

Founders

Who were the Founders of the United States? A common term in use is 'Founding Fathers.'

Founding Fathers. Founders. Fathers. Signers. Framers. Patriots. The list of terms to describe the individuals who 'founded' the United States of America can go on and on. (Harvard)

Warren G. Harding popularized 'Founding Father' a little over a century ago, in his keynote address at the 1916 Republican National Convention. Harding was a senator from Ohio at the time, and chairman of the convention, which nominated Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes (who ultimately lost to Woodrow Wilson).

As reported by the Richmond Virginian on June 8, 1916, Harding said,

No political party ever has builded or even can build permanently except in conscientious devotion to abiding principles. Time never alters a fundamental truth.

Conditions do change, popular interest is self-assertive, and 'paramounting' has its perils, as the Democratic party will bear witness, but the essentials of constructive government and attending progress are abiding and unchanging.

For example, we ought to be as genuinely American today as when the founding fathers flung their immortal defiance in the face of old-world oppressions and dedicated a new republic to liberty and justice.

We ought to be as prepared for defense as Washington urged amid the anxieties of our national beginning, and Grant confirmed amid the calm reflections of union restored.

This wasn't the only time Harding used the term. In remarks delivered to the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution in 1918, Harding said,

It is good to meet and drink at the fountains of wisdom inherited from the founding fathers of the Republic.

He also frequently used the term 'founding fathers' during his campaign for the presidency in 1920; for example,

Let's hold fast to that which has come to us from the founding fathers, from the union, from those who awakened us to a little finer conscience, then get off this detour on the right track again and go ahead.

Once Harding became President, he used the term in his inaugural address, delivered on March 4, 1921,

Standing in this presence, mindful of the solemnity of this occasion, feeling the emotions which no one may know until he senses the great weight of responsibility for himself, I must utter my belief in the divine inspiration of the founding fathers.

On June 17, 1825, at the setting of the Corner Stone of Bunker Hill Monument (50-years after the battle in 1775), Daniel Webster, an American lawyer and statesman who represented New Hampshire and Massachusetts in the US Congress and served as the US Secretary of State, acknowledged,

Those who established our liberty and our government are daily dropping from among us. The great trust now descends to new hands.

Let us apply ourselves to that which is presented to us, as our appropriate object. We can win no laurels in a war for independence.

Earlier and worthier hands have gathered them all. Nor are there places for us by the side of Solon, and Alfred, and other founders of states.

Our fathers have filled them. But there remains to us a great duty of defense and preservation; and there is opened to us, also, a noble pursuit, to which the spirit of the times strongly invites us.

In 1859, George William Curtis, a popular lecturer and writer of his day, referred to the men who created the Declaration of Independence as 'fathers,' when he said,

Our fathers did not say it, because they did not mean it. They were men who meant what they said, and who said what they meant, and meaning all men, they said all men. They were patriots asserting a principle and ready to die for it, not politicians pettifogging for the presidency

A few years later (on November 19, 1863) on the battlefield near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania came perhaps the most famous use of the term 'fathers,'

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

("Four score and seven" equals eighty-seven, so President Abraham Lincoln (speaking in 1863, at the time of the American Civil War) was referring to 1776. Likewise, his reference to "all men are created equal" takes us to the Declaration of Independence that states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.")

Curtis, in 1875 at Concord, 100-years after the Battles of Lexington and Concord, again referenced the 'fathers', saying,

We are fortunate that we behold this day. The heavens bend benignly over, the earth blossoms with renewed life, and our hearts beat joyfully together with one emotion of filial gratitude and patriotic exultation.

Citizens of a great, free, and prosperous country, we come hither to honor the men, our fathers, who, on this spot and upon this day, a hundred years ago, struck the first blow in the contest which made that country independent.

Here beneath the hills they trod, by the peaceful river on whose shores they dwelt, amid the fields that they sowed and reaped, proudly recalling their virtue and their valor, we come to tell their story, to try ourselves by their lofty standard to know if we are their worthy children; and

standing reverently where they stood and fought and died, to swear before God and each other, in the words of him upon whom in our day the spirit of the revolutionary fathers visibly descended, that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Dictionaries don't necessarily help in narrowing a list on who a Founding Father is:

Merriam-Webster

founding father (n): 1. an originator of an institution or movement; 2. often capitalized both Fs: a leading figure in the founding of the United States; specifically a member of the American Constitutional Convention of 1787

Oxford English Dictionary

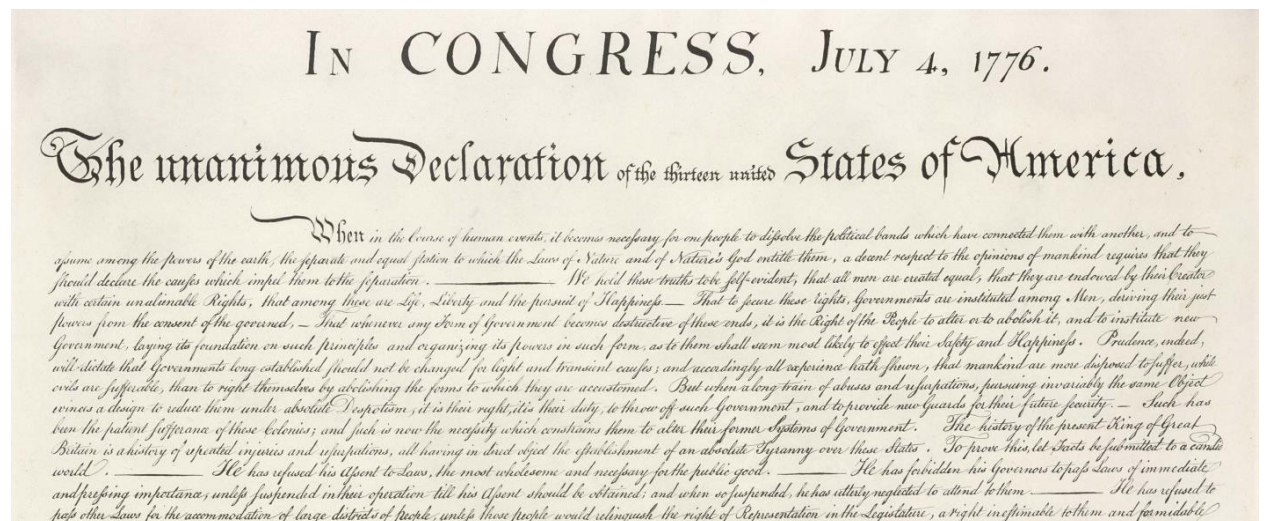
founding (adj): Associated with or marking the establishment of (something specified); that originated or created. Spec. founding father (freq. with capital initials), an American statesman of the Revolutionary period, esp. a member of the American Constitutional Convention of 1787

Safire's Political Dictionary (1968, 2008)

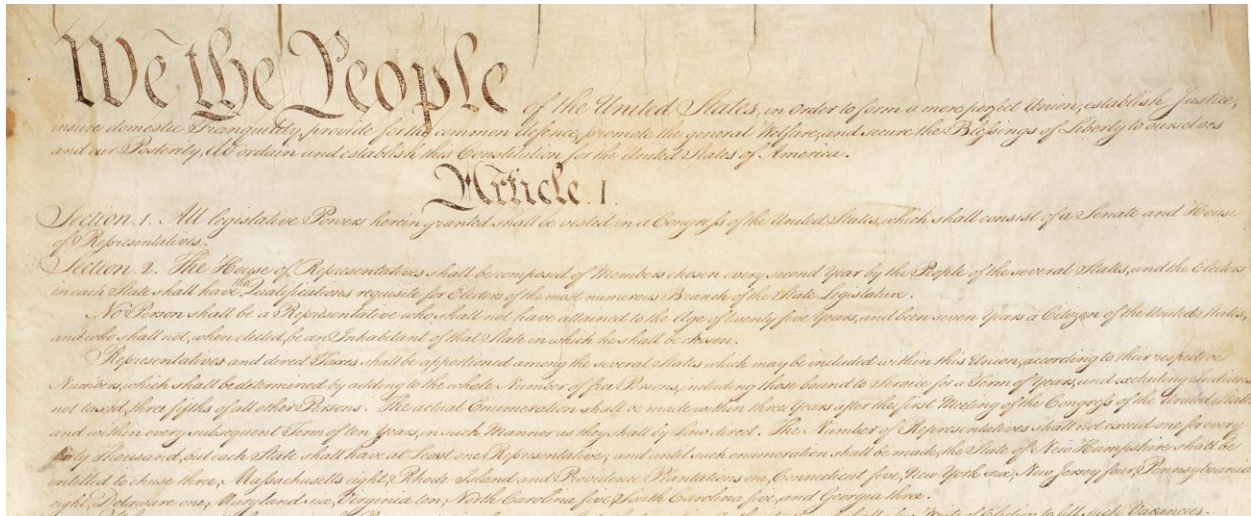
Founding Fathers: A group of revolutionaries who took their chances on treason to pursue the course of independency, who are today viewed reverently as sage signers of the documents of U.S. freedom.

Some say the term has been applied to the first English settlers in North America, to participants in the Continental Congresses and Constitutional Convention or the "founding generation" that led the United States from the Declaration of Independence onward.

To some, a Founding Father is, more specifically, a signer of the Declaration of Independence (there were 56 signers – who "mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.")



In addition, some suggest the framers and/or signers of the US Constitution are the Founding Fathers.



The original states, except Rhode Island, collectively appointed 70 individuals to the Constitutional Convention. A number of these individuals did not accept or could not attend, including Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock. In all, 55 delegates attended the Constitutional Convention sessions, but only 39 actually signed the Constitution.

In 1973, Richard B. Morris wrote *Seven Who Shaped Our Destiny: The Founding Fathers as Revolutionaries*, and included among his seven "Founding Fathers" John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington — that's three signers of the Declaration.

A more recent article on the Founding Fathers in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, written by Joseph J. Ellis, lists ten men: John Adams, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Marshall, George Mason, and George Washington.

The 'Founders' is Not a Sex-based Group

An obvious omission in finding the 'Founding Fathers' is that it suggests only men helped found this country. That, of course, is simply not true.

We are reminded of Abigail Adams, wife of the 2nd President of the US, John Adams, and mother of the 6th President of the US, John Quincy Adams. She reminds us of the saying, "Behind every great man is a great woman."

In the spring of 1776, John Adams was serving in the Continental Congress; on March 31, 1776, Abigail writes to her husband,

I long to hear that you have declared an independency - and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors.

Do not put such unlimited powers into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could.

If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend.

Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity.

Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

As she says, "Remember the Ladies." Abigail Adams signs her letter, "I am your ever faithfull friend".

In addition, if one were to suggest Paul Revere is a 'Founding Father' because of his midnight ride to Lexington, Massachusetts, with the news that British soldiers stationed in Boston were about to march into the countryside northwest of the town, then we would also need to include Sybil Ludington as a 'Founder;' she, too, rode a midnight ride to warn Patriots of the coming of the British.

Sybil was a 16-year old girl. Although she would not make her journey until April 26, 1777, she provided service to the American forces, just as Paul Revere did on April 18, 1775. The daughter of Colonel Henry Ludington, Sybil, would make a journey double to that of Revere (totaling 40 miles) to warn the colonists at Danbury, Connecticut of the approach of the British.

Commissioned by her father, who knew that Sybil was familiar with the terrain, the young girl set out at 9 pm the night of April 26 through Kent to Farmers Mills and then returned back home again just before dawn. The men she recruited were too late to save the town of Danbury, which had been set aflame by the British, but they were able to drive the enemy troops from the area.



The Founders Were Not Perfect (Neither Are We)

None of the 'Founders' were perfect; and, neither are any of us.

For some of the Founders, their deeds were not consistent with their words. For example, many of the Founders were slave owners. While this is abhorrent, the Founders established a system of government that, after much struggle and the violence of the Civil War and the civil rights movement, did lead to legal freedom for all Americans and movement toward equality. (Smithsonian)

Nowadays it seems it is easy and often that others will blame everyone else for everything. And, one fault of character becomes the focus of the judgment of the whole person. With respect to this, I am reminded of an appropriate message of about a couple thousand years ago that we should all adhere to,

Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.

And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8 1-11 (King James Bible))

If we continue to judge people of the past by their respective actions or inactions based on the norms of our society today versus theirs, I am confident future generations will look upon all of us and laugh and wonder, 'What were they thinking?'

Wouldn't it be nice if, "I just want to say - you know - can we, can we all get along? Can we, can we get along?" (Rodney King, May 1, 1992)

Broad Expression of the Founders

A challenge of making a list is that lists invariably leave someone out.

And, who makes the list of Founders depends on who you talk to, or what criteria you suggest you use in making your own list. And, unfortunately, views tend to change, as political or social views/issues of the present interfere with the context and commitment of nearly 250-years ago.

More broadly, it may be appropriate to suggest a Founder is anyone who helped bring on the American Revolution, win the war that secured independence, and helped establish the American Republic.



In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young