conveyed a sense of strength and caring when reporting to Congress his decision to pardon Whiskey rebels: “Though I shall always think it a sacred duty to exercise with firmness and energy the constitutional powers with which I am vested, yet it appears to me no less consistent with the public good than it is with my personal feelings to mingle in the operations of government every degree of moderation and tenderness.” Like a father who mixed discipline and love, the Heroic Man infused authority with tenderness to personalize politics and promote citizen confidence in him.

Family symbolism figured prominently in leaders’ efforts to solicit and sustain consent. Defending the Alien and Sedition Acts, John Thayer argued that President Adams’s motives were honorable by stating: “This great man can have nothing in view but the happiness and prosperity of his fellow citizens, with whose fortunes his own and those of his family are evidently and inseparably connected.” A draft of Washington’s first Inaugural Address put a different spin on the leader as Family Man. Washington hoped to convince Americans that his presidency posed no threat to liberty by pointing out that he was a stepfather (as opposed to a biological father) with no dynastic prospects: “Divine providence hath not seen fit that my blood should be transmitted or my name perpetuated by the endearing though sometimes seducing channel of immediate offspring. I have no child for whom I could wish to make a provision—no family to build in greatness upon my country’s ruins.” Tench Coxe saw republican leadership as a variation on stepfatherhood: “As their sons are not to succeed them, they will not be induced to aim at a perpetuity of their powers at the expense of the liberties of the people.” The Heroic Man was both a father figure who could be trusted to seek the good of his public family and a stepfather figure who could be trusted because
he was not tempted to transform public power into a dynastic legacy. His blood was invested in the Republic.

The founders used images of family and fraternal trust to outline the appropriate relationship between great leaders and common citizens. Noah Webster ridiculed “the man who, as soon as he has married a woman of unsuspected chastity, locks her up in a dungeon,” just as he condemned the practice of voters to elect political leaders only immediately to “arm ourselves against them as against tyrants and robbers.” Nathanael Emmons argued for a presumption of mutual confidence among all members of America’s political family as a basis for criticizing individuals who “trample on human authority” with their “unruly spirit” or “restless, discontented, seditious spirit,” foolishly thinking that they played “a noble, manly, patriotic part” when they actually behaved like little boys by “weakening the hands of rulers and destroying the energy of government.” Emmons’s message was that “nothing but absolute necessity can justify . . . breaking the bands of society.” Ultimately, John Adams insisted, the Heroic Man deserved to be respected by “every manly mind.” He was resisted only by children.49

The Heroic Man fortified public trust by appearing in public as the citizen’s friend. Israel Evans observed that “exalted characters in authority feel themselves connected to the whole community by a brotherly, benevolent attachment.” Public expressions of fraternal feeling reassured men that their “lives and estates” were “secure.” Great leaders neither flaunted high status nor called attention to the social distance that separated them from commoners. Instead, they self-consciously identified with ordinary men and befriended them “to establish esteem and confidence between the people and their rulers.” Especially important, great leaders conducted themselves with what Peres Fobes described as “an affable deportment, a complacency of behavior, and such conciliating manners as cannot fail to secure the most commanding influence over the people.”50 Leaders fortified hegemony with civility.

The debate over the Constitution raised the issue of whether the sheer size of the new national government would preclude leaders from cultivating a sense of fellow feeling with most citizens. Antifederalists argued that the great geographical extent of the proposed polity and the huge numbers of men composing each electoral district worked against the likelihood that national leaders would be widely recognized, known, respected, or befriended by citizens. “Brutus” complained, “The people . . . will have very little acquaintance with those who may be chosen to represent them; a greater part of them will probably not know the characters of their own members much
less that of a majority of those who will compose the federal assembly; they will consist of men whose names they have never heard and of whose talents and regard for the public good they are total strangers to; and they will have no persons so immediately of their choice so near them, of their neighbors and of their own rank in life that they can feel themselves secure in trusting their interests in their hands.” If American men came to view their leaders “as a body distinct from them,” the result would be a deficit in public confidence, which guaranteed that factionalism and fratricide would prevail over fraternalism.51

Madison agreed that national leaders needed to cultivate “personal influence among the people” to gain men’s confidence. He also recognized that most members of the executive and judicial branches would be unknown to citizens. He argued, however, that members of Congress would be in a position to build networks of public friendship. They would be more numerous and accessible than other federal officials; they would “dwell among the people at large” and have “connections of blood, of friendship, and of acquaintance” that extended to “the most influential part of society.” The most influential part of society included local notables who would have “ties of personal acquaintance and friendship and of family” to their constituents. Put differently, the Heroic Man would be personally acquainted with the Better Sort, who would intermingle with the Family Man. A great leader could strengthen serial bonds with common men by expressing “a manly confidence in their country” and by lauding the “manly spirit which actuates the people of America.”52 A man, father, and friend to the people honored citizens’ manhood.

The founders procreated fraternal twins: (1) an institutional republic of men and laws; and (2) a symbolic politics that legitimized democratic deference to leadership prerogative. During extraordinary times, most founders felt that the Republic’s health and survival ultimately depended on the ability of a few men to rule the democratic masses, build public support among them, ensure order in the ranks of men, and meet the historical challenges of the modern era. What best distinguished a great leader was his ability to reconcile leadership prerogative and republican sovereignty. The Heroic Man appeared in public as a confident and caring man, a fatherly and friendly man, who calmed fears of betrayal and earned sufficient citizen trust to govern with widespread compliance and quiescence. Although he sometimes governed regardless of public opinion and law, he had little reason “to recur to force” because he could count on men’s “esteem and good will” to sustain the consent of the governed.53
A Government of Men

The politics of war and peace was the preeminent domain for manhood and leadership in the service of posterity. The founders told the story of America’s struggle for liberty as a battle of virtuous fathers and sons against “cruel and unmanly” enemies opposed to natural rights and national independence. The moral of their story was that the peaceful exercise of liberty required citizens to show manly restraint at home and a “dignified, manly, independent spirit” in their dealings abroad.54 Because the founders had limited faith in most men’s ability to exercise self-restraint and practice civility, they relied on exceptional leaders to identify their own manhood with the nation’s fortunes and exercise authority to secure the Republic’s survival, safety, and reputation in the world.

The founders enlisted the grammar of manhood to legitimize controversial foreign policy initiatives. For example, President Washington anticipated public outcry if he signed a treaty with Great Britain that contradicted prior agreements with France. He told Secretary Hamilton that he wanted a treaty that could be “assimilated with a firm, manly, and dignified conduct.” When the resulting Jay Treaty precipitated predictable opposition, Washington defended his actions as a product of “manly and neutral conduct which . . . would so well become us as an independent nation.” He also pointed out the unmanly “misconduct of some of our own intemperate people” who subordinated the public good to French interests.55 Though they often disputed foreign policy, most founders agreed that national leaders should exercise a manly prerogative to establish, defend, and extend America’s independence and respectability in the world.

International respectability was important. During the Revolution, Hamilton argued that unification was desperately needed to enhance America’s reputation abroad: “There is something noble and magnificent in the perspective of a great federal republic, closely linked in the pursuit of a common interest, tranquil and prosperous at home, respectable abroad.” He was mortified that America was “a number of petty states with the appearance only of union, jarring, jealous, and perverse, without any determined direction, fluctuating and unhappy at home, weak and insignificant by their dissensions in the eyes of other nations.” After the Revolution, Paine called on Americans to build “a fair national reputation” to command global “reverence.” Jefferson and Jay wanted Americans to gain “respect in Europe” to dispose European powers “to cultivate our friendship [rather] than provoke our resentment.”56 America’s reputation abroad would determine its fit, fame, and future in the fraternity of Western nations.
How did a new nation achieve international respectability? The founders tried to create a notable national identity by disseminating the story of their manly struggle for liberty and independence. They related the adventures of freedom-loving fathers, patriotic brothers, and valiant sons of liberty to foster fraternal feelings at home and produce an exalted but fearsome reputation abroad. Their message was twofold. First, Americans’ devotion to liberty was so strong that they had defeated the most powerful army and navy in the world. Second, their love of liberty was so enduring that they would mobilize anew to defeat any power that threatened their security. Hamilton liked the message but limited its longevity. American men’s memorable deeds and worthy reputation were likely to be compromised by their current excesses. What was happening to French revolutionaries could happen to American citizens:

A struggle for liberty is in itself respectable and glorious. When conducted with magnanimity, justice, and humanity it ought to command the admiration of every friend to human nature. But if sullied by crimes and extravagances, it loses its respectability. Though success may rescue it from infamy, it cannot in the opinion of the sober part of mankind attach to it much positive merit or praise. But in event of want of success, a general execration must attend to it. It appears thus far but too probable that the pending revolution of France has sustained some serious blemishes. There is too much ground to anticipate that a sentence uncommonly severe will be passed upon it if it fails.57

Even with constitutional unification, many founders feared that men’s excessive passions and democratic disorders would weaken the United States’ global standing.

A government led by great men was needed to protect American liberty by ensuring stability at home and unified purpose abroad. James Madison explained, “An individual who is observed to be inconsistent with his plans, or perhaps carry on his affairs without any plan at all, is marked at once by all prudent people as a speedy victim of his own unsteadiness and folly. His more friendly neighbors may pity him, but all will decline to connect their fortunes with his; and not a few will seize the opportunity of making their fortunes out of his. One nation is to another what one individual is to another.” National leaders needed to establish and maintain domestic order as well as develop and pursue national unity of purpose for America to build consistent, cooperative relationships with friendly nations and fend off victimization by hostile ones. Hamilton emphasized that leaders needed considerable political, economic, and military clout to support national unity of purpose when it was necessary, for example, to uphold neutrality or repel aggression to avoid “national humiliation.”58
Regardless of their expressed fears of powerful leaders, most founders relied on the president to serve as the repository of national unity of purpose in foreign policy. The U.S. Constitution imposed few checks on a president’s authority to formulate foreign policy, administer it, and command the military to enforce it. Equally important, Washington’s precedent-setting presidency demonstrated that Americans would rally around a great leader while his neutrality proclamation confirmed that citizens would tolerate presidential prerogative in foreign policy. When President Adams conjured up what Madison considered a false crisis that threatened to undermine men’s liberty at home and engage them in a foolish war abroad, Madison observed that a president’s exercise of prerogative in foreign policy was both inevitable and dangerous. That was why it was crucial that a “cool, considerate, and cautious” individual like Washington rather than a “headlong” person like Adams man the helm of state. In 1800, Madison’s preference was Thomas Jefferson, who reaffirmed in word and deed the need for exceptional leaders to map foreign policy and steer the nation through turbulent international waters.59

Ultimately, most founders depended on the Heroic Man to frame, govern, and promote a reputable republic. They understood that governance was as much a matter of the “art of definition” as their new science of politics. Madison was attentive to the “pliancy of language.” He feared demagogues who manipulated language to mislead men. Thus, he criticized Sedition Act supporters for “sophistry” when making a false distinction “between the liberty and licentiousness of the press” or when attempting the “seduction of expediency” to rob men of liberty. However, Madison also appreciated the utility of language for legitimizing leadership and promoting the public good, and proved quite adept at the art of definition. So too did the “Republican,” for example, who reinvented the meaning of “unanimous consent” to announce that the whole Constitutional Convention supported ratification. Yes, three delegates dissented, but they did not count because they acted “from partial considerations that can have no weight with a free and enlightened people.” The founders relied on the authority of language to shape public discourse, create a collective identity, promote domestic order and international reputation, and fix their own place in history. Indeed, they defined themselves as living exemplars of the Heroic Man who procreated a republic of men.60

Abigail Adams demonstrated remarkable insight when she observed to John that “the art of government” was “a prerogative to which your sex lay an almost exclusive claim.” The founders practiced the art of manly politics. They used the grammar of manhood to highlight the procreativity of men and to dim the political potency of women. They also applied the grammar of
manhood to justify the rule of a few great men over common men to neutralize democratic passions, foster order in the ranks of men, raise America’s standing in the world, and convey to posterity a legacy in which they would be remembered as founding fathers—as fertile men who gave birth, in William Pitt’s words, to “a glorious asylum of liberty, of manliness.”61