

# WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

*The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*

## Introduction from *Founding Father*

RICHARD BROOKHISER

Page | 1

*What does George Washington (or any other Founding Father) mean to 21st-century Americans? Do we know him, admire him, look up to him? Much less than did our predecessors.<sup>1</sup> Concerned about this change, journalist and historian Richard Brookhiser (b. 1955) has tried to do something about it. He has crafted engaging “moral biographies”—like those written by the ancient Greek historian Plutarch, in his *Parallel Lives of Greek and Roman political figures*—of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris, and James Madison; and he has written and hosted television documentaries (with Michael Pack) on “Rediscovering George Washington” and “Rediscovering Alexander Hamilton.”<sup>2</sup> In this introduction to his 1996 biography, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*, Brookhiser shows how highly Washington was once regarded by leading Americans and how and why he has become, for us, more remote and even unimportant. Against the stream, he sets out his reasons for trying to revive interest in *The Founding Father*.*

*What does Brookhiser want us to see in the Trumbull paintings at the Capitol?<sup>3</sup> Why, according to the essay, has Washington become remote to us? How have both “humanizers” and “debunkers” contributed to this diminution of his heroic standing? How does Brookhiser propose to counter these tendencies? What does he mean by saying that “one must look for the man in the glare of public life”? What does he mean by “a moral biography”? Can Washington’s life, if properly told, still have, as Brookhiser*

---

<sup>1</sup> When the editors of this volume were growing up, in New York (AAK) and Chicago (LRK), there were portraits of Washington (and Lincoln) on the walls of most of their classrooms. They learned about these men in school. Washington’s Birthday, celebrated always on February 22, was a school holiday. Their children and grandchildren have not had this experience.

<sup>2</sup> Both of these documentaries can be viewed here: <http://manifoldproductions.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> View Trumbull’s four paintings at the Capitol—the Declaration of Independence, Surrender of General Burgoyne, Surrender of Lord Cornwallis, and General George Washington Resigning His Commission—at [www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/declaration-independence](http://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/declaration-independence), [www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/surrender-general-burgoyne](http://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/surrender-general-burgoyne), [www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/surrender-lord-cornwallis](http://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/surrender-lord-cornwallis), and [www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/general-george-washington-resigning-his-commission](http://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/historic-rotunda-paintings/general-george-washington-resigning-his-commission), respectively.

# WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

*The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*

*insists, “the power to inspire anyone who studies it”? Are you open to such a possibility yourself?*

Four of John Trumbull’s paintings of the American Revolution hang, vast and remote, over the heads of tourists in the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington, but to see the complete series, in its original small scale and up close, you must visit the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut. The depictions of George Washington that are included in the series are not the only good portraits of him, but they are the best historical portraits: images that put him in context. What they say about him, and (by implication) ourselves, is still worth pondering.

Page | 2

Read the rest of Brookhiser’s “Introduction” in *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*: <http://www.amazon.com/Founding-Father-Rediscovering-George-Washington/dp/0684831422>.



[www.whatsoproudlywehail.org](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org)