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History and New Media  
Absentee (Founding) Fathers

Introduction

Since the founding of the United States, the nation has been centered around the ideals of the “founding fathers;” freedom, independence, and democracy, regardless of whether or not those ideals applied to everyone in the country at the time. As the nation grew, the founding fathers became synonyms for the ideals they fought for. Mapping the founding fathers, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin, through Google n-gram and the Brigham Young University Time Magazine Corpus reveals that during times of national crisis, academia and popular culture alike are prone to fall back upon the rhetoric of the founding fathers. The purpose of this paper is two-fold; first it intends to study when and why the founding fathers became popularized in academia and the public at the times they did using macroanalysis. Second, it intends to study what was said during these times of crisis and how it related to its contemporary context in a close reading. Studying these the overarching trends from a distance and up close through Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus will demonstrate the reliance and impact of founding fathers on the past and their relationships with the present. Both of these approaches put into conversation with each other reveal that the founding fathers are used more frequently during times of conflict on the national and international level to provide moral guidance and reassurance to the average American consumer.

Methods

In order to understand America, neither popular culture nor academia can be ignored. Hence, this paper uses Google n-gram, which searches through all the words and phrases that
have been published and been digitized in books, articles, and primary sources, etc. The Time Magazine Corpus searches through all of the words published in Time Magazine between 1923 – 2006. Both tools provide methods for examining broad trends as well as context for the search results. One of the major drawbacks of relying on the Time Magazine Corpus’ database is its date range, which excludes, among many things, the Civil War and the First World War. Google n-gram ranges as far as back as the written word can go, and will therefore be used to interpret events before 1923 alone. As Google n-gram does search all published works, not solely in academia, it will suffice to represent American ideology between 1850-1923.

Google n-gram also poses the question of which language setting to choose from. Searching “George Washington” in English, American English, and French yields different results, as the term has different cultural contexts for each language. For the purposes of this paper, searches were completed using the American English option as the goal is to understand what these individuals meant to Americans. Tracking American figures and how they have been interpreted across international borders would be an extremely cool project, but ultimately that is not the goal of this paper.

The figures used in this survey are: George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln. The majority of the individuals studied are considered founding fathers or at the very least their contemporaries. The only exception is Abraham Lincoln. The founding fathers have had time to become larger than life figures that have been interpreted as ideas rather than as the complex human beings they were. Lincoln has been dead for over a hundred years but he lived was too late to
become sanctified among the founding fathers. Lincoln, however, has come to represent more to Americans, such as Equality, Freedom, and Civil Rights, lengthening his legacy to issues beyond his lifetime, much like the founding fathers. Therefore, Lincoln joins the founding fathers in this study as another key figure in shaping and representing American identity. For the sake of simplicity and for the reasoning above, when referring to the founding fathers this study includes Lincoln among them. ¹

Using Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus also presents challenges, mainly issues with representation and clarity. Data was compiled from only two different tools, and while Google n-gram uses every source it can access digitally, the Time Magazine Corpus only refers to articles published within Time Magazine. These are limitations due to digital constraints. This project builds off of digital tools’ ability to sort through thousands upon thousands of words. However, in order to examine all of these words, the documents must first be digitized. This limits the amount of data that can be collected and analyzed simply because so many documents have not been digitized and copyright issues have not been settled, a challenge especially related to studying popular culture through newspapers.

The logistics of analyzing every single local newspaper, magazine, and pamphlets without digitization is not possible, and it is likewise impossible to digitize every source of print media, making it relatively difficult to capture a comprehensive picture of America at any given time. The Time Magazine Corpus is useful because it represents one mainstream channel of American communication. Time Magazine claims to be

one of the most authoritative and informative guides to what is happening in the worlds of health and science, politics, business, society and entertainment. Every week, close to 2 million affluent consumers, frequent travelers [sic] and senior business people turn to TIME EMEA for award winning coverage of the

¹ Image: Unknown, the Apotheosis of Lincoln (1865).
key issues affecting the region…TIME sparks debate. Progressive ideas and provocative topics and gets the nation and the world talking. TIME sets the agenda and explores ideas providing a roadmap for the future. TIME responds immediately when big news breaks. TIME published a special Michael Jackson commemorative issue within 36 hours of his unexpected death. TIME Understands your world.²

Even as such, Time Magazine still only represents one news source in a sea of many, and provides one interpretation of current events. Ideally, Time Magazine could be placed in conversation with other news sources such as the Washington Post or the New York Times, but copyright and digitization issues complicate that dream. For the purposes of this paper, Time Magazine will represent popular culture at large, with an understanding that there are likely unrepresented voices within this narrative.

Within both Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus, language also presents an issue of clarity.³ In searching for the names of specific people, especially those with buildings, universities, states, and monuments built in their honor, it becomes difficult to determine whether or not the results are tied back to the individuals or are related to someone with the same name or an affiliated university.⁴ Serving as inspiration for a name of an individual/university hundreds of years after the life of the original still indicates the importance of the figure, but this does not extend to articles about medicine published by the university or fishery reports published by the state of Washington, for example. Therefore, this paper will also study the content of the results published through Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus to fully understand not only that people were talking about these figures, but also what was being said at the time and its

³ For reference, the Time Magazine Corpus will not bring up any search results for people if part of their names are capitalized. The search is conducted in all lowercase letters.
⁴ When searching for George Washington and analyzing the years between 1935-1940, both George Washington University and George Washington Carver were among the “most relevant” search results for George Washington under the Google n-gram “search in google books” feature. https://www.google.com/search?q=%22george%20washington%22&tbm=bks&tbs=cdr:1,cd_min:1935,cd_max:1940&lr=lang_en
significance. To accomplish this, first this paper will use macroanalysis to study overarching trends then it will explore the eras that experienced the highest spikes and analyze what exactly was being said about the founding fathers during that time. This will shed light on how America has conceived of itself and its founding figures during the times in which it has experienced external and internal strife.

Macroanalysis

Macroanalysis, as defined by Matthew Jockers, is not simply reading and qualifying results from far away, but rather it is a quantitative study of trends. It uses the interpreters baseline knowledge of history to identify and quantify trends, not hypothesize specifics, but to build off background information to put sources, words, and individuals into conversation with each other within new and revealing historical trends. Therefore, what follows is not an attempt to hypothesize over each changing trend, but an effort to understand the relationship between the founding fathers and American identity.

Figure 1 - Google n-gram Results 1800-2000

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Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus both reveal an interesting trend; the increased use of the founding fathers during time of internal and external strife, as seen above. Each tool, however, sees spikes in different times of strife. Google n-gram denotes the rise of the founding fathers during times of war while the Time Magazine Corpus reveals a growth in references to the founding fathers during internal stress like the Great Depression. These trends demonstrate a national inclination to use history, especially unifying figures like the founding fathers in different times of conflict. Looking closely at Google n-gram demonstrates several major trends. The most major spikes can be found during periods of war; the Civil War (1861-1865), World War I (1914-1918), and World War II (1939-1945). Other events that signify spikes in search results are the Great Depression (1929-39), Reconstruction (1865-1877), and the collective effort to make sense of and memorialize the Civil War by veterans and the following

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7 Graph compiled from information collected from the Time Magazine Corpus.
generation (1880-1940). The largest spikes occur during the Civil War and the Great Depression which lead into World War II, indicating that, during these times of national crisis, authors turned towards the past to draw upon the ideas and motivations of the nation’s history. Interestingly, after the World War II spike, during the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, the 1960s and 70s saw either a plateau or decline in mentions of the founding fathers with the exception of John Adams both in Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus.

Below are the results of the founding fathers with a smoothing feature of 10. Smoothing makes trends easier to spot, but can erase small blips or points of interest on the lines. The trends illustrated on the graph below demonstrate the rising mentions of American figures, especially John Adams and Abraham Lincoln in the 1860s, with everyone except Adams and Lincoln continuing to climb in mentions throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, beginning to descend in the 1960s. This feature shows the rise and fall of the founding fathers in the 1840s-1930s and the gigantic rise, followed by a steep decline, in the 1920s-1960s.

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8 Blight, David W. Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001, discusses the commemoration of the Civil War and the construction of the Lost Cause narrative alongside the reunification of the North and South around ideas of race and white identity. This was solidified at the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, where both Union and Confederate veterans met and memorialized fallen friends and comrades.

9 Google n-gram, historical figures with smoothing of 10
Spikes: 1840 – 1930

Studying Google n-gram between 1840 and 1930 reveal the first instances of the founding fathers being used beyond their lifetime. The spikes leading up to the Civil War, disregarding Abraham Lincoln due to his lived experience during the Civil War, indicate the increasing presence of the founding fathers in the national consciousness. During the lead up to the Civil War, the founding fathers experience a modest rise in the amount of mentions in written works. This steady rise documents the use of the founding fathers as a unifying identity for the nation during a time when the country became increasingly divided. John Adams presents an interesting study, as he soars above the rest of the founding fathers in mentions until the 1890s. While Adam’s trend line fluctuates more than the average founding father, it still aligns with the same spikes as the other individuals. It is interesting to note that John Adams was incredibly popular in the 1800s, and it was not until the 1900s that he began to decline in popularity. This indicates how founding fathers can rise and fall in popularity in comparison to each other and how their reputation reveals their influence on how Americans understood themselves.

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10 Google n-gram all people searched, 1840-1930. Accessed 4/28/2018
11 Andrew Jackson the last of the founding fathers to die, passed in 1845.
12 This number disregards Lincoln’s spike in the 1850s and 60s because the results are affected by Lincoln’s living decisions, not his presence in national memory.
Examining the trends between 1840-1930 also reveals that Lincoln became more central in published and digitized discussions than George Washington during the post-Reconstruction era. Lincoln’s trend line indicates how he went from popularity in his lifetime to his memorialization and sanctification during the post-Reconstruction era. Further study of Lincoln in American memory between the 1880-90s and 1900-1910 can illuminate how and why some individuals have become sanctified in American culture. Using tools like Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus reveal new and interesting ways to think about American history and identity.

Alongside trends around the time of the Civil War, each of the founding fathers increases respectively during the 1880s and 1890s. They experience some decline in the early 1900s, which is then doubled in the 1920s and 1930s. Placed into conversation with their historical contexts, these date ranges make perfect sense. Immediately following Reconstruction, when most Americans wanted to forget the war that split the nation apart, came the era when Americans tried to make sense out of the Civil War and again turned to their collective memory of the past to reform a solidified national identity that stretched across North and South boarders. This effort also saw the rise of the “Lost Cause” narrative in Southern history and the Southern justification of the war in terms of reclaiming founding principles and individuals of American history, including Virginians George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^\text{13}\) “Lost Cause, The.” [https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Lost_Cause_The#start_entry](https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Lost_Cause_The#start_entry).

For more information on the memorialization of the Civil War, see David Blight’s *Race and Reunion* or the last half of Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
1923-2006:

![Graph](image)


Graph compiled from information collected from the Time Magazine Corpus.
The Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus trend lines reveal stunningly similar trends from 1923 - 1949. From this comparison, it is clear that there was a cultural phenomenon in the 1930s the perpetuated the invocation of the founding fathers during this time. During the early years of Time Magazine, the founding fathers rose in the amount of times they were mentioned, indicating what Google n-gram did as well, that Americans turned towards their histories during times of stress. Carefully looking at the 1930s demonstrates that it was the highest point for search results on historic figures, before declining again from the 1940s to the present. On October 24th, 1929, on the eve of the 1930s, the stock market crashed, plunging America into the Great Depression. The 1920s and 30s also saw an increased effort to memorialize the United States in the wake of World War I and an increasing panic about the future and modern technology. In this context, it is not surprising that Time Magazine would harken back to the days of the founding fathers as inspiration and motivation for their readers.

World War II creates an interest trend, as it is not uniform across Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus. The founding fathers display no uniform growth as would be expected during a time of external conflict, especially on the scale of World War II. In the Time Magazine Corpus, mentions of the founding fathers fade in the 1940s, yet on Google n-gram the decline in the mentions does not begin until the 1950s. Since the decline in mentions of the founding fathers does not begin until the 1950s, the lack of a spike specifically for World War II can be explained through the continued importance of the founding fathers. The Great Depression did not end until the United States entered World War II, moving from one period of stress into another. On Google n-gram the founding fathers remain relevant throughout World War II, because authors were still trying to make sense of what they perceived to be the end of the world using the founding fathers for reassurance and direction. The Time Magazine Corpus
shows a decline in the mentions of all founding fathers in the 1940s compared to the 1930s, except for Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. This can be explained with a closer analysis of the actual numbers on the graph of mentions in the Time Magazine Corpus between 1930 and 1949. The data is for each decade as a whole, and as it is seen below, most of the differences are not very large. It reveals that the authors of Time Magazine relied on the founding fathers to communicate with audience slightly more regularly during the Great Depression than in World War II. The only exception to this trend is George Washington, who caused a significant increase and then decrease in the 1930s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>1930s</th>
<th>1940s</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Increase/Decrease in mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Washington</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Lincoln</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Franklin</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Jefferson</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Adams</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Hamilton</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Jackson</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only abnormal trend left to discuss is the lack of increased mentions of any of the founding fathers during the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. While mentions did fluctuate up and down, there was not a large spike in the amount of times Google n-gram or the Time Magazine Corpus recorded mentions of any of the founding fathers like they did in previous historical social or international conflicts. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech outside of the Lincoln Memorial, further solidifying how Lincoln has become a synonym for freedom, yet Lincoln does not have a huge spike in his amount of

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16 Data compiled from the Time Magazine Corpus
mentions during the 1960s and 70s. During the 1960s and 1970s, counterculture became one example of social pushback against the rhetoric of the 1950s uniformity. This included pushback against the idea of following in the footsteps of anybody, particularly the founding fathers. The Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal shook the faith of many Americans in the ideals and values of American society and many people became disillusioned with the American identity. Perhaps this process did not ingratiate the previous rhetoric of the founding father with the authors and readers of the time, causing the founding fathers to fall out of grace in the public’s eyes. Books and articles referencing the founding fathers may not have been seen as a profitable enterprise.

**Discussion**

One of the greatest features of digital tools such as Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus is their ability to study trends using large amounts of data over a long period of time, and its ability to focus research, especially in this case. Without digital tools it would be impossible to calculate the numbers of times individuals or terms occurred in texts over a three hundred year period. The trends in mentions of the founding fathers demonstrate when certain values of the past were more common and allow a study to focus in on those areas to understand why these trends might occur. Noting the existence of these trends and their relationships with each other also reveals interesting details about American identity. Even though these are not conclusive results, the consistent correlation between spikes on founding fathers and times of conflict reflect how deeply entwined these figures have become with what it meant to be an American until the 1960s and 70s.

These spikes did not happen by chance, as these identities have been carefully crafted over generations into models of “Americanness,” and these figures provided instruction and
motivation on how citizens and the country should act.\textsuperscript{17} Anti-government protests in the 60s and 70s, counterculture, and disillusionment broke out of these molds of idolizing past figures, which is reflected in the results. Using context, macroanalysis reveals trends in how historic figures were mentioned more often in times of national crisis, indicating that Americans turned to the past for help and reassurance; how this manifests itself changes in the 1960s and 70s.

In conjunction with each other, Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus reveal the similarities and differences between a general audience and the authors and readers of published books. While both show spikes related to times of crisis, the magazine audience is more focused on internal issues that can be seen in their daily lives. Authors of books and their publishers seek out historic figures and ideals to explain crises both internal and external.

Macroanalysis also proves difficult, as it is extraordinarily easy to make sweeping generalizations instead of nuanced notations on trends. Macroanalysis can point historians to unique places of history and to areas that divert from the norms that came before them, but it cannot hope to fully explain the trends it reveals.\textsuperscript{18} Put into conversation with each other, macroanalysis and close readings reveal a complete narrative of how and why the founding fathers came to represent different values to Americans throughout their collective history. For example, sometimes individual trends can be explained by macroanalysis, like how Lincoln’s line reaches its peak in 1924, two years after the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial, but these trends beg larger questions – why does Lincoln get a monument in 1922? What does this dedication to Lincoln’s memory and the spike of books written about Lincoln building up to 1924 imply about America? For this reason, macroanalysis is useful for finding places to


\textsuperscript{18} Jockers, 26.
highlight trends that otherwise might have gone unnoticed and locate areas to perform close readings.

Close Reading

The second portion of this paper is devoted to the contextualizing the results of Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus in the areas that macroanalysis revealed interesting trends. A close reading can be thought of as finding interesting trends and proceeding to study the particular and peculiar time period more closely. In the context of this paper, a close reading includes looking at Google n-gram during the 1850s-80s to understand why John Adams was an extraordinarily popular subject and why he faded from prominence alongside Andrew Jackson. Following John Adams is an in-depth study of George Washington using both Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus in the 1930s. The section concludes with an attempt to understand the irregular trends during the 1940s and what was said about the founding fathers at that time. The tone of these texts reveals that the authors and readers consistently venerated the founding fathers and their ideals.

1850-1880

![Graph showing trends from 1850 to 1880]

19 Google n-gram search without Abraham Lincoln 1850-1880.
In between 1850 and 1880, mentions of John Adams and Andrew Jackson soared. At a time when the other founding fathers displayed relatively smooth periods of growth, John Adams and Andrew Jackson demonstrate unusually sharp spikes. Looking closely at the Google n-gram results for both John Adams and Andrew Jackson at these times reveals what was being said about these historical figures during the mid to late 1800s and why they might have had spikes in their mentions.

Looking at the Google n-gram results for John Adams at this time reveals two types of sources that were heavily published in this era: primary source documents and historical texts about the American Revolution. Several of John Adam’s speeches and letters were published in the 1850s and 60s alongside history books placing these newly published primary sources into conversation with the Revolutionary War and other key figures that do not appear in this study such as John Jay and Patrick Henry. These publications indicate that John Adams was present in the minds of Americans during the buildup to the Civil War more so than he was before or afterwards. His rise and fall shows that at least one of the founding father was more discussed during the time before the Civil War when the nation was more divided than ever. It could be argued that the publication of John Adams speeches and letters was caused by their discovery, not on purpose. However, the fact that there were individuals were looking for sources on John Adams and that there was a market for these texts and documents indicates that at this time, the public wanted to learn more about John Adams and his values and words prior to and after the Civil War.

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20 Another interesting point for further study would be to consider why certain historical figures are popular during different eras. Why is it that John Jay and Patrick Henry were common names in the 1850s but have been relatively forgotten by the general public today? This would also relate to the fact the John Adams was the most popular of the founding fathers in this study until the 1890s and now he sits as the second to last discussed of the founding fathers.
Andrew Jackson presents a much more uniform rise to relevance during the late 1850s until the end of the Civil War. The spike begins in 1855 ten years after Andrew Jackson’s death, with works being published about his life and achievements. These new biographies exalt Jackson’s life and personality in a way that indicates Jackson had become a role-model for other American citizens. One biography states

There is no ordinary obstacle that can thwart or defeat a well directed and prudent ambition – momentary it may be, but the courage and determination of the human heart are not easily foiled; and when a point is fixed in the distance, it is almost invariably attained. The life of Andrew Jackson is full proof of this position, and the experience of every day life confirms it. The American presidents were all “self made men” – by perseverance they were elevated to a point of political prominence, which is above and beyond all others. Let the proud motto of our flag be engraved upon the heart of American youth; “Virtue, Liberty, and Independence,” and the perpetuity of that government which our ancestors regarded as an “experiment” will be certain. And the illustrious hero of New Orleans [Andrew Jackson], by his acts and deeds – by his habits and conduct, has been among the foremost of those who have given a character and tone to our country, that have placed her high upon the great scroll of nations. Let those who could share his honours [sic] imitate his example.\(^{21}\)

As is indicated by the tone of this biography, Jackson has clearly come to represent model for American values and serve as an example for both the readers of Jackson’s biography and future generations of Americans. He demonstrates the values of being “self made” and alongside national values of “Virtue, Liberty, and Independence.” Published in 1861, the year the Civil War began, this text reveals that at the time the nation was literally split in two, Americans consumed works that glorified the founding fathers and relied on them for moral guidance.

George Washington in the 1920s-1930s

The trend of discussing the founding fathers continues in the 1920s-1930s following World War I and continuing through the Great Depression, especially mentions of George Washington. On both Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus, mentions of George Washington rise faster and at the highest frequency of any of the founding father before or after

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22 Google n-gram just George Washington 1920-1940
23 Time Magazine Corpus only George Washington 1923 (Magazine start date) – 1949, note year ends in 1949 because data was assembled based on average per decade, the time period for the 1940s includes articles published in December of 1949.
the 1930s. Mentions of George Washington make it clear that following World War I and throughout the Great Depression, Americans relied on the rhetoric the first president and his status to provide moral guidance and to serve as a reminder of the potential of the nation. In a close reading of both Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus, George Washington is mentioned in the context of creating memorials and the invocation of his name is used as representation of democracy and freedom. A surprising number of articles in Time Magazine discuss the centennial of Simon Bolivar’s death, and each time the Magazine refers to Bolivar, he is called the “George Washington of South America.” In this use of George Washington as a representation of freedom worldwide, Time Magazine makes it clear how the general American public understood George Washington.24

Studying what was said about George Washington during his massive rise in popularity during the 1930s reveals how the public consumed this presentation of the first president. A Time Magazine article titled “N.E.A.” published on December 18th, 1927 which promoted more funding for education stated “in the teachers’ trust lies the perpetuity of the U. S. They keep alive George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, et al, [sic] for rising generations. So said President Francis G. Blair of N. E. A.[National Education Association]”25 Here, George Washington is put into conversation with other founding fathers to promote education so children will learn from the example of the founding fathers and their moral values. Keeping knowledge of the founding fathers alive was a strong enough rhetorical device in 1927 that the President of the NEA used it to convince readers of Time Magazine to provide more funding for schools.

24 More could be said about the comparison between George Washington and Simon Bolivar that came out this analysis. Both men became symbols of freedom and have been called fathers of the their nations. Using Google n-gram reveals that this comparison did not arise until the 1920s, and it rose and fell drastically in the years between 1920 and 2000.

Additionally, the memorialization of George Washington through the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Washington D.C. represents several different facets of American identity. The Time Magazine Corpus repeatedly referenced the construction of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in the 1930s, which official began in 1931. This was part of a trend begun in 1927 suggested by President Calvin Coolidge to build highways to honor American presidents that would accommodate the ever-growing presence of cars in America. After the horrors of World War I and the during the daily turmoil of the Great Depression, Americans used the founding fathers to celebrate the America of the past and project it onto the America of their future. The George Washington Memorial Parkway denotes the intersection of past and present in 1931 as the Parkway was designed for relaxing afternoon drives, complete with scenic outlooks and picnic pullouts. Here, the memorialization of George Washington was used to lead America into the future with modern roads and leisurely comforts. In this case, using a close reading from Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus reveal that there were an extraordinary amount of mentions of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in the 1930s, indicating its practical significance to readers and the meaning of its creation as a memorial of George Washington. In the case of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, George Washington represents the stability and morals of the past in the face changing modern warfare in World War I and technological advancements in America.

The 1940s and World War II create an interesting point of comparison between Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus. Google n-gram reveals a small increase in the amount of mentions the founding fathers have during World War II with a relatively smooth decline into the 1960s equal for all of the founding fathers. However, the Time Magazine Corpus shows no

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27 Google n-gram search of all founding fathers between 1930-1959.
28 Time Magazine Corpus results compiled 1930-1959.
uniform trends. Only Thomas Jefferson and John Adams increased in their mentions in the magazine in the 1940s. A close reading of Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus will indicate what was being said in books and magazines at the time and how the founding fathers were treated.

Google n-gram denotes a small increase during World War II that reflects the nature of other increased mentions of the founding fathers during wartime. The works published in the 1940s also follow the trends in previous close readings. The majority of the works digitized on Google n-gram relate back to the publication of primary source papers alongside a growth in historical scholarship on the founding fathers. It reveals more of the same glorification of the founders as moral guides and representations of the freedoms that the country was involved in World War II to protect. At this time, the majority of the books published regarding the founding fathers were history books. All academic texts are reflections upon the time they were written, and the ones glorifying the founding fathers in the 1940s are no different. These texts reflect the rhetoric surrounding the founding fathers at the time and the presence of the founding fathers in these texts demonstrate that the founding fathers were used to promote American values and provide examples of proper behavior to US citizens during World War II.

The Time Magazine Corpus provides a different angle for interpretation. Time Magazine represents how the founding fathers were used in front of a consistent, general audience. These articles made direct comparisons to the founding fathers, especially Thomas Jefferson. While some of the articles were still related to sharing news about the publication of primary sources, other articles directly referred to Thomas Jefferson’s naval policies while he was president in comparison to the 1940s alongside articles that were book reviews of texts discussing the founding fathers. Further types of articles included references to Thomas Jefferson’s quotes and
intellect, demonstrating that Jefferson was both well-known to the general audience and that his legacy was important to the historical context within the articles. Even though the Time Magazine Corpus results show that the founding fathers were discussed at inconsistent rates compared to each other, it is apparent through a close reading of Thomas Jefferson that these figures were still significant to understanding American identity as they continued to be mentioned in contexts that implied the readers were aware of the importance of the founding fathers’ work, values, and stature throughout the 1940s.

Discussion

Close readings in the case of Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus reveal the ways in which authors and readers interpreted the importance of the founding fathers. The majority of the close readings revealed a plethora of primary sources and historical texts that were published at times of stress in American history that solidified the founding fathers as moral guideposts for citizens during their historical context. These close readings are key to understanding how the founding fathers were discussed within the trends made apparent through macroanalysis. If these results had only returned as medical texts published by George Washington University medical school or works condemning the founding fathers, it would show that Americans did not think as highly of their founding fathers as the macroanalysis indicated. In this study, the close reading did corroborate what the trending lines indicated: that Americans have consistently used the founding fathers during times of stress to explain perceived American virtues and to use the founding principles of the nation to inspire and lead the country into an unknown future.
Conclusion

Ultimately, the results indicate that the founding fathers have been idolized and more heavily invoked during times of internal and external stress in America. Macroanalysis demonstrates the trends during times of strife such as the Civil War and World War I and the haunting memory and memorials of both wars. The close readings reveal that during these trends, Google n-gram and the Time Magazine Corpus both documented mentions of the founding fathers’ speeches and letters alongside historical texts and contemporary efforts to use the founding fathers in memorials. As is seen from the image above, the founding fathers are still a part of everyday life in America, but in a different context. One of the limitations of this project is the time frame, as the Time Magazine Corpus only has data up until 2006, which does not provide material to form a comparison with the present. This study could be continued on using more recent search though Google trends that would likely include the surge of texts written on the founding fathers during the trend of “Founders Chic” It would also have important implications in relation to the musical “Hamilton” and Lin Manuel Miranda’s interpretation of the founding fathers.

This form of examination of the founding fathers using data analysis available through digital technology also reveals several new trends to explore in relation to how certain founding fathers have been memorialized and come to represent American ideals that are larger than the founding fathers could have possibly imagined in their lifetimes. This includes, and is not limited to, why John Adams was popular throughout the 19th century which peaked in late 1800s and has been declining through to the present. Another study that could capitalize off of digital tools

29 Photo taken by author
would be an attempt to understand how Abraham Lincoln became immortalized alongside the other founding fathers forty to fifty years after the other founding fathers died. Additionally, there could be further study of the founding fathers during the 1960s and 70s and what exactly was being discussed in their place or why they faded from popularity, however the nature of that field of inquiry makes it difficult to interpret using a close reading. Close reading is generally useful for finding out what was said, not what was not.

The project sought to explain how and when the founding fathers became relevant to American identity over the course of the nation’s two hundred plus years of history. Along the way it uncovered fascinating trends about how various founding fathers have been interpreted during different times of strife, leading to potential points of future research. Most importantly, this project revealed that the founding fathers have always been part of American identity through their representation of national values of Freedom and Democracy, which escalates during times of stress within the country. Even if the founding fathers were absentee during the 1960s and 1970s, their impact on Americans and the creation of American identity prior to then cannot be ignored.
Works Cited


“Lost Cause, The.” https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Lost_Cause_The#start_entry.


