

**LESSONS FROM “THE FOUNDING BROTHERS”**  
**November 22, 2002**

Joseph Ellis has written a powerful book with new insights on the “Founding Brothers” (ahem!) of the United States of America: Abigail and John Adams, Aaron Burr, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and George Washington. I urge you to read the book for good lessons on learning and teaching. Then, with usual synchronicity, PBS this week showed the fine documentary *Benjamin Franklin*.

The lesson that I took from both the book and the film was the deep-seated need we have to be conscious and to be explicit about what we are feeling! Ellis points out that the “elephant in the living room” of the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention and indeed of the first fifty years of this incongruent “republic” was slavery. These great men, otherwise wise and sage, creative and hard-working avoided the decision that would have perhaps rent the precarious, young union, and surely saved the 600,000 lives lost in the Civil War. They ran scared!

*Benjamin Franklin*, the documentary, showed how this good man got absorbed in his work and thoroughly neglected his good wife. He manipulated the appointment of his son, William, as governor of the colony of New Jersey and then complained bitterly when William would not side with his father against the Empire to which that Father had led him to swear allegiance. “I am betrayed” Franklin complained. He was both sad and mad.

I draw from all this that I must face the tough issues that I want to avoid in my life. I think of my friend, Jane Connor, who teaches Multicultural Psychology at SUNY Binghamton. She went to Israel this past summer in order to school herself in the Mid-East Issue. As she put it: “For years, I have avoided raising the basic multicultural Arab-Israeli question in that course. I always felt I did not know enough about the issue to address it.” So, this summer, of all times, she went to study in Israel!

I don’t want to betray or to feel betrayed. The way to feel glad about what we do in teaching and learning, and in life, is to face the “silent” issues courageously. As Carl Jung responded, when asked: “What is our purpose in life? To become conscious!”