

★ FOUNDING ★ MOTHERS

WITH COKIE ROBERTS

History™ Presents

FOUNDING MOTHERS WITH COKIE ROBERTS An Original Documentary

Introduction

The lore of the Revolutionary War and the “Founding Fathers” casts the forging of the American republic as predominantly male efforts. Portrayals of these years often assume that women remained quietly at home, content to relinquish political power to their male counterparts in the government and the military. *Founding Mothers*, hosted by veteran journalist Cokie Roberts, reveals that quite the opposite was true. This documentary takes a thought-provoking look at the influential women of the Revolution-



ary period, revealing that they were anything but passive and sedentary. While women may have been relegated to secondary political roles, they provided tremendous contributions to the victory over the British and the establishment of the new republic. This engaging one-hour program explores the intimate and often dramatic stories of how women – both individually and collectively – shaped the course of history through dedication and determination. These unsung heroines fought for the ideals of liberty and freedom, providing critical support for the creation of the United States. Later, these women worked diligently to ensure that the ideals embodied in the Constitution would be realized for all citizens of this vibrant new nation.

Curriculum Links

Founding Mothers with Cokie Roberts would be an excellent addition to any middle school or high school class on U.S. History, American Culture, Politics and Civics. It would be a great addition to Women’s History Month course units and activities. This documentary fulfills several guidelines as outlined by the National Council for History Education including: (1) Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas and Institutions; (2) Conflict and Cooperation; (3) Patterns of Social and Political Interaction; and (4) Comparative History of Major Developments.

Vocabulary

Using the dictionary at www.merriamwebster.com, an Internet resource such as www.history.com, or an encyclopedia, students should define and explain the significance of the following terms:

alleviate
genteel

conciliatory
inoculation

embezzle
parsonage

euphoria
spendthrift

fervor
watershed

Comprehension Questions

1. What was the Stamp Act, and why did the British decide to impose it on the colonies? How was this received by the colonists, especially by Benjamin Franklin and his wife Deborah?



★ FOUNDING ★ MOTHERS

WITH COKIE ROBERTS

2. What was the relationship like between Benjamin and Deborah Franklin? How would you describe Deborah's influence on Benjamin, and how do you think she shaped the Revolutionary era?
3. Why did colonists boycott tea? What did Abigail Adams think about the tea tax and the overall British approach to the importation of tea into the colonies?
4. Describe the relationship between John and Abigail Adams. How were the two reliant upon each other? How did each approach the idea of women's rights? How do you think Abigail Adams' role in politics might have been different if she lived in the 19th century or in the 20th century?
5. What was the Olive Branch Petition? What were Abigail Adams' opinions on this offer?
6. Once a woman chose to get married, what were her legal rights within the colonies? Can you justify any of these stipulations?
7. What were some of the ways that Martha Washington aided the Revolutionary War effort?
8. What was "The Sentiments of an American Woman"? Who wrote it and what did it recommend? Furthermore, what was the Ladies Organization of Philadelphia?
9. Who was Benedict Arnold and how did his second wife, Peggy Shippen, influence his treasonous decisions? Given her role, how would you say she affected the Revolutionary era overall?
10. Who was Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman, and how did she succeed in securing her freedom from slavery? What does her story reveal about slavery and the ability of slaves to overcome these immense obstacles?
11. Who were the "camp-followers" and how did they play a role in the helping of colonial forces during the Revolution? How were camp-followers treated by American soldiers?
12. How did Deborah Samson succeed in fighting in the Revolution? Were women allowed to fight? What do you think would have happened if her true identity had been discovered?

Extended Activities

1. Dear John

Imagine you are either John or Abigail Adams, updating your spouse on the Revolutionary War effort. Using sites such as www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/aa2.html or www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/ for background, compose your own letter with accurate historical details that project emotions onto either of these characters. Imagine how they would feel at certain junctures of the war. How do they feel about being apart? How do they feel about Washington's successes and failures? If given more of an opportunity, how would they have discussed gender roles? Do your best to imitate the 18th-century language. Be creative with your letters, but keep in mind historical events and realities.

2. All Men are Created Equal

The Declaration of Independence famously asserts that "All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..." Consider the role of women in the American Revolution, many of whom fought diligently and sacrificed greatly for a country that from its inception valorized men over women. After demonstrating their loyalties to a fledgling United States, were women treated any differently during the years following the Revolution? Did they gain certain rights or legal

★ FOUNDING ★ MOTHERS

WITH COKIE ROBERTS

privileges? For example, how did the Patent Act of 1790 affect women? When did women gain the right to vote? In small groups, research the role of women after the American Revolution. Create an illustrated timeline charting 10-15 key events in American women's history after the establishment of the United States through the present day. These timelines can be on posterboard or in PowerPoint format.

3. First Ladies

This documentary focuses on the roles of several important women during the Revolutionary era to reveal the critical roles they played in helping achieve American independence from Britain. In addition to the women discussed in this program, there were many other women during this time period who contributed to the world of politics and the arts. As an extended activity, conduct additional research on one of the women in this documentary, or other influential women of this era and create a mini-biography of the person you chose. These biographies can be in illustrated format, in essay form, or written as an obituary which chronicles her life. Examples of women you might choose for this project include: Mercy Otis Warren, Elizabeth Freeman (also known as Mum Bett), Annis Stockton, Martha Washington, Phillis Wheatley, Mary Katherine Goddard, Sybil Ludington, and Penelope Barker.

4. On the Front Lines

The story of Deborah Samson, the Massachusetts native who disguised herself as a man in order to fight for the colonists, is inspiring and revealing. Why do you think women weren't allowed to fight? Considering what you learned about her story from this documentary, imagine you were in her position at the time of the American Revolution. Write an editorial from Samson's perspective making an argument for the roles women could play in the military and political arena to help further the cause of the American Revolution.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites

The Canton, Massachusetts' Historical Society's website devoted to Deborah Samson, and her consecration as the Massachusetts state heroine. This website features an extensive biography: www.canton.org/samson/

The Library of Congress' "American Women" website, featuring resources for the study of women's history and culture in the United States. Contains several primary documents and extensively detailed information about famous women throughout history, including the Revolutionary era: memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/index.html

The Massachusetts Historical Society's website containing the letters between John and Abigail Adams and extensive background information about these two figures: www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/

The White House's biography of Abigail Adams: www.whitehouse.gov/history/firstladies/aa2.html

Books

Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for American Independence* (Vintage, 2006).

Brady, Patricia. *Martha Washington: An American Life* (Doubleday, 2005).

Hogan, Margaret A. and C. James Taylor. *My Dearest Friend: Letters of John and Abigail Adams* (Belknap Press, 2007).

Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800* (Cornell University, 1996).

Roberts, Cokie. *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* (Harper Perennial, 2005).