

SSU OLLI: Suggested Readings: “Statesmen and Rogues: America’s Founding Fathers”

Week One: The Founding Fathers and The Enlightenment Roy Porter’s magnificent study of the Enlightenment in Great Britain entitled THE CREATION OF THE MODERN WORLD is one of the best works on the subject. Try also Steven Pinker’s ENLIGHTENMENT NOW.

Weeks Two: George Washington Many choices here. I would recommend HIS EXCELLENCY GEORGE WASHINGTON by Joseph Ellis, or Ron Chernow’s monumental WASHINGTON: A LIFE.

Week Three: Alexander Hamilton For the ambitious reader, Chernow again wins the prize with his ALEXANDER HAMILTON. For a (much) shorter summary of Hamilton—and all of the Founders—see Gordon Wood, REVOLUTIONARY CHARACTERS: WHAT MADE THE FOUNDERS DIFFERENT.

Week Four: Benjamin Franklin Literally hundreds of bios of Dr. Franklin, but the two best current studies are by Walter Isaacson and H.W. Brands

Week Five: James Madison I would go with JAMES MADISON by Garry Wills. Brief and penetrating. For a more in-depth study see JAMES MADISON BY Ralph Ketcham.

Week Six: Forgotten Founders I used Craig Nelson’s THOMAS PAINE while preparing this lecture, and found it to be very clear and entertaining. For a very readable and humorous look at the life of the Marquis de Lafayette, check out Sarah Vowell’s LAFAYETTE IN THE SOMEWHAT UNITED STATES. To learn more about Aaron Burr, see Nancy Isenberg’s FALLEN FOUNDER.

NOTE: ANYTHING by Gordon Wood or Joseph Ellis on the Revolution/Founders era will be most helpful.