

David Weinman

Reflection of Founding Myths Book and Website Creation Rationale

Ray Raphael's book, *Founding Myths* provides new insight to American Revolutionary war history that many including myself, may not be familiar with. Raphael is able to identify the "truth" behind significant events, battles, the "brutal British," slaves during the war, hero's and heroines, founding fathers of the time period, and identify for the reader a realistic perspective of what may of actually occurred based on empirical research. Because history is subjective, and people believe what they want to believe, it can have students questioning what is the point of learning it. *Founding Myths* is able to provide a reliable American Revolutionary war history that is truthful, believable, and beneficial for students to learn from.

Raphael's book is too advanced for elementary students; however, I think the messages the book symbolizes are not. The book identifies to the reader that American Revolutionary war history is being watered down so much to fit within the textbooks, and unit curriculum in the classroom that the next generations are likely to loose the core meaning what actually happened during the time-period, and not care. I think it is important for people to share their knowledge of a time-period so significant to American history so that it is not lost over time. This does not mean that people should water down the history for the next generation, because the truth is too brutal, horrific, and not appropriate for children's minds. It is important for students to hear the truth about history based on reliable research, so they do not have to relearn it at a later time.

Students of this generation deserve to know the reality of what is known as the American Revolutionary War, so that they can then teach it to the next generation. The Founding Myths website is designed to allow viewers to see and question their understanding of what they know about the history of the American Revolution. The focus is to introduce viewers and teachers to Ray Raphael's book *Founding Myths*. The webpage provides reference to the American Revolutionary war history that the book represents, and potential classroom activities for students who wish to know more about the American Revolutionary War time period.

My website focuses on Paul Revere, Molly Pitcher, The Final Battle of Yorktown, and Patriotic Slaves as a brief introduction to what Ray Raphael displays in his book. These people, events, and concepts represent symbolic representations for what the American Revolutionary War was about. They were picked for this webpage because each of them represents significant concepts regarding what students may learn about as American Revolutionary war history. Paul Revere and Molly Pitcher were key elements to this page because they both are considered a hero of the American Revolutionary war.

It was important to begin with Paul Revere, because people today think of the man as a significant part of American Revolutionary war history. People love the idea of a good story, hero, and a symbol of the past. What many people do not know is that when he rode to say the British are coming, he did not do so alone, and did not do so in the dramatic fashion that Henry Longfellow describes in his poem ("Paul Revere's Ride"). Paul Revere was not hugely famous during his lifetime, and became more famous 43 years after his death by Longfellow's poem. The point is not to say that Paul Revere's life and this was not significant, but to inform people of the truth about the icons that

represent the American Revolution, instead of creating fantasy myths about people and calling it history. In reference to Bloom's Taxonomy, it is important for students think at higher cognitive levels, and learn about Paul Revere by researching what kind of person Paul Revere was. It is more valuable for the next generation to determine for themselves through research analysis, synthesis, and evaluation if the Paul Revere should be considered a hero of the American Revolution, (Bloom's Taxonomy, Woolfolk 435-436). A student's ability to understand this particular man's significance in American history relates to Gardner's naturalist intelligence "(observing and understanding natural and human-made patterns and systems)," (Woolfolk pg. 109). Students will be able to develop an understanding of Paul Revere's life's history through research, and identify Revere's life's role (within patterns of events) within the American Revolution period. It is less meaningful to students to be told someone is a hero and to be forced to believe it without being told accurately why.

When students ask about the heroines of the American Revolution, the woman named Molly Pitcher might be brought up. Students are led to believe that a woman who supposedly took a cannon from her husband after being killed during battle, and kept firing it should be considered a heroine. The same Molly Pitcher should be considered a heroine for bringing water to thirsty soldiers on the battlefield injured. What students are not told is that the person never existed. It is unfair to students to learn about a fictional woman who supposedly did these things during the American Revolutionary War, and call her a heroine. This demonstrates to students that they are not ready, or not capable of knowing fact from fiction. It demonstrates to students that the American people do not know their own history well enough, and are forced to make up stories of what actually

happened. It is important for students to think at higher cognitive levels. One way to introduce the “heroine” Molly Pitcher to students in a unit about the American Revolution is to have them research her life during the war, and what life was like for woman during the war. Having students cognitively evaluate for themselves the truth and significance behind what they found within their research, will provide students a greater understanding of woman during the war than just looking at a fictional Molly Pitcher, (Bloom’s Taxonomy, Woolfolk 435-436).

My website addresses Raphael’s chapter on The Final Battle of Yorktown. I chose to address this event specifically because too many students are led to believe when studying the American Revolutionary War that this was the final battle, and the end of the War with the British when studying the war in school. Many American Revolutionary War units in classrooms end with this war because it demonstrates the victory of the American Continental Army over the British. The discrepancy for students is that the war ends here, and that on October 17, 1781 the war was over. What students are not necessarily taught is that this was just one battle, and that there were still thousands of British Redcoats located in the North and South American colonies. Students are also not necessarily taught that British Commander Cornwallis served under General Henry Clinton who commanded four times as many troops as Cornwallis. It is important for students who study the war to be informed that war did continue after this event, and that there is more to the American Revolutionary War history than just battles. Students are likely to be motivated to learn beyond the curriculum’s content when students find "academic activities meaningful and worthwhile, and try to benefit from them," (Woolfolk, pg 374). If students are given the opportunity to explore their own interests in

the American Revolution period rather than be forced into rote memorization of events and dates, then there is more potential for students to think at higher cognitive levels, and learn more from the history beyond the battles.

The purpose of focusing on Raphael's Patriotic Slaves chapter was to inform viewers of the website of the discrepancy of how slaves were treated during the American Revolutionary war era. It is important for teachers to inform their students that slavery was a huge part of the American Revolution. Many of the founding fathers owned and depended on slaves to work their plantations and estates during the time of war. It is important for students to know that slaves were presented offers by the British to have the privilege of serving under His Majesty King George III and earn their freedom in the process. Slaves were also in some cases eligible to serve in the American Continental Army and Militia, but not promised freedom. The discrepancy is that slaves would be considered free after the war. The American Colonies and Colonials were fighting for freedom from British Rule, but this did not necessarily mean freedom for slaves as well. In reference to Piaget's cognitive theory, students trying to understand American colonists fighting for freedom from the British, and slaves fighting for freedom on the side of the American Colonists can cause disequilibrium, (Woolfolk, pg 58). Students should be taught that slaves were not going to be considered free immediately after the war, no matter which side won. Students should also learn the majority of slaves were not British, most likely were not considered true American Colonials by slave owners during the time period, and unfortunately treated horribly stuck in the middle. Another major discrepancy with the American Revolution and slavery is that blacks and whites came together peacefully to fight in the war. Students should learn that it is true that slaves

served on both sides (British and Continental forces). They should be told that slaves in service were still treated poorly, given less equipment, put on the front lines, were provided with fewer food rations, and were still treated as slaves but in service of the British/ Continental Army/and or Militia.

The purpose of this website is to introduce to future teachers, and others interested in American Revolutionary war history to Ray Raphael's *Founding Myths*. It is important for this generation, and next learns an understanding of American history that is based on actual events, people, dates, and empirical evidence. Students new to American Revolutionary war history should not be taught watered down, simplified versions of battles, quotes, from movies, and textbooks as their only source of knowledge of these events. *Founding Myths* has done a good job in identifying the discrepancies within American Revolutionary war history. It is a teacher's responsibility to create an effective way for students to learn history's truth by using reliable sources for information, and teaching students credible information so students do not have to relearn the history in the future.

References:

- Woolfolk, A. (2004). *Educational psychology* ninth edition. Pearson Education Inc. 32-436
- Raphael, R. (2004) *Founding Myths*. The New Press, New York. 1-354