

2024 Early American History Summer Fellowship



Current Historiography

There are two discernable parties from the current historiography into which historians of the American Revolution and its era fall: the traditionalist perspective, often called "Great Man History," and the comparatively more modern revisionist perspective which focuses on the social aspects of individuals and groups.

Research Questions

Did the national identity of the United States form after the Revolution from different ideas and groups who participated in the American Revolution? How?

Looking at the formation of the national identity of the United States through the first inauguration, how did George Washington serve as this first national figure for all citizens of the United States? What values did he embody and were these shared across these groups?

The aim of the project, therefore, is to examine and bring to light how Americans formed a national identity and the roles that both George Washington and his inauguration played in the process.

Hypothesis

There was a unified view of George Washington as the national leader of the emerging republic of the United States and of the social and political groups within it. Notwithstanding, individual social groups still maintained their pre-election views on the goals of the Revolution - their cause.

What is at Stake?

The history of the early American Republic and more specifically the portrayal of the election of George Washington is viewed by historians through a perspective of "great man history." Although this is not inherently an issue, the lens through which historians view aspects of the American Revolution and the early republic period are in danger of leaving out the common perspective. Therefore, historians must move away from following only the popular figures of American history and bring to light the common perspective of individuals and social groups who worked for and participated in the American system. As a result, to understand the national identity of the United States in the wake of the Revolution, the common perspective of aspects of these social groups must be discovered to understand the forming of the national identity.

While the history of the early American republic was often viewed through the perspectives of the Founding Fathers and to a wider extent landowning elite. The experiences of those untold voices are no less essential to understanding our history and this history.

Key Takeaways:

- 01 George Washington's identity as a national unifying figure was cast in the United States from; his presiding over the Constitutional Convention, the precedent he established, and his personal beliefs.
- 02 Formation around a national identity based on the culmination of several social groups who, through their efforts in the American Revolution, sought to express their view of the newly forming nation.

- 03 Different Nation groups that participated in the American Revolution. They focused on the gender and racial/abolitionist groups existing during this time and added the aspects that led to showing their cause and desire for the revolution.
- 04 Historiography around the time of the American Revolution and early Republic is narratively driven and information is determined by the lens that the historian uses to conduct their research and frame their history of events.

Thesis

The inauguration of George Washington served to present the man as a national figure and symbol to unify different groups under a single national identity.

Citations

- Ellis, Joseph J. *Founding Brothers: the Revolutionary Generation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
- Ellis, Joseph J. *The cause: The American Revolution and its Discontents, 1773-1783*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2021.
- Nash, Gary B. *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. New York: Viking, 2005.

Mark Menning | Faculty Adviser: Kristen Foster, PhD
History | Klingler College of Arts and Sciences

Discovery Process & Findings

Summer research was completed online and in person during a road trip to Washington D. C. and Philadelphia to visit our Library of Congress, National Archives, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Mount Vernon, Independence Hall, and numerous monuments.



The Constitution: Mural by Barry Faulkner



Washington Monument at night



Library of Congress Reading Room



Liberty Bell

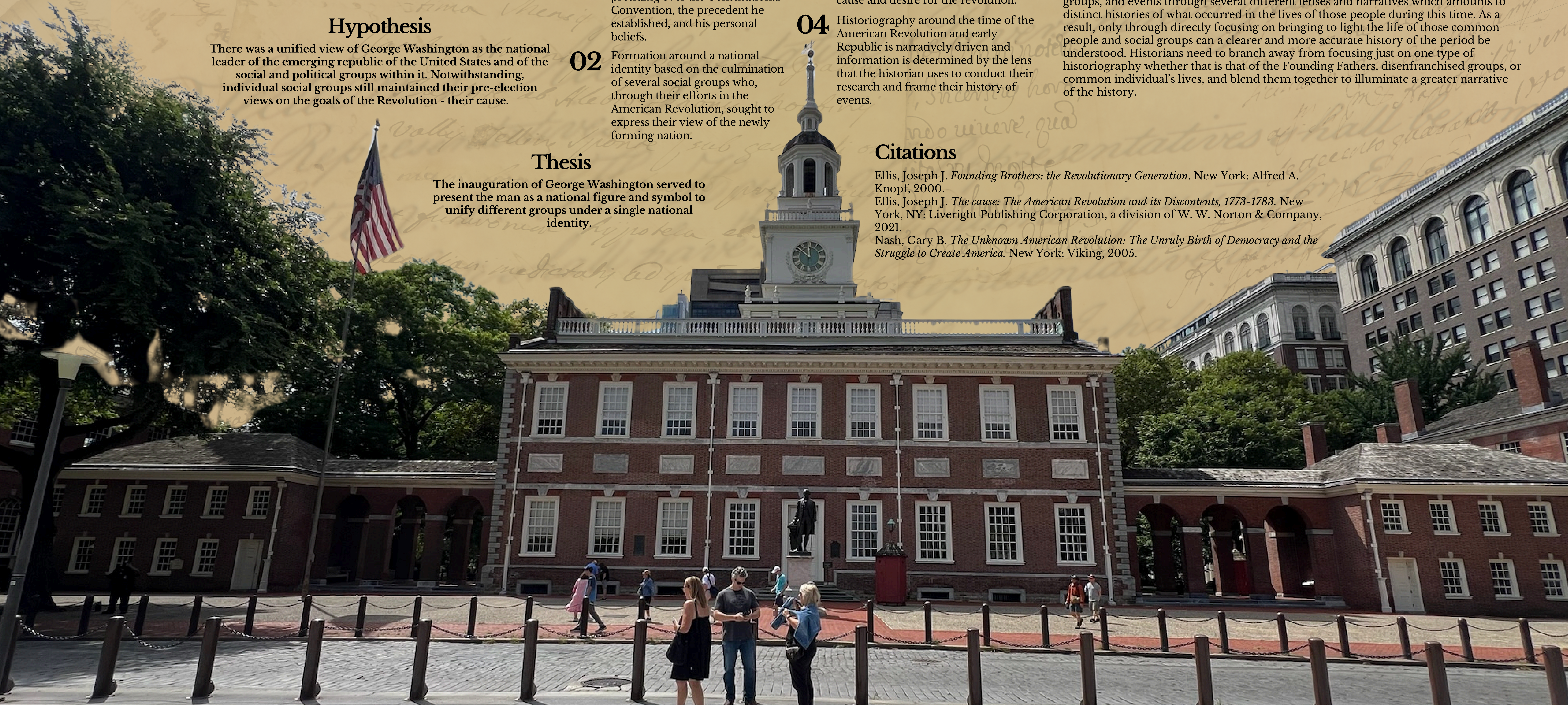
Conclusion

The History of the American Revolution and its causes has been debated since the time of the Founding Fathers with histories being presented from those who were there to witness the revolution. Today's historiography is diverse and depicts these figures, groups, and events through several different lenses and narratives which amounts to distinct histories of what occurred in the lives of those people during this time. As a result, only through directly focusing on bringing to light the life of those common people and social groups can a clearer and more accurate history of the period be understood. Historians need to branch away from focusing just on one type of historiography whether that is that of the Founding Fathers, disenfranchised groups, or common individual's lives, and blend them together to illuminate a greater narrative of the history.

Washington Monument Fountain, which depicts Washington alongside European and native American figures, posed akin to a Greco-Roman style



Powder horns and Inaugural buttons adorned with popular revolutionary messages



Independence hall in Philadelphia where the Constitutional Convention took place