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**Book Review: Fighting over the Founders: How We Remember the
American Revolution by Andrew M. Schocket**

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Roney's approach, theoretical questions, such as "who should rule," seem to be tools that arise from, and provide solutions for, maladjustments. From the opposite vantage, one might suggest that this question is present in all politics: ideas about the purpose of government inform questions as to its proper function.

As Roney is aware, Pennsylvania's political history might also be described as one of broken institutions, or less an alternative model of politics than what Franklin called the "State of Nature" (Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard Labaree et al., 41 vols. to date [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press], 2:185)—humans living together without a functioning government. He made this social contractarian argument about the requisite ends of government in 1729 and other times thereafter (Franklin, *Papers*, 1:160; 3:199; 9:74). As Roney notes, the absence of a militia was a source of tension as early as 1704 (50); it weakened the political community and abdicated a core responsibility of government to defend its citizens. Franklin, who endorsed a militia as early as 1734, concluded in 1747 that Pennsylvanians had both a right and a duty to form the extralegal Association. He exhorted disparate groups to "unite with us in Defence of . . . *Liberty and Property*" (Franklin, *Papers*, 3:203). Or, as James Logan wrote him in 1747, "Ever since I have had the power of thinking, I have clearly seen that government without arms is an inconsistency" (Franklin, *Papers*, 3:219).

Finally, Roney's treatment begs us to consider what is meant by a people or community. Does it pertain to sovereignty? Is it associative, or pre-political? Is it geographic? Roney posits that civic life "did not revolve around a central authority, a common space, or shared activities and rituals" (36). One wonders whether it is possible to have a people without shared principles, what Franklin called a common sense. By 1747, and throughout the 1750s, Pennsylvania's factions threatened to prevent a public spirited defense of the province. Franklin's task to unite those peoples for the collective advantage included public teachings and a great deal of high-brow rhetoric.

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Andrew M. Schocket. *Fighting over the Founders: How We Remember the American Revolution*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. Pp. xiv+252. \$30.00.

History, politics, and culture regularly collide in the United States, especially when political partisans, entertainment producers, litigants, and citizens dispute what American history teaches about who Americans or what the United

States should be today and why. The former ground for such conflicts was the Civil War, and a remarkable literature explores the uses that Americans have made of the Civil War and of Abraham Lincoln in seeking to understand themselves. In the past several decades, however, the American Revolution has emerged as a similar site of cultural disputation, challenging the Civil War for preeminence in using the past to explain the present and chart the future. In *Fighting over the Founders*, Andrew M. Schocket explores an array of such conflicts over the Revolution's meaning. Schocket, director of American studies and associate professor of American history and culture studies at Bowling Green University, has written a fascinating and entertaining book, one refreshingly free of jargon.

Schocket has presented his argument in five thematic chapters, framed by a useful introduction and conclusion, a list of further readings, and an index. (The book, sadly, has no footnotes or endnotes.) "Truths That Are Not Self-Evident" focuses on political uses of the Revolution and the founding in political speeches by modern Republicans and Democrats. "We Have Not Yet Begun to Write" explores battles within the community of historians over ways of writing the history of the Revolution, posing the celebratory "Founders Chic" genre of history and biography against more serious, probing scholarly histories and biographies. "We the Tourists" examines how over time museums, stately homes, and other historic sites have reformulated their ways of explaining the history they commemorate to legions of American and foreign tourists. "Give Me *Liberty's Kids*" explores ways that movies and television programs have presented the American Revolution for a viewing audience. Finally, in "To Re-create a More Perfect Union," Schocket tackles the new constitutional orthodoxy of originalist interpretation, noting its connections to the modern Tea Party movement and the growing community of historical reenactors. Readers will soon recognize that for Schocket this book must have been fun to write—as suggested by his punning yet acutely perceptive chapter titles.

Historians tend to take note of how their subject crops up in various quadrants of political and popular culture, and Schocket's book will rightly become a must-read for specialists in the American Revolution and the early Republic, as well as for those engaged with understanding how history can become a way of entry into national self-understanding. His sharp-eyed approach to historic sites, museums, and parks and to such films as *The Patriot* and *National Treasure* (both films that still from time to time haunt this reviewer's nightmares) is particularly perceptive and enlightening. Given how many Americans get most of their historical information from the world of entertainment rather than from reading serious books—even such works of Founders Chic as David McCullough's *John Adams* and *1776*—Schocket's

careful, well-considered, and gently satirical approach to these sources of historical understanding will be of great and enduring value.

Originalism in constitutional interpretation has generated an immense and growing scholarly literature, yet Schocket's treatment stands out because it rightly links the emphasis on originalism with the growth of historical re-enacting (formerly a subject usually linked to the Civil War) and the rise of the disorderly but insistent Tea Party movement since 2009. In all three cases, though the participants claim to be recovering some essential truth about this vital fragment of the American past, Schocket rightly recognizes that that "essential truth" is at least as much an artifact of our time—a perfected and idealized reconception of that past, having little or nothing to do with the American past as it happened.

My two issues with this book are relatively modest. One is that, in his treatment of television programs and films, Schocket has stressed works of imagination—historical fiction, as it were—rather than expanding his coverage to include historical documentaries. My larger issue is with the two terms of art that Schocket makes central to his argument—"essentialist" versus "organicist" (esp. 4–6). In Schocket's book, "essentialist" views of the American Revolution stress continuities between past and present and a high-minded, almost worshipful perception of the Revolution and the founding fathers. By contrast, in his pages, "organicist" views stress that the Revolution launched a project of national and constitutional development without end, one in which Americans work on an effort of national political creation and adaptation that always requires more effort to conform it to the aspirations of the founders and their successors. Though I recognize and to some extent endorse the dichotomy that Schocket proposes, I wish that he had used a more descriptive pair of words—or pair of phrases. In my own work, I identify Schocket's "organicists" with the Constitution's concept of "a more perfect Union," and I equate his "essentialists" with the brand of originalist constitutional interpretation associated with Justice Scalia, who took great pains to assure us that, in his view, the Constitution is dead. Schocket's essentialists practice a kind of "freeze-frame" history in which the past is sealed in some form of epistemic bubble, unchanging and remote, almost a Platonic essence of revolution and founding. By contrast, Schocket's organicists stress the need for us to view the Revolution in context, to view the entire film, as it were. Perhaps I would have been happier had Schocket substituted the term "contextualists" (emphasizing the need to see the Revolution and the founding era in historical context) for "organicists." ("Freeze-frame" may be almost as apt as "essentialists," but it lacks the full range of nuance that Schocket persuasively assigns to his term.)

That muted dissent aside, *Fighting over the Founders* joins the small but valuable collection of books on what might be called cultural constitutional

history—the history of prevailing and competing cultural understandings of the American Revolution and the American founding—alongside such classics as the late Michael Kammen’s *A Season of Youth* (on the American Revolution) and *A Machine That Would Go of Itself* (on the Constitution). Readers will return to this book again and again, deriving from it enlightenment and sober second thoughts about the relationship between past and present, between the Revolution and now.

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Mary Sarah Bilder. *Madison’s Hand: Revising the Constitutional Convention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. Pp. 358. \$90.00.

To read *Madison’s Hand* is like panning for gold. One must work one’s way through much sediment and dross before hitting upon the luminous truth—the nugget of gold—this work has to offer. This occurs because the author has obscured that truth with much that is incorrect, misleading, and perhaps even dishonest. In the process, however, the author unwittingly reveals a heretofore insufficiently appreciated dimension of James Madison’s contribution to the constitutional foundations of the United States.

To understand what the author did accomplish, one must first de-sediment the work. Bilder failed to write a definitive study of one of the most influential resources in the history of the United States Constitution. The failure strikes the reader forcefully, for the promise of this work bears epic dimensions. Bilder set out to reconcile once and for all the divergent strands of interpretation of James Madison’s record of the debates in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. A great deal of work had been done heretofore, including the most recent addition to the corpus from Gordon Lloyd, who produced a definitive version of the Transcription Edition of Madison’s record (Gordon Lloyd, ed., *Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 by James Madison, a Member* [Ashland, OH: Ashbrook, 2014]). Prior to that, Max Farrand’s “Original Manuscript” version was the mainstay of scholarly analysis, followed by Charles Tansill’s 1927 compendium and Adrienne Koch’s “Revised Manuscript” version. The differences among these several versions all turn around the question of the extent of subsequent revision to reflect in Madison’s original journal. For Madison devoted careful attention subsequent to the Convention to “getting it right.”

In this context Bilder’s project of tracing Madison’s hand closely enough to disclose the “history of James Madison’s mind” bore the promise of extracting