

As Lin Manuel Miranda writes in his notes to the libretto of the show (in “Hamilton, the Revolution” which Miranda wrote with Jeremy McCarter), “Once I wrote this passage, I knew it would be the key to the whole musical... It’s the fundamental truth all our characters (and all of us) share.”

The line first appears in the song “History Has Its Eyes on You,” sung largely by George Washington, commonly known as the “Father of Our Nation.” But the play is more broadly about many of our “Founding Fathers,” including not only the titular and central character, Alexander Hamilton, but others including Aaron Burr, James Madison, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, of course, was the author of the Declaration of Independence, which was signed on July 4th and so makes this day what it is for citizens and residents of the United States.

It just so happens that the 4th of July falls on Shabbat this year, the Shabbat on which we read the combined parshiot of Hukat-Balak. Much of the Torah is about the founding fathers (and mothers) of our nation – the patriarchs and matriarchs of Genesis, Joseph and his brothers, Aaron and Miriam – but none more so than Moses (so much so that we also call the Torah the “Five Books of Moses”).

I’ve been sitting for some time with these two parshiot and trying to imagine what connections I could draw to today’s holiday in the United States, and struggling to come to a helpful answer. We’re in the midst of the book of Numbers at the moment, and this is a challenging book. In the last two weeks, we read about the disastrous end to a scouting mission into the Land and God’s determination that the Israelites will wander for ~~40 years and~~ the generation of the Exodus will die out, and then about the rebellion led by Korah. In the course of Hukat, Miriam dies, Moses strikes the rock instead of speaking to it and is condemned to die ~~before reaching the Land, Aaron dies, Balak is somewhat~~ more uplifting, perhaps, as the intent of the prophet Bilaam to curse the Israelites is turned to a blessing, but it also ends with an episode of Israelite rebellion and the zealotry of Pinhas.

But I think Lin Manuel Miranda has graciously found a key for me, and us, as well as for his own theatrical vision: “History Has Its Eyes on You.” And therefore: “Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?”

In “Hamilton,” Washington sings another highly significant song in the middle of the Second Act, “One Last

This email was sent to michelle.starkman@aju.edu.
To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.