

A detailed oil painting of George Washington, shown from the chest up. He has white powdered hair, a serious expression, and is wearing a white cravat and a brown coat. The background is a soft, warm tone.

# WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY

*The American Calendar*

Amy A. Kass | Leon R. Kass

# THE MEANING OF GEORGE WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY

The American Calendar

Amy A. Kass | Leon R. Kass

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Cover: Rembrandt Peale, *George Washington*, c. 1858. Oil on Canvas.  
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\* Suitable for students grades 5–8

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George Washington's Birthday:  
An American Holiday

## The Origins and Traditions of George Washington's Birthday Holiday

Remembering the birthday of George Washington—February 22, 1732—should be a particularly cherished national obligation. Americans celebrated Washington's Birthday long before Congress in 1879 declared it a holiday for federal workers in the District of Columbia, and, in 1885, a holiday for federal employees everywhere. It was celebrated at Valley Forge in 1778, and, after the Founding, it was annually, if unofficially, marked throughout the new republic. Writing in *American History*, historian Richard Brookhiser notes, "No need to say whose birthday, or who the big man was; February 22, as every American knew, was the birthday of President George Washington, the biggest man in the infant United States."<sup>1</sup>

In 1832, as the centennial of Washington's birth approached, Congress debated how best to honor the Founding Father who, according to fellow Virginian Henry Lee, was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Kentucky Senator Henry Clay suggested that the federal government remove Washington's body from his home at Mount Vernon and that a tomb be erected within the US Capitol—an idea originally proposed by John Marshall (future Supreme Court Justice) and unanimously approved by Congress in 1799, but delayed indefinitely due to lack of funding. However, by 1832, regional and political differences made the proposal much more divisive, with Virginia Senator John Tyler declaring that a removal of Washington's body from his state would impede on Virginia's rights. He urged Congress to refrain from exhibiting Washington "in the Capitol as a spectacle to a gaping crowd."<sup>2</sup> Southern congressmen agreed with the Virginians (and Senator John Forsythe of Georgia even read aloud Washington's will, which designated Mount Vernon as his burial place), while those from northern states tended to favor the transfer. Eventually, the bill passed (109-76 in the House and 29-15 in the Senate), but Washington's heirs declined the federal application, and Washington remains entombed "on the banks of the Potomac, & under the shadow of [his] own Vine & [his] own Fig tree" at Mount Vernon.<sup>3</sup>

For all the debate over Washington's final burial place, the centennial of Washington's birthday was celebrated with parades, orations, and festivals across the country, and Congress itself adjourned for the day out of respect for his memory.

Thirty years later, in 1862, the Union threatened by Civil War, Congress chose to celebrate the 130th anniversary of Washington's birthday by reading the first president's Farewell Address to the nation.<sup>4</sup> A group of citizens from Philadelphia had petitioned

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Brookhiser, "A Birthday Every American Should Remember," *American History* 47, no. 6 (February 2013): 42–45.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Costello, "Centennial of Washington's Birthday," Mount Vernon Digital Encyclopedia, [www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/encyclopedia/birthday-centennial](http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/encyclopedia/birthday-centennial).

<sup>3</sup> George Washington, Letter to the Marquis de Lafayette from Mount Vernon, February 1, 1784. See below.

<sup>4</sup> George Washington, Farewell Address, September 19, 1796. See below.

Congress to this effect, and Tennessee Senator Andrew Johnson made the motion in the Senate. "In view of the perilous condition of the country," he said, "I think the time has arrived when we should recur back to the days, the times, and the doings of Washington and the patriots of the Revolution, who founded the government under which we live."<sup>5</sup> On February 22, Congress met in a joint session and, joined by members of the Supreme Court, military officers, and members of President Abraham Lincoln's cabinet (Lincoln himself, whose son Willie had died two days earlier, did not attend), listened as Secretary of the Senate John W. Forney read Washington's Farewell Address.

In 1888, the Senate reintroduced this ceremony and, within a few years, made its observance an annual tradition. Every year since 1896, the body has selected one of its members to read the Farewell Address aloud, in legislative session, in honor of Washington's Birthday. (Unfortunately, this tradition has lost much of the attention it once held among members of the Senate. In 2012, only two senators—Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, who was reading the address, and Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, who was presiding over the Senate—were in the chamber at the time of the reading.<sup>6</sup>)

On February 22, 1927, President Calvin Coolidge addressed a joint session of Congress to officially commence the planning of festivities for the 1932 bicentennial of Washington's birthday, declaring that Washington "was the directing spirit without which there would have been no independence, no Union, no Constitution, and no Republic."<sup>7</sup> Five years later, President Herbert Hoover addressed the same body as towns across the nation held public festivals, parades, and speeches to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the nation's first president.

In 1968, the tradition of honoring Washington on his actual birthday changed. That year, members of Congress approved, and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law, the Uniform Monday Holiday Act to "provide uniform annual observances of certain legal public holidays on Mondays."<sup>8</sup> By creating more three-day weekends, Congress hoped to "bring substantial benefits to both the spiritual and economic life of the Nation,"<sup>9</sup> while preventing midweek holiday interruptions. When signing the act, Johnson noted, "This will mean a great deal to our families and our children. It will enable families who live some distance apart to spend more time together."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> US Senate Historical Minutes, "February 22, 1862, Washington's Farewell Address," [www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Washingtons\\_Farewell\\_Address.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Washingtons_Farewell_Address.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Josiah Ryan, "Senators Skip 150th Reading of George Washington's Farewell Address," *The Hill*, February 27, 2012, <http://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/senate/212783-senators-skip-150th-reading-of-george-washingtons-farewell-address>.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin Coolidge, Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 22, 1927, in *History of the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration*, Vol. II (Washington, DC: George Washington Bicentennial Commission, 1932), 2, <http://archive.org/stream/historyofgeorgew02geor#page/2/mode/2up>.

<sup>8</sup> Uniform Monday Holiday Act, Pub. L. No. 90-363, Stat. (June 28, 1968), [www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2004/winter/images/uniform-monday-holiday-law.jpg](http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2004/winter/images/uniform-monday-holiday-law.jpg).

<sup>9</sup> "George Washington's Birthday," National Archives, [www.archives.gov/legislative/features/washington/](http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/washington/).

<sup>10</sup> John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, "342—Statement by the President Upon Signing the Uniform Holiday Bill. June 28, 1968," The American Presidency Project, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=28963](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=28963).

Decades later, the practical benefits of the holiday have come to be realized, as many Americans use the holiday for vacation or bargain-hunting. Washington's Birthday is now celebrated on the third Monday in February—and therefore *never* on February 22—as a grateful nation enjoys the “spiritual and economic” benefits of Washington's Birthday Mattress Day Sales.

To add to the confusion, the Uniform Monday Holiday Act also included a provision, championed by Illinois Senator Robert McClory, to change the name of Washington's Birthday to Presidents' Day, given the day's proximity to Abraham Lincoln's birthday on February 12. Congress did not approve McClory's proposal, but many states did, with the result that, by the mid-1980s, the day was known to most Americans as Presidents' Day. Although the federal holiday remains Washington's Birthday, the change in the popular conception of the day has caused confusion regarding whether we are honoring only Washington and his fellow February giant, Lincoln, or all the presidents, regardless of merit.

# The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*How do we American citizens develop attachment to and affection for the United States? What role do our founding documents (the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution) and principles play in making patriots? How important is national memory of important events and great leaders? These questions were much on the mind of an aspiring young politician named Abraham Lincoln (1809–65) who, on January 28, 1838 gave this speech to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois on “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions,” in which he articulated the need for a “political religion” to secure “the attachment of the People” to the Republic.*

*What does Lincoln mean by political religion, and why is it necessary? Why does he suppose a danger to the perpetuation of our political institutions? Toward the end of his speech, Lincoln speaks about the founding generation, “a forest of giant oaks” that “were pillars of the temple of liberty,” whose now crumbling places must be replaced “with other pillars hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason.” What precisely does he have in mind? At the end of the speech, after speaking of the importance of cold, calculating reason, Lincoln invokes George Washington. Why does he do so? What place does Lincoln give Washington in America’s new political religion? Has Lincoln in this speech unintentionally provided a reason for making Washington’s birthday a national holiday?*

As a subject for the remarks of the evening, *the perpetuation of our political institutions*, is selected.

In the great journal of things happening under the sun, we, the American People, find our account running, under date of the nineteenth century of the Christian era. We find ourselves in the peaceful possession, of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate. We find ourselves under the government of a system of political institutions, conducing more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty, than any of which the history of former times tells us. We, when mounting the stage of existence, found ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings. We toiled not in the acquirement or establishment of them—they are a legacy bequeathed us, by a *once* hardy, brave, and patriotic, but *now* lamented and departed race of ancestors. Their’s was the task (and nobly they performed it) to possess themselves, and through themselves, us, of this goodly land; and to uprear upon its hills and its valleys, a political edifice of liberty and equal rights; ’tis ours only, to transmit these, the former, unprofaned by the foot of an invader; the latter, undecayed by the lapse of time, and untorn by usurpation—to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know. This task of gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity, and love for our species in general, all imperatively require us faithfully to perform.

How, then, shall we perform it? At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

I hope I am over wary; but if I am not, there is, even now, something of ill-omen amongst us. I mean the increasing disregard for law which pervades the country; the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions, in lieu of the sober judgement of Courts; and the worse than savage mobs, for the executive ministers of justice. This disposition is awfully fearful in any community; and that it now exists in ours, though grating to our feelings to admit, it would be a violation of truth, and an insult to our intelligence, to deny. Accounts of outrages committed by mobs, form the every-day news of the times. They have pervaded the country, from New England to Louisiana;—they are neither peculiar to the eternal snows of the former, nor the burning suns of the latter;—they are not the creature of climate—neither are they confined to the slaveholding, or the non-slaveholding States. Alike, they spring up among the pleasure hunting masters of Southern slaves, and the order loving citizens of the land of steady habits. Whatever, then, their cause may be, it is common to the whole country. . . .

*(Here, in three paragraphs, Lincoln recounts recent episodes of lawlessness and mob rule in Mississippi and in St. Louis.)*

But you are, perhaps, ready to ask, “What has this to do with the perpetuation of our political institutions?” I answer, it has much to do with it. Its direct consequences are, comparatively speaking, but a small evil; and much of its danger consists, in the proneness of our minds, to regard its direct, as its only consequences. . . . Thus, then, by the operation of this mobocratic spirit, which all must admit, is now abroad in the land, the strongest bulwark of any Government, and particularly of those constituted like ours, may effectually be broken down and destroyed—I mean the *attachment* of the People. Whenever this effect shall be produced among us; whenever the vicious portion of population shall be permitted to gather in bands of hundreds and thousands, and burn churches, ravage and rob provision stores, throw printing presses into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons at pleasure, and with impunity; depend on it, this Government cannot last. By such things, the feelings of the best citizens will become more or less alienated from it; and thus it will be left without friends, or with too few, and those few too weak, to make their friendship effectual. At such a time and under such circumstances, men of sufficient talent and ambition will not be wanting to seize the opportunity, strike the blow, and overturn that fair fabric, which for the last half century, has been the fondest hope, of the lovers of freedom, throughout the world.

I know the American People are *much* attached to their Government;—I know they would suffer *much* for its sake;—I know they would endure evils long and patiently, before they would ever think of exchanging it for another. Yet, notwithstanding all this, if the laws be continually despised and disregarded, if their rights to be secure in their persons and property, are held by no better tenure than the caprice of a mob, the alienation of their affections from the Government is the natural consequence; and to that, sooner or later, it must come.

Here then, is one point at which danger may be expected.

The question recurs "how shall we fortify against it?" The answer is simple. Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of seventy-six did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and Laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor;—let every man remember that to violate the law, is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the character of his own, and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap—let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges;—let it be written in Primmers, spelling books, and in Almanacs;—let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the *political religion* of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.

While ever a state of feeling, such as this, shall universally, or even, very generally prevail throughout the nation, vain will be every effort, and fruitless every attempt, to subvert our national freedom. . . .

*(Here, Lincoln speaks about bad laws and the need both to repeal them but to obey them while they remain in force.)*

But, it may be asked, why suppose danger to our political institutions? Have we not preserved them for more than fifty years? And why may we not for fifty times as long?

We hope there is no *sufficient* reason. We hope all dangers may be overcome; but to conclude that no danger may ever arise, would itself be extremely dangerous. There are now, and will hereafter be, many causes, dangerous in their tendency, which have not existed heretofore; and which are not too insignificant to merit attention. That our government should have been maintained in its original form from its establishment until now, is not much to be wondered at. It had many props to support it through that period, which now are decayed, and crumbled away. Through that period, it was felt by all, to be an undecided experiment; now, it is understood to be a successful one. Then, all that sought celebrity and fame, and distinction, expected to find them in the success of that experiment. Their *all* was staked upon it:—their destiny was *inseparably* linked with it. Their ambition aspired to display before an admiring world, a practical demonstration of

the truth of a proposition, which had hitherto been considered, at best no better, than problematical; namely, *the capability of a people to govern themselves*. If they succeeded, they were to be immortalized; their names were to be transferred to counties and cities, and rivers and mountains; and to be revered and sung, and toasted through all time. If they failed, they were to be called knaves and fools, and fanatics for a fleeting hour; then to sink and be forgotten. They succeeded. The experiment is successful; and thousands have won their deathless names in making it so. But the game is caught; and I believe it is true, that with the catching, end the pleasures of the chase. This field of glory is harvested, and the crop is already appropriated. But new reapers will arise, and *they*, too, will seek a field. It is to deny, what the history of the world tells us is true, to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us. And, when they do, they will as naturally seek the gratification of their ruling passion, as others have *so* done before them. The question then, is, can that gratification be found in supporting and maintaining an edifice that has been erected by others? Most certainly it cannot. Many great and good men sufficiently qualified for any task they should undertake, may ever be found, whose ambition would inspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial or a presidential chair; *but such belong not to the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle*. What! think you these places would satisfy an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon? Never! Towering genius disdains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored. It sees *no distinction* in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others. It *denies* that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It *scorns* to tread in the footsteps of *any* predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen. Is it unreasonable then to expect, that some man possessed of the loftiest genius, coupled with ambition sufficient to push it to its utmost stretch, will at some time, spring up among us? And when such a one does, it will require the people to be united with each other, attached to the government and laws, and generally intelligent, to successfully frustrate his designs.

Distinction will be his paramount object; and although he would as willingly, perhaps more so, acquire it by doing good as harm; yet, that opportunity being past, and nothing left to be done in the way of building up, he would set boldly to the task of pulling down.

Here then, is a probable case, highly dangerous, and such a one as could not have well existed heretofore.

Another reason which *once was*; but which, to the same extent, is *now no more*, has done much in maintaining our institutions thus far. I mean the powerful influence which the interesting scenes of the revolution had upon the *passions* of the people as distinguished from their judgment. By this influence, the jealousy, envy, and avarice, incident to our nature, and so common to a state of peace, prosperity, and conscious strength, were, for the time, in a great measure smothered and rendered inactive; while the deep rooted principles of *hate*, and the powerful motive of *revenge*, instead of being turned against each other, were directed exclusively against the British nation. And thus, from the force of circumstances, the basest principles of our nature, were either made to

lie dormant, or to become the active agents in the advancement of the noblest cause—that of establishing and maintaining civil and religious liberty.

But this state of feeling *must fade, is fading, has faded*, with the circumstances that produced it.

I do not mean to say, that the scenes of the revolution *are now or ever will be* entirely forgotten; but that like every thing else, they must fade upon the memory of the world, and grow more and more dim by the lapse of time. In history, we hope, they will be read of, and recounted, so long as the bible shall be read;—but even granting that they will, their influence *cannot be* what it heretofore has been. Even then, they *cannot be* so universally known, nor so vividly felt, as they were by the generation just gone to rest. At the close of that struggle, nearly every adult male had been a participator in some of its scenes. The consequence was, that of those scenes, in the form of a husband, a father, a son or a brother, a *living history* was to be found in every family—a history bearing the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity, in the limbs mangled, in the scars of wounds received, in the midst of the very scenes related—a history, too, that could be read and understood alike by all, the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned. But *those* histories are gone. They *can* be read no more forever. They *were* a fortress of strength; but, what invading foeman could *never do*, the silent artillery of time *has done*; the leveling of its walls. They are gone. They *were* a forest of giant oaks; but the all resistless hurricane has swept over them, and left only, here and there, a lonely trunk, despoiled of its verdure, shorn of its foliage; unshading and unshaded, to murmur in a few more gentle breezes, and to combat with its mutilated limbs, a few more ruder storms, then to sink, and be no more.

They *were* the pillars of the temple of liberty; and now, that they have crumbled away, that temple must fall, unless we, their descendants, supply their places with other pillars, hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason. Passion has helped us; but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all the materials for our future support and defence. Let those materials be moulded into *general intelligence, sound morality* and, in particular, *a reverence for the constitution and laws*; and, that we improved to the last; that we remained free to the last; that we revered his name to the last; that, during his long sleep, we permitted no hostile foot to pass over or desecrate his resting place; shall be that which to learn the last trump shall awaken our WASHINGTON.

Upon these let the proud fabric of freedom rest, as the rock of its basis; and as truly as has been said of the only greater institution, "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"

# The Character of Washington

DANIEL WEBSTER

*On February 22, 1832, the centennial birthday of George Washington, a number of gentlemen, members of Congress and others, from different parts of the Union, celebrated the occasion by a public dinner in the city of Washington. After dinner, Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts (1782–1852) gave this (excerpted) address, which remains one of the greatest speeches commemorating our founding president. Why, according to Webster, should Washington's birthday be celebrated? For what virtues of character does Webster praise him? How does he characterize Washington's political principles, both of foreign and domestic policy? How relevant does Webster regard Washington's example and his teachings for Webster's own time and for America's future? Is Webster's view of the importance of George Washington and of celebrating his life still fitting today? Why or why not?*

I rise, Gentlemen, to propose to you the name of that great man, in commemoration of whose birth, and in honor of whose character and services, we are here assembled.

I am sure that I express a sentiment common to every one present, when I say that there is something more than ordinarily solemn and affecting in this occasion.

We are met to testify our regard for him whose name is intimately blended with whatever belongs most essentially to the prosperity, the liberty, the free institutions, and the renown of our country. That name was of power to rally a nation, in the hour of thick-thronging public disasters and calamities; that name shone, amid the storm of war, a beacon light, to cheer and guide the country's friends; it flamed, too, like a meteor, to repel her foes. That name, in the days of peace, was a loadstone, attracting to itself a whole people's confidence, a whole people's love, and the whole world's respect. That name, descending with all time, spreading over the whole earth, and uttered in all the languages belonging to the tribes and races of men, will for ever be pronounced with affectionate gratitude by every one in whose breast there shall arise an aspiration for human rights and human liberty.

We perform this grateful duty, Gentlemen, at the expiration of a hundred years from his birth, near the place, so cherished and beloved by him, where his dust now reposes, and in the capital which bears his own immortal name.

All experience evinces that human sentiments are strongly influenced by associations. The recurrence of anniversaries, or of longer periods of time, naturally freshens the recollection, and deepens the impression, of events with which they are historically connected. Renowned places, also, have a power to awaken feeling, which all acknowledge. No American can pass by the fields of Bunker Hill, Monmouth, and Camden, as if they were ordinary spots on the earth's surface. Whoever visits them feels the sentiment of love of country kindling anew, as if the spirit that belonged to the

transactions which have rendered these places distinguished still hovered round, with power to move and excite all who in future time may approach them.

But neither of these sources of emotion equals the power with which great moral examples affect the mind. When sublime virtues cease to be abstractions, when they become embodied in human character, and exemplified in human conduct, we should be false to our own nature, if we did not indulge in the spontaneous effusions of our gratitude and our admiration. A true lover of the virtue of patriotism delights to contemplate its purest models; and that love of country may be well suspected which affects to soar so high into the regions of sentiment as to be lost and absorbed in the abstract feeling, and becomes too elevated or too refined to glow with fervor in the commendation or the love of individual benefactors. All this is unnatural. . . . We may be assured, Gentlemen, that he who really loves the thing itself, loves its finest exhibitions. A true friend of his country loves her friends and benefactors, and thinks it no degradation to commend and commemorate them. The voluntary outpouring of the public feeling, made to-day, from the North to the South, and from the East to the West, proves this sentiment to be both just and natural. In the cities and in the villages, in the public temples and in the family circles, among all ages and sexes, gladdened voices to-day bespeak grateful hearts and a freshened recollection of the virtues of the Father of his Country. And it will be so, in all time to come, so long as public virtue is itself an object of regard. The ingenuous youth of America will hold up to themselves the bright model of Washington's example, and study to be what they behold; they will contemplate his character till all its virtues spread out and display themselves to their delighted vision . . . .

Gentlemen, we are at a point of a century from the birth of Washington; and what a century it has been! During its course, the human mind has seemed to proceed with a sort of geometric velocity, accomplishing for human intelligence and human freedom more than had been done in fives or tens of centuries preceding. Washington stands at the commencement of a new era, as well as at the head of the New World. A century from the birth of Washington has changed the world. The country of Washington has been the theatre on which a great part of that change has been wrought, and Washington himself a principal agent by which it has been accomplished. His age and his country are equally full of wonders; and of both he is the chief.

If the poetical prediction, uttered a few years before his birth, be true; if indeed it be designed by Providence that the grandest exhibition of human character and human affairs shall be made on this theatre of the Western world; if it be true that,

“The four first acts already past,  
A fifth shall close the drama with the day,  
Time's noblest offspring is the last”;—<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Bishop George Berkeley (1684–1753), On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America,* [www.berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org/history-notes/bishop-george-berkeley.html](http://www.berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org/history-notes/bishop-george-berkeley.html).

how could this imposing, swelling, final scene be appropriately opened, how could its intense interest be adequately sustained, but by the introduction of just such a character as our Washington?

Washington had attained his manhood when that spark of liberty was struck out in his own country, which has since kindled into a flame, and shot its beams over the earth. In the flow of a century from his birth, the world has changed in science, in arts, in the extent of commerce, in the improvement of navigation, and in all that relates to the civilization of man. But it is the spirit of human freedom, the new elevation of individual man, in his moral, social, and political character, leading the whole long train of other improvements, which has most remarkably distinguished the era. Society, in this century, has not made its progress, like Chinese skill, by a greater acuteness of ingenuity in trifles; it has not merely lashed itself to an increased speed round the old circles of thought and action; but it has assumed a new character; it has raised itself from *beneath* governments to a participation *in* governments; it has mixed moral and political objects with the daily pursuits of individual men; and, with a freedom and strength before altogether unknown, it has applied to these objects the whole power of the human understanding. It has been the era, in short, when the social principle has triumphed over the feudal principle; when society has maintained its rights against military power, and established, on foundations never hereafter to be shaken, its competency to govern itself.

It was the extraordinary fortune of Washington, that, having been intrusted, in revolutionary times, with the supreme military command, and having fulfilled that trust with equal renown for wisdom and for valor, he should be placed at the head of the first government in which an attempt was to be made on a large scale to rear the fabric of social order on the basis of a written constitution and of a pure representative principle. A government was to be established, without a throne, without an aristocracy, without castes, orders, or privileges; and this government, instead of being a democracy, existing and acting within the walls of a single city, was to be extended over a vast country, of different climates, interests, and habits, and of various communions of our common Christian faith. The experiment certainly was entirely new. A popular government of this extent, it was evident, could be framed only by carrying into full effect the principle of representation or of delegated power; and the world was to see whether society could, by the strength of this principle, maintain its own peace and good government, carry forward its own great interests, and conduct itself to political renown and glory. By the benignity of Providence, this experiment, so full of interest to us and to our posterity for ever, so full of interest, indeed, to the world in its present generation and in all its generations to come, was suffered to commence under the guidance of Washington. Destined for this high career, he was fitted for it by wisdom, by virtue, by patriotism, by discretion, by whatever can inspire confidence in man toward man. In entering on the untried scenes, early disappointment and the premature extinction of all hope of success would have been certain, had it not been that there did exist throughout the country, in a most extraordinary degree, an unwavering trust in him who stood at the helm.

I remarked, Gentlemen, that the whole world was and is interested in the result of this experiment. And is it not so? Do we deceive ourselves, or is it true that at this moment

the career which this government is running is among the most attractive objects to the civilized world? Do we deceive ourselves, or is it true that at this moment that love of liberty and that understanding of its true principles which are flying over the whole earth, as on the wings of all the winds, are really and truly of American origin? . . .

Gentlemen, the spirit of human liberty and of free government, nurtured and grown into strength and beauty in America, has stretched its course into the midst of the nations. Like an emanation from Heaven, it has gone forth, and it will not return void. It must change, it is fast changing, the face of the earth. Our great, our high duty is to show, in our own example, that this spirit is a spirit of health as well as a spirit of power; that its benignity is as great as its strength; that its efficiency to secure individual rights, social relations, and moral order, is equal to the irresistible force with which it prostrates principalities and powers. The world, at this moment, is regarding us with a willing, but something of a fearful admiration. Its deep and awful anxiety is to learn whether free states may be stable, as well as free; whether popular power may be trusted, as well as feared; in short, whether wise, regular, and virtuous self-government is a vision for the contemplation of theorists, or a truth established, illustrated, and brought into practice in the country of Washington.

Gentlemen, for the earth which we inhabit, and the whole circle of the sun, for all the unborn races of mankind, we seem to hold in our hands, for their weal or woe, the fate of this experiment. If we fail, who shall venture the repetition? If our example shall prove to be one, not of encouragement, but of terror, not fit to be imitated, but fit only to be shunned, where else shall the world look for free models? If this great *Western Sun* be struck out of the firmament, at what other fountain shall the lamp of liberty hereafter be lighted? What other orb shall emit a ray of glimmer, even, on the darkness of the world?

There is no danger of our overrating or overstating the important part which we are now acting in human affairs. It should not flatter our personal self-respect, but it should reanimate our patriotic virtues, and inspire us with a deeper and more solemn sense, both of our privileges and of our duties. We cannot wish better for our country, nor for the world, than that the same spirit which influenced Washington may influence all who succeed him; and that the same blessing from above, which attended his efforts, may also attend theirs.

The principles of Washington's administration are not left doubtful. They are to be found in the Constitution itself, in the great measures recommended and approved by him, in his speeches to Congress, and in that most interesting paper, his Farewell Address to the People of the United States. The success of the government under his administration is the highest proof of the soundness of these principles. And, after an experience of thirty-five years, what is there which an enemy could condemn? What is there which either his friends, or the friends of the country, could wish to have been otherwise? I speak, of course, of great measures and leading principles.

In the first place, all his measures were right in their intent. He stated the whole basis of his own great character, when he told the country, in the homely phrase of the proverb,

that honesty is the best policy. One of the most striking things ever said of him is, that "*he changed mankind's ideas of political greatness.*"<sup>12</sup> To commanding talents, and to success, the common elements of such greatness, he added a disregard of self, a spotlessness of motive, a steady submission to every public and private duty, which threw far into the shade the whole crowd of vulgar great. The object of his regard was the whole country. No part of it was enough to fill his enlarged patriotism. His love of glory, so far as that may be supposed to have influenced him at all, spurned every thing short of general approbation. It would have been nothing to him, that his partisans or his favorites outnumbered, or outvoted, or outmanaged, or outclamored, those of other leaders. He had no favorites; he rejected all partisanship; and, acting honestly for the universal good, he deserved, what he has so richly enjoyed, the universal love.

His principle it was to act right, and to trust the people for support; his principle it was not to follow the lead of sinister and selfish ends, nor to rely on the little arts of party delusion to obtain public sanction for such a course. Born for his country and for the world, he did not give up to party what was meant for mankind. The consequence is, that his fame is as durable as his principles, as lasting as truth and virtue themselves. While the hundreds whom party excitement, and temporary circumstances, and casual combinations, have raised into transient notoriety, sink again, like thin bubbles, bursting and dissolving into the great ocean, Washington's fame is like the rock which bounds that ocean, and at whose feet its billows are destined to break harmlessly for ever.

The maxims upon which Washington conducted our foreign relations were few and simple. The first was an entire and indisputable impartiality towards foreign states. He adhered to this rule of public conduct, against very strong inducements to depart from it, and when the popularity of the moment seemed to favor such a departure. In the next place, he maintained true dignity and unsullied honor in all communications with foreign states. It was among the high duties devolved upon him, to introduce our new government into the circle of civilized states and powerful nations. Not arrogant or assuming, with no unbecoming or supercilious bearing, he yet exacted for it from all others entire and punctilious respect. He demanded, and he obtained at once, a standing of perfect equality for his country in the society of nations; nor was there a prince or potentate of his day, whose personal character carried with it, into the intercourse of other states, a greater degree of respect and veneration.

He regarded other nations only as they stood in political relations to us. With their internal affairs, their political parties and dissensions, he scrupulously abstained from all interference; and, on the other hand, he repelled with spirit all such interference by others with us or our concerns. His sternest rebuke, the most indignant measure of his whole administration, was aimed against such an attempted interference. He felt it as an attempt to wound the national honor, and resented it accordingly.

The reiterated admonitions in his Farewell Address show his deep fears that foreign influence would insinuate itself into our counsels through the channels of domestic

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<sup>12</sup> *Quoting Fisher Ames (1758–1808), a Federalist politician and Representative in the US Congress from the 1st Congressional District of Massachusetts.*

dissension, and obtain a sympathy with our own temporary parties. Against all such dangers, he most earnestly entreats the country to guard itself. He appeals to its patriotism, to its self-respect, to its own honor, to every consideration connected with its welfare and happiness, to resist, at the very beginning, all tendencies towards such connection of foreign interests with our own affairs. With a tone of earnestness nowhere else found, even in his last affectionate farewell advice to his countrymen, he says, "Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence, (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens,) the jealousy of a free people ought to be *constantly* awake; since history and experience prove, that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government."

Lastly, on the subject of foreign relations, Washington never forgot that we had interests peculiar to ourselves. The primary political concerns of Europe, he saw, did not affect us. We had nothing to do with her balance of power, her family compacts, or her successions to thrones. We were placed in a condition favorable to neutrality during European wars, and to the enjoyment of all the great advantages of that relation. "Why, then," he asks us, "why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice?"

Indeed, Gentlemen, Washington's Farewell Address is full of truths important at all times, and particularly deserving consideration at the present. With a sagacity which brought the future before him, and made it like the present, he saw and pointed out the dangers that even at this moment most imminently threaten us. I hardly know how a greater service of that kind could now be done to the community, than by a renewed and wide diffusion of that admirable paper, and an earnest invitation to every man in the country to reperuse and consider it. Its political maxims are invaluable; its exhortations to love of country and to brotherly affection among citizens, touching; and the solemnity with which it urges the observance of moral duties, and impresses the power of religious obligation, gives to it the highest character of truly disinterested, sincere, parental advice.

The domestic policy of Washington found its pole-star in the avowed objects of the Constitution itself. He sought so to administer that Constitution, as to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty. These were objects interesting, in the highest degree, to the whole country, and his policy embraced the whole country.

Among his earliest and most important duties was the organization of the government itself, the choice of his confidential advisers, and the various appointments to office. This duty, so important and delicate, when a whole government was to be organized, and all its offices for the first time filled, was yet not difficult to him; for he had no sinister ends to accomplish, no clamorous partisans to gratify, no pledges to redeem, no object to be regarded but simply the public good. It was a plain, straightforward matter, a mere honest choice of men for the public service.

His own singleness of purpose, his disinterested patriotism, were evinced by the selection of his first Cabinet, and by the manner in which he filled the seats of justice, and other places of high trust. He sought for men fit for offices; not for offices which might suit men. Above personal considerations, above local considerations, above party considerations, he felt that he could only discharge the sacred trust which the country had placed in his hands, by a diligent inquiry after real merit, and a conscientious preference of virtue and talent. The whole country was the field of his selection. He explored that whole field, looking only for whatever it contained most worthy and distinguished. He was, indeed, most successful, and he deserved success for the purity of his motives, the liberality of his sentiments, and his enlarged and manly policy.

Washington's administration established the national credit, made provision for the public debt, and for that patriotic army whose interests and welfare were always so dear to him; and, by laws wisely framed, and of admirable effect, raised the commerce and navigation of the country, almost at once, from depression and ruin to a state of prosperity. Nor were his eyes open to these interests alone. He viewed with equal concern its agriculture and manufactures, and, so far as they came within the regular exercise of the powers of this government, they experienced regard and favor.

It should not be omitted, even in this slight reference to the general measures and general principles of the first President, that he saw and felt the full value and importance of the judicial department of the government. An upright and able administration of the laws he held to be alike indispensable to private happiness and public liberty. The temple of justice, in his opinion, was a sacred place, and he would profane and pollute it who should call any to minister in it, not spotless in character, not incorruptible in integrity, not competent by talent and learning, not a fit object of unhesitating trust.

Among other admonitions, Washington has left us, in his last communication to his country, an exhortation against the excesses of party spirit. A fire not to be quenched, he yet conjures us not to fan and feed the flame. Undoubtedly, Gentlemen, it is the greatest danger of our system and of our time. Undoubtedly, if that system should be overthrown, it will be the work of excessive party spirit, acting on the government, which is dangerous enough, or acting *in* the government, which is a thousand times more dangerous; for government then becomes nothing but organized party, and, in the strange vicissitudes of human affairs, it may come at last, perhaps, to exhibit the singular paradox of government itself being in opposition to its own powers, at war with the very elements of its own existence. Such cases are hopeless. As men may be protected against murder, but cannot be guarded against suicide, so government may be shielded from the assaults of external foes, but nothing can save it when it chooses to lay violent hands on itself.

Finally, Gentlemen, there was in the breast of Washington one sentiment so deeply felt, so constantly uppermost, that no proper occasion escaped without its utterance. From the letter which he signed in behalf of the Convention when the Constitution was sent out to the people, to the moment when he put his hand to that last paper in which he addressed his countrymen, the Union,—the Union was the great object of his thoughts. In that first letter he tells them that, to him and his brethren of the Convention, union

appears to be the greatest interest of every true American; and in that last paper he conjures them to regard that unity of government which constitutes them one people as the very palladium of their prosperity and safety, and the security of liberty itself. He regarded the union of these States less as one of our blessings, than as the great treasure-house which contained them all. Here, in his judgment, was the great magazine of all our means of prosperity; here, as he thought, and as every true American still thinks, are deposited all our animating prospects, all our solid hopes for future greatness. He has taught us to maintain this union, not by seeking to enlarge the powers of the government, on the one hand, nor by surrendering them, on the other; but by an administration of them at once firm and moderate, pursuing objects truly national, and carried on in a spirit of justice and equity.

The extreme solicitude for the preservation of the Union, at all times manifested by him, shows not only the opinion he entertained of its importance, but his clear perception of those causes which were likely to spring up to endanger it, and which, if once they should overthrow the present system, would leave little hope of any future beneficial reunion. Of all the presumptions indulged by presumptuous man, that is one of the rashest which looks for repeated and favorable opportunities for the deliberate establishment of a united government over distinct and widely extended communities. Such a thing has happened once in human affairs, and but once; the event stands out as a prominent exception to all ordinary history; and unless we suppose ourselves running into an age of miracles, we may not expect its repetition. . . .

Other misfortunes may be borne, or their effects overcome. If disastrous war should sweep our commerce from the ocean, another generation may renew it; if it exhaust our treasury, future industry may replenish it; if it desolate and lay waste our fields, still, under a new cultivation, they will grow green again, and ripen to future harvests. It were but a trifle even if the walls of yonder Capitol were to crumble, if its lofty pillars should fall, and its gorgeous decorations be all covered by the dust of the valley. All these might be rebuilt. But who shall reconstruct the fabric of demolished government? Who shall rear again the well-proportioned columns of constitutional liberty? Who shall frame together the skilful architecture which unites national sovereignty with State rights, individual security, and public prosperity? No, if these columns fall, they will be raised not again. Like the Coliseum and the Parthenon, they will be destined to a mournful, a melancholy immortality. Bitterer tears, however, will flow over them, than were ever shed over the monuments of Roman or Grecian art; for they will be the remnants of a more glorious edifice than Greece or Rome ever saw, the edifice of constitutional American liberty.

But let us hope for better things. Let us trust in that gracious Being who has hitherto held our country as in the hollow of his hand. Let us trust to the virtue and the intelligence of the people, and to the efficacy of religious obligation. Let us trust to the influence of Washington's example. Let us hope that that fear of Heaven which expels all other fear, and that regard to duty which transcends all other regard, may influence public men and private citizens, and lead our country still onward in her happy career. Full of these gratifying anticipations and hopes, let us look forward to the end of that century

which is now commenced. A hundred years hence, other disciples of Washington will celebrate his birth, with no less of sincere admiration than we now commemorate it. When they shall meet, as we now meet, to do themselves and him that honor, so surely as they shall see the blue summits of his native mountains rise in the horizon, so surely as they shall behold the river on whose banks he lived, and on whose banks he rests, still flowing on toward the sea, so surely may they see, as we now see, the flag of the Union floating on the top of the Capitol; and then, as now, may the sun in his course visit no land more free, more happy, more lovely, than this our own country!

Gentlemen, I propose—"THE MEMORY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON."

# The Vow of Washington

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

*In previous generations, Americans have celebrated not only Washington's birthday but also the anniversary of his inauguration as America's first president. This poem, composed by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–92), was read on April 30, 1889, at the centennial celebration of Washington's first taking the oath of presidential office in New York City. How does Whittier describe the scene and national mood? What was the vow of Washington, and why did "freedom's great experiment" succeed? How does the poet deal with the Civil War in relation to Washington's vow? Why is Washington's name "our Union-bond" and why should we "take on our lips the old Centennial vow"?*

The sword was sheathed: in April's sun  
Lay green the fields by Freedom won;  
And severed sections, weary of debates,  
Joined hands at last and were United States.

O City sitting by the Sea!  
How proud the day that dawned on thee,  
When the new era, long desired, began,  
And, in its need, the hour had found the man!

One thought the cannon salvos spoke,  
The resonant bell-tower's vibrant stroke,  
The voiceful streets, the plaudit-echoing halls,  
And prayer and hymn borne heavenward from St. Paul's!

How felt the land in every part  
The strong throb of a nation's heart,  
As its great leader gave, with reverent awe,  
His pledge to Union, Liberty, and Law!

That pledge the heavens above him heard,  
That vow the sleep of centuries stirred;  
In world-wide wonder listening peoples bent  
Their gaze on Freedom's great experiment.

Could it succeed? Of honor sold  
And hopes deceived all history told.  
Above the wrecks that strewed the mournful past,  
Was the long dream of ages true at last?

Thank God! the people's choice was just,  
The one man equal to his trust,

Wise beyond lore, and without weakness good,  
Calm in the strength of flawless rectitude!

His rule of justice, order, peace,  
Made possible the world's release;  
Taught prince and serf that power is but a trust,  
And rule, alone, which serves the ruled, is just;

That Freedom generous is, but strong  
In hate of fraud and selfish wrong,  
Pretence that turns her holy truths to lies,  
And lawless license masking in her guise.

Land of his love! with one glad voice  
Let thy great sisterhood rejoice;  
A century's suns o'er thee have risen and set,  
And, God be praised, we are one nation yet.

And still we trust the years to be  
Shall prove his hope was destiny,  
Leaving our flag, with all its added stars,  
Unrent by faction and unstained by wars.

Lo! where with patient toil he nursed  
And trained the new-set plant at first,  
The widening branches of a stately tree  
Stretch from the sunrise to the sunset sea.

And in its broad and sheltering shade,  
Sitting with none to make afraid,  
Were we now silent, through each mighty limb,  
The winds of heaven would sing the praise of him.

Our first and best!—his ashes lie  
Beneath his own Virginian sky.  
Forgive, forget, O true and just and brave,  
The storm that swept above thy sacred grave.

For, ever in the awful strife  
And dark hours of the nation's life,  
Through the fierce tumult pierced his warning word,  
Their father's voice his erring children heard.

The change for which he prayed and sought  
In that sharp agony was wrought;  
No partial interest draws its alien line

'Twi'xt North and South, the cypress and the pine!

One people now, all doubt beyond,  
His name shall be our Union-bond;  
We lift our hands to Heaven, and here and now.  
Take on our lips the old Centennial vow.

For rule and trust must needs be ours;  
Chooser and chosen both are powers  
Equal in service as in rights; the claim  
Of Duty rests on each and all the same.

Then let the sovereign millions, where  
Our banner floats in sun and air,  
From the warm palm-lands to Alaska's cold,  
Repeat with us the pledge a century old!

# To His Excellency General Washington

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

*This difficult poem, written in neoclassical style, is included in this collection partly because of the remarkable story of its author, partly to show how early the celebration of Washington began, and how widely he was admired. Phillis Wheatley (1753?–84) was born in Africa and brought in 1761 on a slave ship to Boston, where she was purchased by a Mr. Wheatley. But her extraordinary intelligence and character soon led the Wheatleys to treat her more as a family intimate than as a slave. Displaying a thirst for learning, she acquired, without formal schooling, a first-rate education and great familiarity with the best authors, and from an early age she wrote poetry; a volume of her verse was published in London when she was but 19 years old. This poem of martial hope and praise, written at the start of the American Revolution when the result was utterly in doubt, Wheatley sent to Washington on October 26, 1775. Washington replied in a personal letter on February 28, 1776.<sup>13</sup> Readers of the poem should know that “Columbia” was both a historical and poetic name used for America, and also the name of America’s female personification (later “Lady Liberty”).*

*How does Wheatley view the emerging Revolutionary War and how does she see Columbia’s armies? Who is the goddess of stanza two, and what is her role? How, in the third stanza, does Wheatley present the relation between Washington and the army? What, in the fourth stanza, is the place of Columbia among the nations? What, in the last stanza, does the poet wish for Washington and see as his just deserts? Would such a result be compatible with the spirit of liberty to which she is devoted?*

Celestial choir! enthron’d in realms of light,  
Columbia’s scenes of glorious toils I write.  
While freedom’s cause her anxious breast alarms,  
She flashes dreadful in refulgent<sup>14</sup> arms.  
See mother earth her offspring’s fate bemoan,  
And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!  
See the bright beams of heaven’s revolving light  
Involved in sorrows and the veil of night!

The goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,  
Olive and laurel binds Her golden hair:  
Wherever shines this native of the skies,  
Unnumber’d charms and recent graces rise.

Muse! bow propitious<sup>15</sup> while my pen relates

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<sup>13</sup> Read Washington’s letter to Phillis Wheatley here: <http://the-american-catholic.com/2010/04/06/george-washington-and-phillis-wheatley/>.

<sup>14</sup> Shining brightly.

<sup>15</sup> Giving or indicating a good chance of success; favorable.

How pour her armies through a thousand gates,  
As when Eolus<sup>16</sup> heaven's fair face deforms,  
Enwrapp'd in tempest and a night of storms;  
Astonish'd ocean feels the wild uproar,  
The refluent<sup>17</sup> surges beat the sounding shore;  
Or thick as leaves in Autumn's golden reign,  
Such, and so many, moves the warrior's train.  
In bright array they seek the work of war,  
Where high unfurl'd the ensign waves in air.  
Shall I to Washington their praise recite?  
Enough thou know'st them in the fields of fight.  
Thee, first in peace and honors—we demand  
The grace and glory of thy martial band.  
Fam'd for thy valour, for thy virtues more,  
Hear every tongue thy guardian aid implore!

One century scarce perform'd its destined round,  
When Gallic powers Columbia's fury found;  
And so may you, whoever dares disgrace  
The land of freedom's heaven-defended race!  
Fix'd are the eyes of nations on the scales,  
For in their hopes Columbia's arm prevails.  
Anon Britannia droops the pensive<sup>18</sup> head,  
While round increase the rising hills of dead.  
Ah! cruel blindness to Columbia's state!  
Lament thy thirst of boundless power too late.

Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,  
Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.  
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,  
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! be thine.

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<sup>16</sup> *In Greek myth, Aeolus was the ruler of the winds.*

<sup>17</sup> *Flowing back; ebbing.*

<sup>18</sup> *Engaged in, involving, or reflecting deep or serious thought.*

# Ode for Washington's Birthday

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES SR.

*Unlike Wheatley's poem before it, this poem by prominent physician and author Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. (1809–94), written for the Boston Mercantile Library Association's celebration of Washington's birthday on February 22, 1856, has us look back and remember the hero Washington and consider what it means to honor the nation's "Father." Writing just a few years before the outbreak of the Civil War (in which his son, the future Supreme Court justice and author Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. would fight), Holmes warns his readers to "doubt the patriot whose suggestions / strive a nation to divide!" These patriotic themes were common among a group of New England writers known as the Fireside Poets (whose members included Holmes, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and James Russell Lowell) who wrote for ordinary citizens and raised 19th century American poetry to the same level of popularity as that coming from England.*

*Why does Holmes believe that Washington's birthday is "Dearer still as ages flow"? Three times he invites us to "see" images of Washington, from birth to death. What picture of Washington does he create for us? More important than these "seeings," he asks us to "Hear the Father's dying voice." What, according to Holmes, is Washington's final teaching? And what should be the current generation's relation to Washington and his words? As 21st-century Americans bid "Welcome to the day returning," can we still hearken to our Father's counsel and heed his warning against national division?*

Welcome to the day returning,  
Dearer still as ages flow,  
While the torch of Faith is burning,  
Long as Freedom's altars glow!  
See the hero whom it gave us  
Slumbering on a mother's breast;  
For the arm he stretched to save us,  
Be its morn forever blest!

Vain is empire's mad temptation!  
Not for him an earthly crown!  
He whose sword has freed a nation  
Strikes the offered scepter down.  
See the throneless conqueror seated,  
Ruler by a people's choice;  
See the patriot's task completed;  
Hear the Father's dying voice:

"By the name that you inherit,  
By the sufferings you recall,

Cherish the fraternal spirit;  
Love your country first of all!  
Listen not to idle questions  
If its bands may be untied;  
Doubt the patriot whose suggestions  
Strive a nation to divide."

Father! we, whose ears have tingled  
With the discord notes of shame;  
We, whose sires their blood have mingled  
In the battle's thunder-flame,—  
Gathering, while this holy morning  
Lights the land from sea to sea,  
Hear thy counsel, heed thy warning;  
Trust us while we honor thee.

# Washington and Our Schools and Colleges

CHARLES W. ELIOT

*At least until the latter half of the 20th century learning about George Washington was a staple of American public education. His picture adorned the walls of many classrooms, and young people—including the editors of this book—grew up, as it were, under his gaze and in his continual presence. The importance of Washington to the civic mission of our schools and colleges is the subject of this speech, given in 1889 in New York City at the centennial celebration of Washington’s assuming the presidency, by Charles W. Eliot (1834–1926), the extraordinary president of Harvard University from 1869–1909. Eliot imagines the 8 million American children attending elementary schools, the 250,000 attending secondary schools, and the 60,000 students in colleges and universities, each receiving age-appropriate instruction regarding George Washington. What do these students learn, and why might it be important? Eliot then speaks on behalf of the 360,000 teachers of the United States: What is their work with respect to Washington, and why is it important? What does Eliot mean, in his last paragraph, by Washington’s “reward” and “influence”?*

The brief phrase—the schools and colleges of the United States—is a formal and familiar one; but what imagination can grasp the infinitude of human affections, powers, and wills which it really comprises? But let us forget the outward things called schools and colleges, and summon up the human beings. Imagine the eight million children actually in attendance at the elementary schools of the country brought before your view. Each unit in this mass speaks of a glad birth, a brightened home, a mother’s pondering heart, a father’s careful joy. In all that multitude, every little heart bounds and every eye shines at the name of Washington.

The two hundred and fifty thousand boys and girls in the secondary schools are getting a fuller view of this incomparable character than the younger children can reach. They are old enough to understand his civil as well as his military achievements. They learn of his great part in that immortal Federal convention of 1787, of his inestimable services in organizing and conducting through two Presidential terms the new Government,—services of which he alone was capable,—and of his firm resistance to misguided popular clamor. They see him ultimately victorious in war and successful in peace, but only through much adversity and many obstacles.

Next, picture to yourselves the sixty thousand students in colleges and universities—selected youth of keen intelligence, wide reading, and high ambition. They are able to compare Washington with the greatest men of other times and countries, and to appreciate the unique quality of his renown. They can set him beside the heroes of romance and history—beside David, Alexander, Pericles, Cæsar, Saladin, Charlemagne, Gustavus Adolphus, John Hampden, William the Silent, Peter of Russia, and Frederick

the Great,<sup>19</sup> only to find him a nobler human type than any one of them, more complete in his nature, more happy in his cause, and more fortunate in the issues of his career. They are taught to see in him a soldier whose sword wrought only mercy and justice for mankind; a statesman who steadied a remarkable generation of public men by his mental poise and exalted them by his singleness of heart; and a ruler whose exercise of power established for the time on earth a righteous government by all and for all.

And what shall I say on behalf of the three hundred and sixty thousand teachers of the United States? None of them are rich or famous; most of them are poor, retiring, and unnoticed; but it is they who are building a perennial monument to Washington. It is they who give him a million-tongued fame. They make him live again in the young hearts of successive generations, and fix his image there as the American ideal of a public servant. It is through the schools and colleges and the national literature that the heroes of any people win lasting renown; and it is through these same agencies that a nation is molded into the likeness of its heroes.

The commemoration of any one great event in the life of Washington and of the United States is well, but it is nothing compared with the incessant memorial of him which the schools and colleges of the country maintain from generation to generation. What a reward is Washington's! What an influence is his and will be! One mind and will transfused by sympathetic instruction into millions; one life pattern for all public men, teaching what greatness is and what the pathway to undying fame!

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<sup>19</sup> *David (c. 1040–970 BC), according to the Hebrew Bible, the second king of the Kingdom of Israel, and according to the New Testament Gospels of Matthew and Luke, an ancestor of Jesus; Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), a king of Macedon who, by the age of 30, had created one of the largest empires of the ancient world; Pericles (495–429 BC), the most prominent Greek statesmen, orator, and general of Athens during the city's Golden Age; Julius Cæsar (100–44 BC), a Roman general, statesman, consul, and author of Latin prose; Saladin (1137[?]-93), the first sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty; Charlemagne (742–814), the King of the Franks and the first Holy Roman Emperor; Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632), king of Sweden who established Sweden as a great military power; John Hampden (1595–1643), an English politician and one of the central figures of the English Civil War; William the Silent (1533–84), also known as William of Orange, the leader of the Dutch revolt against the Spanish which resulted in the independence of the Dutch Republic in 1648; Peter of Russia (1672–1725), tsar of Russia and later the Russian Empire; and Frederick the Great (1712–86), king of Prussia known for his brilliance in military campaigning.*

# Washington the Nation Builder

EDWIN MARKHAM

*In this poem (written for the bicentennial celebration of Washington's birth), Edwin Markham (1852–1940) pays tribute to the life of Washington, from his Spartan mother who “called him into Time and kindled duty in him as a flame,” until past his end, when “he flamed with God.” Where did Washington acquire the virtues needed for nation-building? What, according to the third stanza, is the relation between the “Cause” and Washington's greatness? What, according to the fifth stanza, is Washington's creed? What does Markham mean when he says that Washington “turned from all the tempters, / Stood firm above the perils of success”? Consider the last sentence of the poem: What does it mean to say, “He moves in his serene eternity”? And what is the point of the comparison with Polaris, the North Star?*

A Spartan<sup>20</sup> mother called him into Time,  
And kindled duty in him as a flame;  
While he was schooled by the primeval hills  
Of old Virginia—schooled by her mighty woods,  
Where Indians war-whooped and the wild beast prowled.  
His name was written on no college scroll;  
But he drank wisdom from the wilderness.  
The mountains poured into his soul their strength,  
The rocks their fortitude, the stars their calm.

He grew a silent man;  
Yet carried on all roads  
The lofty courtesies, the high reserves.  
He seemed to know, even in this noise of time,  
The solemn quiet of Eternity.  
But fiery energy, a live crater, slept  
Under that mountain calm; yet never blazed  
Into a passion, save in some black hour  
When craven souls betrayed the people. Then  
He was all sword and flame, a god in arms.

With the heart of a child, the wisdom of a sage,  
He toiled with no self to serve.  
He grew in greatness, year by luminous year  
Until he carried empire in his brain.  
Yet if no Cause, no high commanding Cause,  
Had called him to the hazard of the deed,  
None would have guessed his power

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<sup>20</sup> *Of or relating to the Spartan people in ancient Greece, who were famous for their courage, self-restraint, and patriotism.*

To build a nation out of chaos, give  
To her the wings of soaring destinies.  
But at the Hour, the People knew their Man,  
The one ordained of Heaven, ordained to stand  
In the deadly breach and hold the gate for God.

And when the Scroll was signed and the glad Bell  
Of Independence echoed round the world,  
He led his tattered host on stubborn fields,  
Barefoot and hungry, thru the ice and mire—  
Thru dolors, valors, desperations, dreams—  
Thru Valley Forge on to world-startling hours  
When proud Cornwallis yielded up his sword.  
And all the way, down to the road's last bend,  
Cool Judgment whispered to his listening mind.  
Where there was faltering, he was there as faith;  
Where there was weakness, he was there as strength;  
Where there was discord, he was there as peace.

His trust was in the Ruler of Events—  
In Him who watches. He could say, "The ends  
Are in God's hands. I trust,  
But while I trust I battle." In this creed,  
His soul took refuge and his heart found rest.  
When, after Yorktown, all the guns were husht,  
Still was our Chieftain on a battle line,  
Fighting old laws, old manners, old beliefs.  
He fought the outworn old,  
And lit new torches for the march ahead.

Life tried his soul by all the tests of time—  
By hardship, treachery, ingratitude;  
Yes, even by victory and the loud applause.  
When fortune flung to him a crown, he flung  
The bauble back and followed the People's dream.  
He turned from all the tempters,  
Stood firm above the perils of success—  
Stood like Monadnock<sup>21</sup> high above the clouds.

He did the day's work that was given him:  
He toiled for men until he flamed with God.  
Now in his greatness, ever superbly lone,  
He moves in his serene eternity,  
Like far Polaris wheeling on the North.

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<sup>21</sup> A mountain in New Hampshire, known also from the writings of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

# Address to a Joint Session of Congress Opening the Celebration of the Bicentennial of the Birth of George Washington

HERBERT HOOVER

*Through most of the calendar year 1932, the American people celebrated the bicentennial of George Washington's birth. On February 22, President Herbert Hoover (1874–1964) opened the celebration with this address to a joint session of Congress. Why—and how—does Hoover say we should commemorate the founder of our country? What does he mean by saying, “The true eulogy of Washington is this mighty Nation”? Despite Washington's lack of spectacular qualities, “Why did his brilliant fellow patriots always . . . turn to him?” What, according to Hoover, makes the American system of life “distinctly unique and distinctly American”? Why, according to Hoover, is the Washington monument—rather than a sculptured likeness of him, such as we have of Lincoln and Jefferson in their memorials—the most fitting way to memorialize Washington? Do you agree?*

Just 100 years ago in this city Daniel Webster, in commemoration of the birth of George Washington, said:

A hundred years hence, other disciples of Washington will celebrate his birth, with no less of sincere admiration than we now commemorate it. When they shall meet, as we now meet, to do themselves and him that honor, so surely as they shall see the blue summits of his native mountains rise in the horizon, so surely as they shall behold the river on whose banks he lived, and on whose banks he rests, still flowing on toward the sea, so surely may they see, as we now see, the flag of the Union floating on top of the Capitol and then, as now, may the sun in his course visit no land more free, more happy, more lovely, than this, our own country.<sup>22</sup>

The time that Webster looked forward to is here. We “other disciples of Washington” whom he foresaw are gathered today. His prophecy is borne out, his hope fulfilled. That flag “still floats from the top of the Capitol.” It has come unscathed through foreign war and the threat of internal division. Its only change is the symbol of growth. The 13 stars that Washington saw, and the 24 that Webster looked upon, now are 48. The number of those who pay loyalty to that flag has multiplied tenfold. The respect for it beyond our borders, already great when Webster spoke 100 years ago, has increased—not only in proportion to the power it symbolizes, but even more by the measure in which other peoples have embraced the ideals for which it stands. To Webster's expression of hope we may reasonably answer, yes—“The sun in its course visits no land more free, more happy, more lovely, than this, our own country.” Proudly we report to our forefathers that the Republic is more secure, more constant, more powerful, more truly great than at any other time in its history.

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<sup>22</sup> See above, “The Character of Washington.”

Today the American people begin a period of tribute and gratitude to this man whom we revere above all other Americans. Continuing until Thanksgiving Day they will commemorate his birth in every home, every school, every church, and every community under our flag.

In all this multitude of shrines and forums they will recount the life history and accomplishments of Washington. It is a time in which we will pause to recall for our own guidance, and to summarize and emphasize for the benefit of our children, the experiences, the achievements, the dangers escaped, the errors redressed—all the lessons that constitute the record of our past.

The ceremonial of commemorating the founder of our country is one of the most solemn that either an individual or a nation ever performs; carried out in high spirit it can be made one of the most fruitful and enriching. It is a thing to be done in the mood of prayer, of communing with the spiritual springs of patriotism and of devotion to country. It is an occasion for looking back to our past, for taking stock of our present and, in the light of both, setting the compass for our future. We look back that we may recall those qualities of Washington's character which made him great, those principles of national conduct which he laid down and by which we have come thus far. We meet to reestablish our contact with them, renew our fidelity to them.

From this national revival of interest in the history of the American Revolution and of the independence of the United States will come a renewal of those inspirations which strengthened the patriots who brought to the world a new concept of human liberty and a new form of government.

So rich and vivid is the record of history, that Washington in our day lives again in the epic of the foundation of the Republic. He appears in the imagination of every succeeding generation as the embodiment of the wisdom, the courage, the patience, the endurance, the statesmanship, and the absence of all mean ambition, which transformed scattered communities of the forest and the frontiers into a unity of free and independent people.

It is not necessary for me to attempt a eulogy of George Washington. That has been done by masters of art and poetry during more than 100 years. To what they have said I attempt to make no addition.

The true eulogy of Washington is this mighty Nation. He contributed more to its origins than any other man. The influence of his character and of his accomplishments has contributed to the building of human freedom and ordered liberty, not alone upon this continent but upon all continents. The part which he played in the creation of our institutions has brought daily harvest of happiness to hundreds of millions of humanity. The inspirations from his genius have lifted the vision of succeeding generations. The definitions of those policies in government which he fathered have stood the test of 150 years of strain and stress.

From the inspiration and the ideals which gave birth to this Nation, there has come the largest measure of liberty that man has yet devised. So securely were the foundations of this free Government laid that the structure has been able to adapt itself to the changing world relations, the revolutions of invention and the revelations of scientific discovery, the fabulous increase of population and of wealth, and yet to stand the kaleidoscopic complexities of life which these changes have brought upon it.

What other great, purely human institution, devised in the era of the stagecoach and the candle, has so marvelously grown and survived into this epoch of the steam engine, the airplane, the incandescent lamp, the wireless telephone, and the battleship?

If we are to get refreshment to our ideals from looking backward to Washington, we should strive to identify the qualities in him that made our revolution a success and our Nation great. Those were the qualities that marked Washington out for immortality.

We find they were not spectacular qualities. He never charged with a victorious army up the capital streets of a conquered enemy. Excepting only Yorktown and Trenton, he won no striking victories. His great military strength was in the strategy of attrition, the patient endurance of adversity, steadfast purpose unbent by defeat. The American shrine most associated with Washington is Valley Forge, and Valley Forge was not a place of victory—except the victory of Washington's fortitude triumphant above the weakness and discouragement of lesser men. Washington had courage without excitement, determination without passion.

The descriptions of George Washington by his contemporaries give us no clear picture of the inner man, the Washington whose spiritual force so palpably dominated his whole epoch. As a mirror, his own writings do him indifferent justice, whilst the writings of others are clouded by their awe or are obscured by their venom. We must deduce mainly from other records why he stood out head and shoulders above all the crowd around him. It was an extraordinary crowd, living at white heat, comprising men as varied, as brilliant, as versatile as the extraordinary demands which the times made upon them. They were men flexible in intellect, and versed in the ways of the world. Yet in every crisis, and for every role they turned to Washington. They forced upon him the command of Indian fighters; they made him a general against trained British troops; they demanded that he be a constitutionalist and a national statesman; they insisted he must guide his country through the skillful ambushes of European kings; they summoned him to establish the nonexistent credit of an insolvent infant nation. Why did his brilliant fellow patriots always thus turn to him?

The answer of history is unmistakable: They brought their problems to Washington because he had more character, a finer character, a purer character, than any other man of his time. In all the shifting pressures of his generation, all men acknowledged that the one irresistible force was the overwhelming impact of his moral power. Motives and men were measured by their stature when standing in his shadow. Slander fell harmless before him, sham hung its head in shame, folly did not risk to look him in the face, corruption slunk from his presence, cowardice dared not show its quaking knees.

In his integrity, all our men of genius in his day found their one sure center of agreement. In his wisdom and authority they found the one sure way to practical fulfillment of their dreams.

We need no attempt at canonization of George Washington. We know he was human, subject to the discouragements and perplexities that come to us all. We know that he had moments of deepest anxiety. We know of his sufferings and the sacrifices and anguish that came to him. We know of his resentment of injustice and misrepresentation. And yet we know that he never lost faith in our people.

Nor have I much patience with those who undertake the irrational humanizing of Washington. He had, indeed, the fine qualities of friendliness, of sociableness, of humanness, of simple hospitality, but we have no need to lower our vision from his unique qualities of greatness, or to seek to depreciate the unparalleled accomplishments of the man who dominated and gave birth to the being of a great nation.

What we have need of today in this celebration is to renew in our people the inspiration that comes from George Washington as a founder of human liberty, as the father of a system of government, as the builder of a system of national life. . . .

Upon these foundations of divine inspiration laid by our forefathers, and led by Washington, our Nation has builded up during this century and a half a new system of life, a system unique to the American people. It is hallowed by the sacrifice and glorious valor of men. It is assured by a glorious charter of human rights.

It comprises a political system of self-government by the majority, resting upon the duties of individual men to the community, and of the local communities to the Nation. It is a government designed in spirit to sustain a dual purpose, to protect our people among nations by great national power, and to preserve individual freedom by local self-government.

It comprises a social system free of inherited position, based upon the ideal of equality of all men before the law, the equal privilege of men to strive and to achieve, and the responsibilities of men to their neighbors.

It embraces an economic system based upon the largest degree of freedom and stimulation to initiative and enterprise which can be permitted and still maintain the ideal of equality of opportunity among men.

Finally, it embraces a system of relationships to other nations based upon no thought of imperialism, no desire to dominate; a determined national self-reliance in defense and independence in action; freedom from all commitment to the unknown future, and an aspiration to promote peace and good will among all men.

Perhaps no single part of this system is different from some instance in history or in some other part of the world. But in its composite form it is distinctly unique and

distinctly American, a system under which we have reached an assured position among the most powerful of the nations of the world.

This destiny of national greatness was clearly foreseen by George Washington. More fully than any man of his time was he gifted with vision of the future. He spoke habitually of the "American Empire," and predicted its expansion from ocean to ocean. He planned and wrought for the binding forces of transportation and peaceful commerce. He thought in terms of almost imperial grandeur, and he wrought in terms of republican solidity. His far-flung dreams have come true, and he lives today in his works, in the names of our towns or cities and our States, and in the affectionate reverence of us who so immeasurably benefit by his wisdom.

Our American system of national life is dependent upon a trust in the principles of government as established by George Washington; a trust in his example to our people; a trust in and a devotion to religious faith, which he himself so devoutly practiced; a trust in that divine inspiration which he so sedulously invoked and which is expressed in the common mind of our people; and above all a trust in the Divine Providence which has always given guidance to our country.

From Washington's spirit there has grown an infusion of social ideals with the quality of magnanimity: upholding prosperity with generosity, dignity with forbearance, security without privilege, which has raised our institutions to a level of humanity and nobility nowhere else attained.

We have the faith that Webster expressed that 100 years hence our countrymen will again celebrate his birth, will review the memory of his services with no less sincere admiration and gratitude than we now commemorate it, and that they too will see, as we now see, "the flag of the Union floating on the top of the Capitol."

From the room where I conduct my high office I hourly see the monument which Washington's proud and grateful countrymen have raised to his memory. It stands foursquare to the world, its base rooted steadfast in the solid substance of American soil. Its peak rises towards the heavens with matchless serenity and calm. Massive in its proportions, as was the character of Washington himself, overwhelming in its symmetry, simplicity, and sincerity, it most fittingly, beautifully, and nobly proclaims the founder of our commonwealth and our acceptance of his faith. Around that monument have grown steadily and surely the benevolent and beneficent agencies of orderly government dedicated to the spirit of Washington.

Beyond any other monument built by the hand of man out of clay and stone, this shaft is a thing of the spirit. Whether seen in darkness or in light, in brightness or in gloom, there is about it a mantle of pure radiance which gives it the aspect of eternal truth. It is a pledge in the sight of all mankind, given by Washington's countrymen, to carry forward the continuing fulfillment of his vision of America.

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Father of Our Country:  
The Career of George Washington

## A Short Biography of George Washington

*“More than most, Washington’s biography is the story of a man constructing himself.”*  
— W. W. Abbot<sup>23</sup>

### *Early Life*

America’s first president was born on February 22, 1732<sup>24</sup> to Augustine Washington (1694–1743) and his second wife, Mary Ball Washington (1708–89), at their family plantation at Popes Creek, Westmoreland County, Virginia. Together with his four siblings (Elizabeth, Samuel, John Augustine, and Charles; a fifth, Mildred, died as an infant), George spent much of his childhood on the move with his family. (George also had three stepsiblings from his father’s previous marriage: Lawrence and Augustine II—respectively 14 and 12 years George’s senior—and Jane, who died when George was two.) When he was three, the family relocated 60 miles upstream to their home at Little Hunting Creek on the Potomac (later named Mount Vernon); three years later, they moved once more, this time to a smaller plot of land on the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg that was close to an iron furnace George’s father was then managing.

When Washington, at age 11, lost his father to a sudden illness, the family owned nearly 50 slaves and 10,000 acres of land, planting the family firmly in the landed gentry of Virginia—though by no means near the top of that class. George’s inheritance included, among other things, the family plot near Fredericksburg and its ten slaves. With his father’s death also came the news that he would not be able to attend the classical Appleby School in England as his stepbrothers had. This lack of a liberal education was much regretted by Washington as an adult, who would later write that “future *years* cannot compensate for lost *days* at this period” of one’s educational life.<sup>25</sup>

Instead, George learned lessons that would benefit him practically as a farmer and landowner: math, geometry, surveying, law (e.g., leases, bonds, and patents) and basic economics (interest, currency conversions, etc.). With an intense desire to improve himself, the teenage Washington regularly mined books for their maxims to live by; he famously copied out all 110 “Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation” (see selection below).

At the same time, George regularly visited his older stepbrother Lawrence, who had inherited Mount Vernon and, shortly after his father’s death, married Ann Fairfax, daughter of the powerful Colonel William Fairfax. Lawrence’s marriage into the family

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<sup>23</sup> W. W. Abbot, “An Uncommon Awareness of Self,” *Prologue: Quarterly Journal of the National Archives and Records Administration* 29 (1989): 7–19; repr. in *George Washington Reconsidered*, ed. Don Higginbotham (University Press of Virginia: 2001), 277. Abbot (1922–2009) was the longtime editor-in-chief of *The Papers of George Washington* project.

<sup>24</sup> Washington was born under the Julian calendar then in use in the British Empire on February 11, 1731; this date was changed to February 22, 1732 when the Gregorian calendar was implemented in 1752.

<sup>25</sup> George Washington, Letter to George Steptoe Washington, December 5, 1790, qtd. in Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 12.

quickly elevated him into the higher social class, and he soon won election to the Virginia House of Burgesses. Lawrence regularly invited George to visit him at Belvoir, the Fairfax estate not far from Mount Vernon, and soon George won the approval of the Colonel himself, who took him on fox hunts (George was, even at a young age, already noted for his riding ability) and taught him to navigate the world of the upper gentry.<sup>26</sup>

In 1746, at the age of 16, Washington set out with George William Fairfax (Colonel Fairfax's son) to survey much of the Northern Neck Proprietary, which the Fairfax family had received from King Charles II in 1649. The surveying trip took Washington into the Shenandoah Valley, and it was here that he first became accustomed to life in the wild—even as he simultaneously sought to fit into polite society back home. For the next several years, George worked as a surveyor for the Fairfax family, and by the time he turned 21 had accumulated nearly 2,500 acres of his own in the Shenandoah Valley.

### *Early Military Career*

In 1752, Lawrence Washington died of tuberculosis, leaving his seat as an adjutant general of the Virginia militia vacant. George, inspired by his stepbrother's example and with a handful of influential patrons who would vouch for him, applied for the position despite his lack of military experience. In February 1753, just before his 21st birthday, he received the appointment as district adjutant for the Northern Neck of Virginia, becoming a major in the Virginia militia. At six-feet-tall and a muscular 180 pounds, he looked the part.

In October of the following year, Washington was given the assignment to venture into the western territories of the Ohio Country (so named for the Ohio Company, a land speculation company that both of Washington's stepbrothers had helped found in 1747) to learn if the French were building forts in the land that England claimed as hers. If they were, Washington should ask them to peacefully depart; if they didn't, Washington was, in an order signed by King George II, "strictly charge[d] and command[ed] . . . to drive them off by force of arms."<sup>27</sup>

Joined by a small band of outdoorsmen and a French interpreter, Washington set off into the Ohio wilderness, where he quickly became plagued by miserably cold weather and freezing rain. Nevertheless, he made contact with local Iroquois Indians, who guided Washington to a French trading post; from there, they made their way to the French Fort Le Boeuf, arriving at the fort (in present day northwest Pennsylvania) in mid-December. The French were not keen to obey Washington's request that they leave, and Washington hurriedly returned to Williamsburg to report the news. Presenting Governor Dinwiddie with the French reply, along with his own estimates of French military power and a detailed journal of the expedition, Washington impressed his superiors with the diligence with which he undertook the mission. His reports were soon published in newspapers across the Colonies and in Great Britain, making the young George Washington instantly famous—and setting the stage for the soon-to-come French and Indian War.

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<sup>26</sup> For more on Washington's time at Belvoir, see Noemie Emery's "Young Washington and Cato," below.

<sup>27</sup> Chernow, 32.

A few months later, the now-Lieutenant Colonel Washington led about a hundred militiamen and a number of Mingo Iroquois warriors back into the wilderness, this time to confront the French. In an ambush by Washington against a French force of about 35 men, a French envoy, Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville, who carried a message to the British, was killed, setting off a diplomatic nightmare. (Washington claimed that the French were spying on his party and preparing to launch their own ambush.) Aware that the French would retaliate, Washington swiftly began constructing defenses, which he labeled Fort Necessity. On July 3, 1754, the French finally attacked, killing a third of Washington's soldiers while only suffering three dead of their own. By nightfall, the French commander—who was the fallen Jumonville's brother—accepted Washington's surrender and allowed him and his men to return to Virginia.

The failed expedition raised Washington's profile both in the Colonies and abroad, though not in the way the ambitious young officer desired: while many Americans thought Washington brave, if inexperienced, many in London and elsewhere derided the infamous disaster and the brash young colonial who caused it. With war soon to be declared between Britain and France, it is not too much to say with Sir Horace Walpole of London that “the volley fired by a young Virginian in the backwoods of America set the world on fire.”

Following the surrender of Fort Necessity, Washington served as an aide-de-camp to British General Edward Braddock. After a disastrous expedition in which Braddock was killed along with much of his fighting force, Washington—who had two horses shot out from under him and four bullets tear through his hat and clothes—was hailed as a hero for his courageous actions during the battle. Soon he was made a colonel in the Virginia militia and commander in chief of all forces raised in Virginia, overseeing about 1,500 men. As commander, Washington spent much time and energy in training his men to be soldiers, but was constantly plagued by the problems of deserters and frustrations with the political leaders who seemed, to him, to hinder his every move. After serving for three years—and being repeatedly denied a regular military appointment in the British army—Washington retired his commission in December 1758.

### *Planter and Revolutionary*

A month after retiring from the military, Washington married the wealthy widow Martha Dandridge Custis. Just a couple of years later, Lawrence's widow died and Washington inherited Mount Vernon, which he and Martha would from then on call home. He also soon took his seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses, whose members immediately welcomed him with a resolution thanking him for his brave service to Virginia and to the Crown. The 27-year-old planter had, thanks to his ambition, discipline, and general good fortune, finally arrived to the place of distinction he had always craved.

Over the next few years, Washington remained involved in Virginian politics while overseeing his ever-more-productive estate at Mount Vernon. Throughout the 1760s, he struggled with debt as his tobacco crops failed, but saw the struggle as an opportunity to diversify his crops—eventually bringing 3,000 of his 8,000 acres at Mount Vernon under

cultivation—and to take on more diversified business ventures, including fishing, milling, horse breeding, spinning, weaving, and land speculation.

As his frustrations with British creditors grew, so too did his protest against the policies of the British Crown. In 1765, he opposed the unpopular Stamp Act; a few years later, he led opposition against the Townshend Acts (opposition to which, in Boston, eventually led to the Boston Massacre in 1770), encouraging Virginia to boycott British goods until the Acts were repealed. Though angered by the acts themselves—the Stamp Act imposed a direct tax on the colonists’ use of printed materials, and the Townshend Acts similarly imposed new taxes on the colonists in order to raise revenue—Washington’s larger disagreement with them was their enactment by a British parliament that lacked American representation. This taxation without representation was viewed by Washington as a violation of the colonists’ rights as Englishmen. His frustrations continued to grow over the next few years. Though not agreeing with the Boston Tea Partiers who dumped 342 chests of tea into Massachusetts Bay in the winter of 1773, he found the British response—to send soldiers to Boston—intolerable, declaring it an “unexampled testimony of the most despotic system of tyranny that ever was practiced in a free gov[ernment].”<sup>28</sup>

In August 1774, at 42 years old, Washington was elected as one of Virginia’s seven delegates to the First Continental Congress to meet in Philadelphia. In the company of great orators and statesmen from the 13 colonies, Washington was noted for his quiet, reserved manner and prudence. From the early days of the Congress, Washington stood out as a potential choice as commander in chief—if things came to that. In April 1775, the first military engagements of the American Revolutionary War were fought, when a group of Massachusetts militiamen defended their store of military supplies at Concord against about 700 British army regulars ordered to seize them. The Battles of Lexington and Concord, begun with the “shot heard ’round the World,” as Ralph Waldo Emerson would later call it, marked the beginning of open hostilities. When the Second Continental Congress met in May, Washington appeared in full military uniform, signaling his willingness to serve in a military capacity. On June 16, it was announced the he had been unanimously selected by the Congress to lead the army of the United Colonies.

### *General*

Washington’s first order of business as general was to form a regular army out of the assortment of colonial militias that had been created. After assuming command of the colonial forces outside Boston, Washington, urged by Congress to attack the British, called for restraint and instead took the time to build his forces and plan a suitable attack. His planning paid off. In March 1776, he placed cannon, earlier transported from Fort Ticonderoga by Henry Knox, on the top of Dorchester Heights, which overlooked the British-held city of Boston—leading the occupiers to evacuate the city.

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<sup>28</sup> Chernow, 166.

Washington then led his army to New York. In the summer, British General William Howe, supported by his brother, Admiral Richard Howe, began a campaign to capture New York City. Heavily outnumbered, Washington and his army were soundly beaten and forced to retreat. For the next few months, the Continentals lost city after city in New York and in New Jersey to the advancing British, while also losing their own men to desertion and expiring enlistments. Morale was low (“These are the times that try men’s souls,” Thomas Paine would write that December), and the future of the army—and the fledgling country it fought for—was at stake. Though many of his 7,600 men were personally loyal to their commander—indeed, as one officer wrote, many of the men felt that they could not “desert a man . . . who has deserted everything to defend his country”<sup>29</sup>—they also had debts to pay and families who felt the hardship of their absence. Many planned on leaving the army when their enlistments expired at the end of the year.

Washington, acutely feeling the desperation of the moment, knew it was time for a decisive victory. Wagering the future of his army on an operation whose watchword was “Victory or Death,” on the frigid night of December 25, 1776, he led his men across Delaware River into Trenton, New Jersey, to surprise a group of Hessian soldiers. The gamble paid off, and Washington captured nearly 900 Hessian soldiers and much-needed supplies. The army, invigorated, lived to fight another day.

Throughout 1777, Washington engaged the British in Pennsylvania and New York, suffering a defeat at the Battle of Brandywine in September that enabled General Howe to capture the American capital of Philadelphia. In October, Washington again lost at the Battle of Germantown. However, while engaging General Howe, Washington sent Generals Horatio Gates and Benedict Arnold to fight against British General John Burgoyne in New York. On October 17, after losing roughly a thousand of his men in the Battle of Saratoga, Burgoyne surrendered his army. The American victory prompted the French to enter the war and openly ally with the American cause.

In the winter of 1777, Washington set up camp for his 11,000 men 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia at Valley Forge, which he described as “a dreary kind of place and uncomfortably provided.”<sup>30</sup> On the way into camp, Washington saw the bloody footprints left by his underequipped and barefoot men in the snow, a sign of things to come. Moved by his men’s suffering, he angrily wrote against members of the Pennsylvanian legislature who had criticized him for retiring his men into winter quarters: “I can assure those gentlemen that it is a much easier and less distressing thing to draw remonstrances in a comfortable room by a good fireside than to occupy a cold bleak hill and sleep under frost and snow without clothes or blankets. However, although they seem to have little feeling for the naked, distressed soldiers, I feel superabundantly for them and from my soul pity those miseries which it is neither in my power to relieve or prevent.”<sup>31</sup> Over the

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<sup>29</sup> Chernow, 272.

<sup>30</sup> Chernow, 323.

<sup>31</sup> George Washington, Letter to Henry Laurens, December 23, 1777, [www.apnewsarchive.com/1991/Excerpts-from-Washington-s-Dec-23-1777-Letter-to-Henry-Laurens-With-AM-Washington-Letter/id-297701aeb7f7ddfc071905ee2f5e9617](http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1991/Excerpts-from-Washington-s-Dec-23-1777-Letter-to-Henry-Laurens-With-AM-Washington-Letter/id-297701aeb7f7ddfc071905ee2f5e9617).

next few months, Washington would lose to disease between two and three thousand of his men.

With France now in the war on America's side (which, in addition to providing the Americans much needed military and monetary support, also divided the British presence in the Americas as they now had to defend their colonies in the Indies and elsewhere), Washington was able to pursue the British in New York once more. In 1781, with the aid of the French General the Comte de Rochambeau and a young Marquis de Lafayette, Washington set out on what would become known as the Yorktown campaign. Joined by the Comte de Grasse and his fleet of French warships near the Chesapeake Bay, Washington and Rochambeau set siege to the British encampment at Yorktown. On October 17, the British, under the command of Lord Cornwallis, surrendered. Though no one knew it at the time, this battle marked the end of open hostilities.

The Treaty of Paris was signed in September 1783, officially ending the war. On December 4, Washington assembled his officers and, with a shaky voice, announced that he was taking his leave. Then, the man famous for his self-control took each of his officers in a tearful embrace and departed. As one witness wrote, "Such a scene of sorrow and weeping I had never before witnessed . . . *The simple thought . . .* that we should see his face no more in this world seemed to me utterly insupportable."<sup>32</sup> Three weeks later, on December 23, 1783, after eight long years of serving as commander in chief, Washington formally resigned his commission to the Continental Congress and went home to his beloved Mount Vernon.

### *Statesman, President, and Beyond*

For the next several years, Washington, now in his fifties, set to work reordering his affairs at Mount Vernon and making the plantation profitable again. Next to Benjamin Franklin, Washington was the first American celebrity, and his estate was the destination of a constant stream of friends, veterans, and complete strangers who came to see the man who had led the American Revolution. (Washington's hospitality goes, in part, to explaining why he always found his expenses to outweigh his income.)

In late 1786, Washington was informed that—without his asking—he had been made the head of Virginia's delegation to the upcoming Constitutional Convention, to be held in May of the following year. Washington reluctantly agreed to go, but, once there, was unanimously made the Convention's president. Participating little in the debates, his presence alone had enormous significance—not least, for the designing of the American presidency, a position all in the room thought Washington would be first to fill.

On April 30, 1789, after being unanimously elected by the Electoral College, Washington took the oath of office at Federal Hall in New York City and became the first President of the United States. At the country's first inauguration, Washington set a number of precedents: despite earning his fame as a military commander, he left his military uniform at home; though the new US Constitution said nothing about an

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<sup>32</sup> Chernow, 452.

inaugural speech, he delivered the First Inaugural Address; and, according to legend, he ended his recitation of the oath of office with the words “So help me God.”

Once in office, Washington set about creating a presidency that upheld the dignity of the office while not smacking of monarchy or royalty. Instead of accepting the proposed Senate title—“His Highness, the President of the United States of America, and Protector of their Liberties”—he chose the simpler “President of the United States,” which had been adopted by the House. He held official dinners every other week, and designated a weekly time when visitors could meet with him. He also established the first Cabinet, appointing Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State, Alexander Hamilton as the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Knox as the Secretary of War, and Edmund Randolph as Attorney General.

In the early 1790s, Washington pushed for the creation of a national bank (which Congress approved in 1791), made a tour of the United States, oversaw the creation of the capital city, and kept the United States officially uninvolved in the French Revolution and the war between France and Great Britain. In 1792, he won reelection—again unanimously. Two years later, in a strong showing of federal authority, he raised a militia and, at 62 years old, personally led the troops to quell a growing rebellion of Pennsylvanian farmers who opposed a federal tax on whiskey.

On September 19, 1796, Washington published his Farewell Address (below), announcing that he would not seek a third term. On March 4, 1795, the 65-year-old attended the swearing in of John Adams as the nation’s second president, and he and Martha left for their home at Mount Vernon.

Once back in Virginia, Washington continued his tradition of hospitality and remained active in politics, encouraging, for example, Federalist candidates like John Marshall and Henry Lee to run against the Jeffersonian Republicans. He also set about getting his own affairs in order: arranging his correspondence and penning his will, in which he freed his slaves (upon Martha’s death). On Thursday, December 12, 1799, he went out for a tour of his farm on horseback, returning five hours later in the midst of snow and freezing rain. On December 14, he died. Four days later, a private military funeral was held at Mount Vernon. A Virginia cavalry unit led the solemn procession to bury Washington, followed by a group of infantry, a small military band, four clergymen, and, in a fitting image, Washington’s horse, outfitted with a saddle and pistols but conspicuously missing its legendary rider. Washington was laid to rest in his family’s vault down the road from the main mansion at Mount Vernon. According to Washington biographer Ron Chernow, “It speaks to Washington’s humility that the greatest man of his age was laid to rest in a communal tomb where nobody could single out his grave or honor him separately.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chernow, 810.

# **Appendix:**

## **Historical Memorabilia of Washington**

COMPILED BY H. B. CARRINGTON

- 1732. February 22 (February 11, O.S.), born.
- 1748. Surveyor of lands at sixteen years of age.
- 1751. Military inspector and major at nineteen years of age.
- 1752. Adjutant-general of Virginia.
- 1753. Commissioner to the French.
- 1754. Colonel, and commanding the Virginia militia.
- 1755. Aide-de-camp to Braddock in his campaign.
- 1755. Again commands the Virginia troops.
- 1758. Resigns his commission.
- 1759. January 6. Married.
- 1759. Elected member of Virginia House of Burgesses.
- 1765. Commissioner to settle military accounts.
- 1774. In First Continental Congress.
- 1775. In Second Continental Congress.
- 1775. June 15. Elected commander-in-chief.
- 1775. July 2. In command at Cambridge.
- 1776. March 17. Expels the British from Boston.
- 1776. August 27. Battle of Long Island.
- 1776. August 29. Masterly retreat to New York.
- 1776. September 15. Gallant, at Kipp's Bay.
- 1776. October 27. Battle of Harlem Heights.
- 1776. October 29. Battle near White Plains.
- 1776. November 15. Enters New Jersey.
- 1776. December 5. Occupies right bank of the Delaware.
- 1776. December 12. Clothed with "full power."
- 1776. December 14. Plans an offensive campaign.
- 1776. December 26. Battle of Trenton.
- 1777. January 3. Battle of Princeton.
- 1777. July. British driven from New Jersey, during.
- 1777. July 13. Marches for Philadelphia.
- 1777. September 11. Battle of Brandywine.
- 1777. September 15. Offers battle at West Chester.
- 1777. October 4. Battle of Germantown.
- 1778. Winters at Valley Forge.
- 1778. June 28. Battle of Monmouth.
- 1778. British again retire from New Jersey.
- 1778. Again at White Plains.
- 1779. At Middlebrook, New Jersey, and New Windsor.
- 1780. Winters at Morristown, New Jersey.
- 1781. Confers with Rochambeau as to plans.

- 1781. Threatens New York in June and July.
- 1781. Joins Lafayette before Yorktown.
- 1781. October 19. Surrender of Cornwallis.
- 1783. November 2. Farewell to the army.
- 1733. November 25. Occupies New York.
- 1783. December 4. Parts with his officers.
- 1783. December 23. Resigns his commission.
- 1787. Presides at Constitutional Convention.
- 1789. March 4. Elected President of the United States.
- 1789. April 30. Inaugurated at New York.
- 1793. March 4. Re-elected for four years.
- 1796. September 17. Farewell to the people.
- 1797. March 4. Retires to private life.
- 1798. July 3. Appointed commander-in-chief.
- 1799. December 14. Died at Mount Vernon.



*A. How Washington Became Washington:  
Early Education and Military Career*



# The Fable of George Washington and the Cherry Tree

MASON LOCKE WEEMS

*Truth to tell, very little is known about the actual early life of George Washington. The most famous stories about Washington's boyhood come from Parson Weems' bestselling Life of Washington (1800), which remained the most popular biography of Washington throughout the 19th century. Weems (1759–1825), says American historian Gordon Wood, "wanted to capture the inner, private man—to show the early events that shaped Washington's character—even if he had to make them up."<sup>34</sup> The most famous of these fabled tales, attributed by Weems to Washington's nurse but now thought apocryphal, is the story of the cherry tree.*

*Even if this story is but a fiction, why might it still be worth repeating? Could it be a poetic truth about Washington's character? As you come, through this anthology and elsewhere, to know the mature George Washington, does he reflect the character of young George of cherry-tree fame? Is honesty, according to the teaching of this story, the best policy, or is honesty good in itself? Can a military or political leader ever be simply or perfectly honest? Are not cunning, reticence, and (even) deception often required for leadership? What then should we conclude from this story about Washington's character and his future greatness?*

Never did the wise Ulysses take more pains with his beloved Telemachus,<sup>35</sup> than did Mr. Washington with George, to inspire him with an *early love of truth*. "Truth, George" (said he) "is the loveliest quality of youth. I would ride fifty miles, my son, to see the little boy whose heart is so *honest*, and his lips so *pure*, that we may depend on every word he says. O how lovely does such a child appear in the eyes of every body! His parents doat [dote] on him; his relations glory in him; they are constantly praising him to their children, whom they beg to imitate him. They are often sending for him, to visit them; and receive him, when he comes, with as much joy as if he were a little angel, come to set pretty examples to their children."

"But, Oh! how different, George, is the case with the boy who is so given to lying, that nobody can believe a word he says! He is looked at with aversion wherever he goes, and parents dread to see him come among their children. Oh, George! my son! rather than see you come to this pass, dear as you are to my heart, gladly would I assist to nail you up in your little coffin, and follow you to your grave. Hard, indeed, would it be to me to give up my son, whose little feet are always so ready to run about with me, and whose fondly looking eyes and sweet prattle make so large a part of my happiness: but still I would give him up, rather than see him a common liar."

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<sup>34</sup> See selection by Wood below.

<sup>35</sup> Ulysses (or Odysseus), a legendary Greek king of Ithaca, a hero of Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, and father of Telemachus.

"Pa, (said George very seriously) do I ever tell lies?"

"No, George, I *thank God* you do not, my son; and I rejoice in the hope you never will. At least, you shall never, from me, have cause to be guilty of so shameful a thing. Many parents, indeed, even compel their children to this vile practice, by barbarously beating them for every little fault; hence, on the next offence, the little terrified creature slips out a *lie!* just to escape the rod. But as to yourself, George, you know I have *always* told you, and now tell you again, that, whenever by accident you do any thing wrong, which must often be the case, as you are but a poor little boy yet, without *experience* or *knowledge*, never tell a falsehood to conceal it; but come *bravely* up, my son, like a *little man*, and tell me of it: and instead of beating you, George, I will but the more honour and love you for it, my dear."

This, you'll say, was sowing good seed!—Yes, it was: and the crop, thank God, was, as I believe it ever will be, where a man acts the true parent, that is, the *Guardian Angel*, by his child.

The following anecdote is a *case in point*. It is too valuable to be lost, and too true to be doubted; for it was communicated to me by the same excellent lady to whom I am indebted for the last.

"When George," said she, "was about six years old, he was made the wealthy master of a *hatchet!* of which, like most little boys, he was immoderately fond, and was constantly going about chopping every thing that came in his way. One day, in the garden, where he often amused himself hacking his mother's pea-sticks, he unluckily tried the edge of his hatchet on the body of a beautiful young English cherry-tree, which he barked so terribly, that I don't believe the tree ever got the better of it. The next morning the old gentleman finding out what had befallen his tree, which, by the by, was a great favourite, came into the house, and with much warmth asked for the mischievous author, declaring at the same time, that he would not have taken five guineas for his tree. Nobody could tell him any thing about it. Presently George and his hatchet made their appearance. *George*, said his father, *do you know who killed that beautiful little cherry-tree yonder in the garden?* This was a *tough question*; and George staggered under it for a moment; but quickly recovered himself: and looking at his father, with the sweet face of youth brightened with the inexpressible charm of all-conquering truth, he bravely cried out, "*I can't tell a lie, Pa; you know I can't tell a lie. I did cut it with my hatchet.*"—*Run to my arms, you dearest boy*, cried his father in transports, *run to my arms; glad am I, George, that you killed my tree; for you have paid me for it a thousand fold. Such an act of heroism in my son, is more worth than a thousand trees, though blossomed with silver, and their fruits of purest gold.*

# Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*We know very little of what George Washington read or studied, or what subjects or ideas mattered to him as a young man. The present selection, concerning proper and gentlemanly conduct, is an important exception. At age 16, Washington copied out by hand 110 “Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation,” based on a set of rules composed by French Jesuits at the end of the 16th century. Although many of these rules seem quaint by modern standards, it is worthwhile to try to understand their point and purpose, both in themselves but especially as a window into the aspirations and concerns of young George Washington.*

*What is the meaning of “civility,” and why might it be important? Translate the various rules into your own terms. As you consider their meaning, ask yourself: What is the purpose of this particular rule (and of all taken together)? Why and how might adhering to it (them) contribute to the development of one’s character? Why and how might it contribute to one’s influence or capacity to lead and to have others follow? Which of the rules seem to be most important, even today, for success in public and private life?<sup>36</sup>*

- 1 Every Action done in Company, ought to be with some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present.
- 2 When in Company, put not your Hands to any Part of the Body, not usually Discovered.
- 3 Show Nothing to your Friend that may affright him.
- 4 In the Presence of Others sing not to yourself with a humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet.
- 5 If You Cough, Sneeze, Sigh, or Yawn, do it not Loud but Privately; and Speak not in your Yawning, but put Your handkerchief or Hand before your face and turn aside.
- 6 Sleep not when others Speak, Sit not when others stand, Speak not when you Should hold your Peace, walk not on when others Stop.
- 7 Put not off your Cloths in the presence of Others, nor go out your Chamber half Dressed.

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<sup>36</sup> *Original errors in numbering have been corrected; original spelling and grammar is largely unchanged.*

8 At Play and at Fire its Good manners to Give Place to the last Comer, and affect not to Speak Louder than ordinary.

9 Spit not in the Fire, nor Stoop low before it; neither Put your Hands into the Flames to warm them, nor Set your Feet upon the Fire especially if there be meat before it.

10 When you Sit down, Keep your Feet firm and Even, without putting one on the other or Crossing them.

11 Shift not yourself in the Sight of others nor Gnaw your nails.

12 Shake not the head, Feet, or Legs roll not the Eyes lift not one eyebrow higher than the other wry not the mouth, and bedew no man's face with your Spittle, by approaching too near him when you Speak.

13 Kill no Vermin as Fleas, lice ticks &c in the Sight of Others, if you See any filth or thick Spittle put your foot Dexterously upon it if it be upon the Cloths of your Companions, Put it off privately, and if it be upon your own Cloths return Thanks to him who puts it off.

14 Turn not your Back to others especially in Speaking, Jog not the Table or Desk on which Another reads or writes, lean not upon any one.

15 Keep your Nails clean and Short, also your Hands and Teeth Clean, yet without Showing any great Concern for them.

16 Do not Puff up the Cheeks, Loll not out the tongue rub the Hands, or beard, thrust out the lips, or bite them or keep the Lips too open or too Close.

17 Be no Flatterer, neither Play with any that delights not to be Played Withal.

18 Read no Letters, Books, or Papers in Company but when there is a Necessity for the doing of it you must ask leave: come not near the Books or Writings of Another so as to read them unless desired or give your opinion of them unasked also look not nigh when another is writing a Letter.

19 let your Countenance be pleasant but in Serious Matters Somewhat grave.

20 The Gestures of the Body must be Suited to the discourse you are upon.

21 Reproach none for the Infirmities of Nature, nor Delight to Put them that have in mind thereof.

22 Show not yourself glad at the Misfortune of another though he were your enemy.

23 When you see a Crime punished, you may be inwardly Pleased; but always show Pity to the Suffering Offender.

24 Do not laugh too loud or too much at any Public Spectacle.

25 Superfluous Complements and all Affectation of Ceremony are to be avoided, yet where due they are not to be Neglected.

26 In Pulling off your Hat to Persons of Distinction, as Noblemen, Justices, Churchmen &c make a Reverence, bowing more or less according to the Custom of the Better Bred, and Quality of the Person. Amongst your equals expect not always that they Should begin with you first, but to Pull off the Hat when there is no need is Affectation, in the Manner of Saluting and resaluting in words keep to the most usual Custom.

27 Tis ill manners to bid one more eminent than yourself be covered as well as not to do it to whom it's due. Likewise he that makes too much haste to Put on his hat does not well, yet he ought to Put it on at the first, or at most the Second time of being asked; now what is herein Spoken, of Qualification in behavior in Saluting, ought also to be observed in taking of Place, and Sitting down for ceremonies without Bounds is troublesome.

28 If any one come to Speak to you while you are Sitting Stand up tho he be your Inferior, and when you Present Seats let it be to every one according to his Degree.

29 When you meet with one of Greater Quality than yourself, Stop, and retire especially if it be at a Door or any Straight place to give way for him to Pass.

30 In walking the highest Place in most Countries Seems to be on the right hand therefore Place yourself on the left of him whom you desire to Honor: but if three walk together the middle place is the most Honorable the wall is usually given to the most worthy if two walk together.

31 If any one far Surpasses others, either in age, Estate, or Merit yet would give Place to a meaner than himself in his own lodging or elsewhere the one ought not to except it, So he on the other part should not use much earnestness nor offer it above once or twice.

32 To one that is your equal, or not much inferior you are to give the chief Place in your Lodging and he to who 'tis offered ought at the first to refuse it but at the Second to accept though not without acknowledging his own unworthiness.

33 They that are in Dignity or in office have in all places Precedency but whilst they are Young they ought to respect those that are their equals in Birth or other Qualities, though they have no Public charge.

34 It is good Manners to prefer them to whom we Speak before ourselves especially if they be above us with whom in no Sort we ought to begin.

- 35 Let your Discourse with Men of Business be Short and Comprehensive.
- 36 Artificers & Persons of low Degree ought not to use many ceremonies to Lords, or Others of high Degree but Respect and highly Honor them, and those of high Degree ought to treat them with affability & Courtesy, without Arrogance.
- 37 In Speaking to men of Quality do not lean nor Look them full in the Face, nor approach too near them at lest Keep a full Pace from them.
- 38 In visiting the Sick, do not Presently play the Physician if you be not Knowing therein.
- 39 In writing or Speaking, give to every Person his due Title According to his Degree & the Custom of the Place.
- 40 Strive not with your Superiors in argument, but always Submit your Judgment to others with Modesty.
- 41 Undertake not to Teach your equal in the art himself Professes; it Savors of arrogance.
- 42 [Let thy ceremonies in] Courtesy be proper to the Dignity of his place [with whom thou conversest for it is absurd to act] the same with a Clown and a Prince.
- 43 Do not express Joy before one sick or in pain for that contrary Passion will aggravate his Misery.
- 44 When a man does all he can though it Succeeds not well blame not him that did it.
- 45 Being to advise or reprehend any one, consider whether it ought to be in public or in Private; presently, or at Some other time in what terms to do it & in reprovng Show no Sign of Cholar but do it with all Sweetness and Mildness.
- 46 Take all Admonitions thankfully in what Time or Place Soever given but afterwards not being culpable take a Time [&] Place Convenient to let him know it that gave them.
- 47 Mock not nor Jest at any thing of Importance break no Jest that are Sharp Biting and if you Deliver any thing witty and Pleasant, abstain from Laughing thereat yourself.
- 48 Wherein wherein you reprove another be unblameable yourself; for example is more prevalent than Precepts.
- 49 Use no Reproachful Language against any one neither Curse nor Revile.
- 50 Be not hasty to believe flying Reports to the Disparagement of any.
- 51 Wear not your cloths, foul, unript [*ripped*], or dusty, but see they be brushed once every day at least and take heed that you approach not to any Uncleaness.

52 In your apparel be modest and endeavor to accommodate nature, rather than to procure Admiration keep to the Fashion of your equals Such as are Civil and orderly with respect to Times and Places.

53 Run not in the Streets, neither go too slowly nor with Mouth open; go not Shaking of Arms, nor upon the Toes, nor in a Dancing fashion.

54 Play not the Peacock, looking every where about you, to See if you be well Decked, if your Shoes fit well, if your Stockings sit neatly, and Clothes handsomely.

55 Eat not in the Streets, nor in your House, out of Season.

56 Associate yourself with Men of good Quality if you Esteem your own Reputation; for 'tis better to be alone than in bad Company.

57 In walking up and Down in a House, only with One in Company if he be Greater than yourself, at the first give him the Right hand and Stop not till he does and be not the first that turns, and when you do turn let it be with your face towards him, if he be a Man of Great Quality, walk not with him Cheek by Jowl but Somewhat behind him; but yet in Such a Manner that he may easily Speak to you.

58 Let your Conversation be without Malice or Envy, for 'tis a Sign of a Tractable and Commendable Nature: And in all Causes of Passion admit Reason to Govern.

59 Never express anything unbecoming, nor Act against the Rules Moral before your inferiors.

60 Be not immodest in urging your Friends to Discover a Secret.

61 Utter not base and frivolous things amongst grave and Learned Men nor very Difficult Questions or Subjects, among the Ignorant or things hard to be believed, Stuff not your Discourse with Sentences amongst your Betters nor Equals.

62 Speak not of doleful Things in a Time of Mirth or at the Table; Speak not of Melancholy Things as Death and Wounds, and if others Mention them Change if you can the Discourse tell not your Dreams, but to your intimate Friend.

63 A Man ought not to value himself of his Achievements, or rare Qualities of wit; much less of his riches Virtue or Kindred.

64 Break not a Jest where none take pleasure in mirth Laugh not aloud, nor at all without Occasion, deride no man's Misfortune, tho' there seem to be Some cause.

65 Speak not injurious Words neither in Jest nor Earnest Scoff at none although they give Occasion.

66 Be not forward but friendly and Courteous; the first to Salute hear and answer & be not Pensive when it's a time to Converse.

67 Detract not from others neither be excessive in Commanding.

68 Go not thither, where you know not, whether you Shall be Welcome or not. Give not Advice without being Asked & when desired do it briefly.

69 If two contend together take not the part of either unconstrained; and be not obstinate in your own Opinion, in Things indifferent be of the Major Side.

70 Reprehend not the imperfections of others for that belongs to Parents Masters and Superiors.

71 Gaze not on the marks or blemishes of Others and ask not how they came. What you may Speak in Secret to your Friend deliver not before others.

72 Speak not in an unknown Tongue in Company but in your own Language and that as those of Quality do and not as the Vulgar; Sublime matters treat Seriously.

73 Think before you Speak pronounce not imperfectly nor bring out your Words too hastily but orderly & distinctly.

74 When Another Speaks be attentive your Self and disturb not the Audience if any hesitate in his Words help him not nor Prompt him without desired, Interrupt him not, nor Answer him till his Speech be ended.

75 In the midst of Discourse ask not of what one treateth but if you Perceive any Stop because of your coming you may well entreat him gently to Proceed: If a Person of Quality comes in while your Conversing it's handsome to Repeat what was said before.

76 While you are talking, Point not with your Finger at him of Whom you Discourse nor Approach too near him to whom you talk especially to his face.

77 Treat with men at fit Times about Business & Whisper not in the Company of Others.

78 Make no Comparisons and if any of the Company be Commended for any brave act of Virtue, commend not another for the Same.

79 Be not apt to relate News if you know not the truth thereof. In Discoursing of things you Have heard Name not your Author always A Secret Discover not.

80 Be not Tedious in Discourse or in reading unless you find the Company pleased therewith.

81 Be not Curious to Know the Affairs of Others neither approach those that Speak in Private.

- 82 Undertake not what you cannot Perform but be Careful to keep your Promise.
- 83 When you deliver a matter do it without Passion & with Discretion, however mean the Person be you do it too.
- 84 When your Superiors talk to any Body hearken not neither Speak nor Laugh.
- 85 In Company of these of Higher Quality than yourself Speak not til you are asked a Question then Stand upright put off your Hat & Answer in few words.
- 86 In Disputes, be not so Desirous to Overcome as not to give Liberty to each one to deliver his Opinion and Submit to the Judgment of the Major Part especially if they are Judges of the Dispute.
- 87 Let thy carriage be such as becomes a Man Grave Settled and attentive to that which is spoken. Contradict not at every turn what others Say.
- 88 Be not tedious in Discourse, make not many Digressions, nor repeat often the Same manner of Discourse.
- 89 Speak not Evil of the absent for it is unjust.
- 90 Being Set at meat Scratch not neither Spit Cough or blow your Nose except there's a Necessity for it.
- 91 Make no Show of taking great Delight in your Victuals, Feed not with Greediness; cut your Bread with a Knife, lean not on the Table neither find fault with what you Eat.
- 92 Take no Salt or cut Bread with your Knife Greasy.
- 93 Entertaining any one at table it is decent to present him wt. [with] meat, Undertake not to help others undesired by the Master.
- 94 If you Soak bread in the Sauce let it be no more than what you put in your Mouth at a time and blow not your broth at Table but Stay till Cools of it Self.
- 95 Put not your meat to your Mouth with your Knife in your hand neither Spit forth the Stones of any fruit Pie upon a Dish nor cast anything under the table.
- 96 It's unbecoming to Stoop much to ones Meat Keep your Fingers clean & when foul wipe them on a Corner of your Table Napkin.
- 97 Put not another bit into your Mouth till the former be Swallowed let not your Morsels be too big for the jowls.

98 Drink not nor talk with your mouth full neither Gaze about you while you are a Drinking.

99 Drink not too leisurely nor yet too hastily. Before and after Drinking wipe your Lips breath not then or Ever with too Great a Noise, for its uncivil.

100 Cleanse not your teeth with the Table Cloth Napkin Fork or Knife but if Others do it let it be done wt. [with] a Pick Tooth.

101 Rinse not your Mouth in the Presence of Others.

102 It is out of use to call upon the Company often to Eat nor need you Drink to others every Time you Drink.

103 In Company of your Betters be not longer in eating than they are lay not your Arm but only your hand upon the table.

104 It belongs to the Chiefest in Company to unfold his Napkin and fall to Meat first, But he ought then to Begin in time & to Dispatch with Dexterity that the Slowest may have time allowed him.

105 Be not Angry at Table whatever happens & if you have reason to be so, Show it not but on a Cheerful Countenance especially if there be Strangers, for Good Humor makes one Dish of Meat a Feast.

106 Set not yourself at the upper of the Table but if it Be your Due or that the Master of the house will have it so, Contend not, least you Should Trouble the company.

107 If others talk at Table be attentive but talk not with Meat in your Mouth.

108 When you Speak of God or his Attributes, let it be Seriously & with Reverence. Honor & Obey your Natural Parents although they be Poor.

109 Let your Recreations be Manful not Sinful.

110 Labor to keep alive in your Breast that Little Spark of Celestial fire Called Conscience.

*Finis*

## Young Washington and Cato from *Washington: A Biography*

NOEMIE EMERY

*The last selection indicated that young Washington was interested in the cultivation of the habits and conduct of a gentleman. But he was also moved by stories of republican virtue and political courage, as revealed in this excerpt from *Washington: A Biography* (1976) by American journalist and biographer, Noemie Emery (b. 1938). It explains how George Washington might have been inspired by Joseph Addison's 1713 play, *Cato*, a Tragedy, one of his favorite plays and the one with which he is most closely associated. The play, which deals with the words and deeds of the man famous for opposing the tyranny of Julius Caesar, was also a favorite in the American colonies, especially among the leaders of the American Revolution. Indeed, in 1778 Washington had the play performed for his men at Valley Forge.*

*What, according to Emery, does George Washington take from Addison's *Cato*? What exactly did he learn from it, and how might it have affected his later life? What sort of a young teenager would be drawn to such a play and such ideas? How do the virtues extolled by *Cato*, and appreciated by Washington, compare to his copied rules of civility and behavior (see previous selection), as well as to the virtues recommended by his compatriot Benjamin Franklin in his own "Project for Achieving Moral Perfection"?<sup>37</sup> Are you inspired by *Cato*'s words, or by the tale of how they inspired young Washington?*

George was now thirteen, a crisis age, placed by circumstances at a crisis of events, and the advice he later gave a nephew might have fitted his situation now:

At this crisis your conduct will attract the notice of those who are about you [he wrote George Steptoe Washington in 1789] . . . . Your doings now may mark the leading traits of your character through life. It is absolutely necessary if you mean to make any figure upon the stage, that you should take the first steps right. . . . The first great object . . . is to acquire, by industry and application, such knowledge as your situation enables you to obtain.

At Wakefield, now a graceful country mansion presided over in casual elegance by the fashionable Anne Aylett, he put these precepts into practice, trailing Augustine like a small and watchful shadow, studying his motions as the models for his own. His horizons widened, he attacked his studies with new energies; a cousin recalled his unexpected industry and assiduity at school. "While his brother and the other boys were at playtime," he remembered, George remained "behind the door, ciphering," preternaturally serious, except for "one youthful ebullition . . . romping with one of the largest girls." To guard

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<sup>37</sup> An excerpt from Franklin's "Project for Moral Perfection" and a study guide can be found at [www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/project-for-moral-perfection](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/project-for-moral-perfection), and [www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/self-command](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/self-command).

against the threat of social error, he copied out in painful longhand 110 "Rules of Civility and Social Conduct," blending general advice for deference to those of greater station with such specific precepts as "Wear not your cloths foul, unript or dusty," and "In the Presence of Others Sing not to yourself with a Humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet."

Doubtless, these stood him to advantage when he was transferred to Mount Vernon in the spring of 1745, a sizable advance on his previous experience and a promotion both in quality and kind. Ferry Farm had been a backwater, Wakefield a pleasant country mansion; Belvoir and Mount Vernon were working factors in the web of empire that swung from Bengal to the Alleghenies, with London as its hub. Already, that small circle was an axis of some power; William Fairfax had moved to the Council in 1742, his son George William taking his place in the House of Burgesses; in 1744 Frederick had been detached from Prince William County, and Lawrence, with the Fairfax influence behind him, slipped into the created seat. Lawrence, Anne, and now George Washington were at Belvoir often, mingling with the swarm of notables who frequented the mansion's hall. . . .

Eclat, however, was only part of what Belvoir had to offer. Among the staples of its library was *Cato* by Joseph Addison (a London crony of Lord Fairfax), a post facto defense of the Bloodless Revolution that became the staple of the parliamentary party in both Britain and the colonies and the staple of their revolution when it broke. At Belvoir it was read often, performed frequently, taken with great reverence by all. George's part in these performances was a minor miracle of casting; he played Juba, an adoptive son and protégé of Cato, who fell in love with Cato's daughter, against his judgment and certainly against his will. ("I should think our time more agreeable spent, believe me," George wrote Sally Cary Fairfax in 1755, "playing a part in Cato with the company you mention, and myself doubly happy in being the Juba to such a Marcia as you must make.")

What did George take out of *Cato*, besides the memory of Sally Fairfax's black eyes? Cato was an enemy of Julius Caesar, and his strictures against the rising empire cast the line of values by which the self-conscious classicists lived. George, always one to take instruction seriously, absorbed through this painless medium the idea that civility was to be prized above the state of nature:

A Roman soul is bent on higher views:  
To civilize the rude, unpolish'd world,  
And lay it under the restraint of laws;  
To make man mild and sociable to man,  
To cultivate the wild, licencious savage  
With wisdom, discipline, and liberal arts,  
The embellishment of life. Virtues like these  
Make human nature shine, reform the soul,  
And break our fierce barbarians into men.

reason over instinct:

Let not a torrent of impetuous zeal  
Transport thee beyond the bounds of reason:  
True fortitude is seen in great exploits  
That justice warrants, and that wisdom guides;  
All else is tow'ring frenzy and distraction.

justice over laxity of standards:

. . . this base, degenerate age requires  
Severity, and justice in its rigour. . . .  
This awes an impious, bold offending world  
Commands obedience, and gives force to laws.  
When by just vengeance guilty mortals perish  
The Gods regard the punishment with pleasure  
And lay the uplifted thunderbolt aside.

public service over private comfort:

. . . what pity is it  
That we can die but once to serve our country. . . .  
I should have blushed if Cato's house had stood  
Secure, and flourished in a civil war. . . .  
My life is not my own when Rome demands it.

the great ideal of perseverance under pressure:

. . . valour soars above  
What the world calls misfortune and affliction . . .  
The Gods, in bounty, work up storms about us  
That give mankind occasion to exert  
Their hidden strength.

the enduring fear of arbitrary power:

Bid him disband his legions,  
Restore the commonwealth to liberty,  
Submit his actions to the public censure,  
and stand the judgment of a Roman Senate,  
Bid him do this, and Cato is his friend.

and, over all, the conviction that life without self-determination is worse than no life at all:

. . . let us draw her term of freedom out. . . .

A day, an hour, of virtuous liberty  
Is worth a whole eternity in bondage.

Here, distilled, is the credo of the Whig ascendancy, which echoes through his lifetime like a chime: honor, discipline, impartial justice, order, and relentless self-control. An austere doctrine, lifting values over human virtues, with solace for the fortune-stricken but no mercy for the weak. Seductive doctrine for an adolescent, high-minded and unfanciful, conscious of emerging powers, seeking a channel in which they could be at once released and controlled. In their own right, these ideas would have made an impression; backed and sponsored by the men he loved and looked up to, they took a luster that would never fade. Washington would follow them, with the single-minded zeal of a religious postulant, from the first days of his awkward cubhood to his apogee as nationmaker and as head of state. For also in *Cato*, less noticed, in the beginning, but more telling for the end: "My life is grafted on the fate of Rome."

# The Rise of Washington from “Washingtonianism”

MYRON MAGNET

*Books instruct and inspire, habitual practice produces character, but in George Washington’s case it is most of all the deeds that make the man. And, in the view of American author and editor Myron Magnet (b. 1944), from whose crisply written 2012 essay this selection is excerpted,<sup>38</sup> it is great men who make history and George Washington is, for this thesis, “Exhibit A.” This selection provides a synoptic yet engaging account of Washington’s rise from promising young man to commander in chief of the American army in the War of Independence, tracing his path from surveyor to militia man to entrepreneur in land speculation to delegate to the Virginia House of Burgesses to military leader. The selection ably weaves together Washington’s entry upon his full maturity with the historical events leading up to the birth of the nation that he was to help found and lead.*

*What, according to Magnet, does Washington learn from his experiences—as surveyor, soldier, entrepreneur, etc.—and how do those experiences form his vision for his future nation and prepare him for his starring role in bringing it into being? What in particular does he learn from (a) his time with Braddock, and (b) his “three hard years of patrolling the frontier”? Although he did not have a rebellious nature, Washington gradually comes to see the necessity of revolution. What led him to this conclusion? How does he rise from being “a lightweight in the House of Burgesses” to being its leader? What do you see of Washington at this stage of his life that might lead you to predict that he would become what historian James Flexner called “the Founding’s indispensable man”?*

For we who believe that great men, not impersonal forces, make history, George Washington is Exhibit A. As the Revolution’s commander in chief, president of the Constitutional Convention, and first president of the United States, he was luminously the Founding’s indispensable man, in biographer James Flexner’s pitch-perfect phrase. A pragmatic visionary—that familiar American combination—he conceived from his hard-won experience in the French and Indian War the central Founding ideas of an American union under a strong executive three decades before the Constitutional Convention, and his hardships in the Revolution led him to forge that vision into a plan. An ambitious entrepreneur, he shared the “spirit of commerce” he knew was America’s ruling passion, and he eagerly foresaw a nation where industry and trade, not just farming, would provide opportunity for all and would generate the wealth he thought key to national power and security, a vision he fulfilled in his two terms as president. He had a born leader’s knack of attracting brilliant, like-minded young men to work with him to fill in the details and make his dream a reality, and he fired them up with ample measures of praise and credit. They were visionaries together, but he was the visionary in chief.

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<sup>38</sup> Two other excerpts from this essay appear below.

Continue reading this selection from Myron Magnet's "Washingtonianism" at *City Journal*: [www.city-journal.org/2012/22\\_2\\_urb-george-washington.html](http://www.city-journal.org/2012/22_2_urb-george-washington.html). This selection is composed of the first 31 paragraphs of that essay.



*B. How Washington Became Great:  
His Excellency General Washington*



## *(1) Taking Command*

# **The First Continental Congress** **from *The Life of George Washington***

WASHINGTON IRVING

*Not only the military and presidential Father of His Country, George Washington was also present at its conception. As a delegate from Virginia, he attended the First Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia from September 5 to October 26, 1774 to consider a united colonial response to the Intolerable Acts, passed by the British Parliament to punish Boston for the Boston Tea Party. The Congress discussed options, asserted rights, considered grievances, and ended by agreeing to a peaceful boycott of British goods. They also drafted a petition to King George III for redress of grievances, calling for a second meeting the following year should their petition fail—as indeed it did.*

*The two Continental Congresses are the subject of the present reading and the next, taken from a five-volume biography of George Washington (published in 1855–59) by Washington Irving (1783–1859), American author, essayist, historian, and biographer, known especially for his stories of “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” Irving, named for the great general whom he would later meet when he was seven years old, came to know and interview many figures of the Revolutionary era, and his biography is still regarded as a valuable source. After recounting what transpired at the First Continental Congress, Irving speaks here about Washington’s role in the debates and his attitude toward the possibility of independence, relying largely on Washington’s correspondence with Captain Robert McKenzie, an officer who had served under him during the French and Indian War and later served with the British troops stationed in Boston after the Boston Tea Party.*

*What, according to Irving, were Washington’s sentiments at the time of the Congress? What was his position regarding the Boston uprisings—and why? What was his position, at this time, regarding independence of the colonies? Why were not Washington and his fellow delegates bent on revolution?*

When the time approached for the meeting of the General Congress at Philadelphia, Washington was joined at Mount Vernon by Patrick Henry and Edmund Pendleton, and they performed the journey together on horseback. It was a noble companionship. Henry was then in the youthful vigor and elasticity of his bounding genius; ardent, acute, fanciful, eloquent. Pendleton, schooled in public life, a veteran in council, with native force of intellect, and habits of deep reflection. Washington, in the meridian of his days, mature in wisdom, comprehensive in mind, sagacious in foresight. Such were the apostles of liberty, repairing on their august pilgrimage to Philadelphia from all parts of the land, to lay the foundations of a mighty empire. Well may we say of that eventful period, “There were giants in those days.”

Congress assembled on Monday, the 5th of September, in a large room in Carpenter's Hall. There were fifty-one delegates, representing all the colonies excepting Georgia.

The meeting has been described as "awfully solemn." The most eminent men of the various colonies, were now for the first time brought together; they were known to each other by fame, but were, personally, strangers. The object which had called them together, was of incalculable magnitude. The liberties of no less than three millions of people, with that of all their posterity, were staked on the wisdom and energy of their councils.

"It is such an assembly," writes John Adams, who was present, "as never before came together on a sudden, in any part of the world. Here are fortunes, abilities, learning, eloquence, acuteness, equal to any I ever met with in my life. Here is a diversity of religions, educations, manners, interests, such as it would seem impossible to unite in one plan of conduct. . . ."

From the secrecy that enveloped its discussions, we are ignorant of the part taken by Washington in the debates; the similarity of the resolutions, however, in spirit and substance to those of the Fairfax County meeting, in which he presided, and the coincidence of the measures adopted with those therein recommended, show that he had a powerful agency in the whole proceedings of this eventful assembly. Patrick Henry, being asked, on his return home, whom he considered the greatest man in Congress, replied: "If you speak of eloquence, Mr. Rutledge, of South Carolina, is by far the greatest orator; but if you speak of solid information and sound judgment, Colonel Washington is unquestionably the greatest man on that floor."

How thoroughly and zealously he participated in the feelings which actuated Congress in this memorable session, may be gathered from his correspondence with a friend enlisted in the royal cause. This was Captain Robert Mackenzie, who had formerly served under him in his Virginia regiment during the French war, but now held a commission in the regular army, and was stationed among the British troops at Boston.

Mackenzie, in a letter, had spoken with loyal abhorrence of the state of affairs in the "unhappy province" of Massachusetts, and the fixed aim of its inhabitants at "total independence." "The rebellious and numerous meetings of men in arms," said he, "their scandalous and ungenerous attacks upon the best characters in the province, obliging them to save themselves by flight, and their repeated, but feeble threats, to dispossess the troops, have furnished sufficient reasons to General Gage to put the town in a formidable state of defence, about which we are now fully employed, and which will be shortly accomplished to their great mortification."

"Permit me," writes Washington in reply, "with the freedom of a friend (for you know I always esteemed you), to express my sorrow that fortune should place you in a service that must fix curses, to the latest posterity, upon the contrivers, and, if success (which, by the by, is impossible) accompanies it, execrations upon all those who have been instrumental in the execution. . . . When you condemn the conduct of the

Massachusetts people, you reason from effects, not causes, otherwise you would not wonder at a people, who are every day receiving fresh proofs of a systematic assertion of an arbitrary power, deeply planned to overturn the laws and constitution of their country, and to violate the most essential and valuable rights of mankind, being irritated, and with difficulty restrained, from acts of the greatest violence and intemperance.

“For my own part, I view things in a very different point of light from the one in which you seem to consider them; and though you are led to believe, by venal men, that the people of Massachusetts are rebellious, setting up for independency, and what not, give me leave, my good friend, to tell you that you are abused, grossly abused. . . . I think I can announce it as a fact, that it is not the wish or interest of that government, or any other upon this continent, separately or collectively, to set up for independence; but this you may at the same time rely on, that none of them will ever submit to the loss of their valuable rights and privileges, which are essential to the happiness of every free state, and without which, life, liberty, and property are rendered totally insecure.

“These, sir, being certain consequences, which must naturally result from the late acts of Parliament relative to America in general, and the government of Massachusetts in particular, is it to be wondered at that men who wish to avert the impending blow, should attempt to oppose its progress, or prepare for their defence, if it cannot be averted? Surely I may be allowed to answer in the negative; and give me leave to add, as my opinion, that more blood will be spilled on this occasion, if the ministry are determined to push matters to extremity, than history has ever yet furnished instances of in the annals of North America; and such a vital wound will be given to the peace of this great country, as time itself cannot cure, or eradicate the remembrance of.”

In concluding, he repeats his views with respect to independence: “I am well satisfied that no such thing is desired by any thinking man in all North America; on the contrary, that it is the ardent wish of the warmest advocates for liberty, that peace and tranquility, upon constitutional grounds, may be restored, and the horrors of civil discord prevented.”<sup>39</sup>

This letter we have considered especially worthy of citation, from its being so full and explicit a declaration of Washington’s sentiments and opinions at this critical juncture. His views on the question of independence are particularly noteworthy, from his being at this time in daily and confidential communication with the leaders of the popular movement, and among them with the delegates from Boston. It is evident that the filial feeling still throbbed toward the mother country, and a complete separation from her had not yet entered into the alternatives of her colonial children.

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<sup>39</sup> Sparks. Washington’s Writings, vol. ii., p. 899.

# The Appointment of General Washington from *The Life of George Washington*

WASHINGTON IRVING

*When the Second Continental Congress began meeting in Philadelphia on May 10, 1775, the Battles of Lexington and Concord had already been fought and the Revolutionary War begun. The Congress served as the de facto government of what would become the United States, conducting the war effort by recruiting soldiers, appointing officers, and directing strategy; appointing ambassadors and making treaties; and issuing money, securing loans, and disbursing funds to finance the war. The Congress gradually reached agreement on the need for independence from Britain, and on July 4, 1776 adopted the Declaration of Independence.<sup>40</sup> The present reading, like the last excerpted from Washington Irving's *Life of George Washington* (1855–59), deals with the selection, on June 14, 1775, of George Washington to be commander in chief of the newly organized American army.*

*How and why was Washington chosen to command? What, according to John Adams, were Washington's qualifications to lead? Which of these do you regard as most important? What was Washington's reaction to his nomination and his appointment? In what spirit does Washington assume command? Reading this account today, what thoughts and feelings does it generate in you?*

The second General Congress assembled at Philadelphia on the 10th of May. Peyton Randolph was again elected as president; but being obliged to return, and occupy his place as speaker of the Virginia Assembly, John Hancock, of Massachusetts, was elevated to the chair.

A lingering feeling of attachment to the mother country, struggling with the growing spirit of self-government, was manifested in the proceedings of this remarkable body. Many of those most active in vindicating colonial rights, and Washington among the number, still indulged the hope of an eventual reconciliation, while few entertained, or, at least, avowed the idea of complete independence.

A second "humble and dutiful" petition to the king was moved, but met with strong opposition. John Adams condemned it as an imbecile measure, calculated to embarrass the proceedings of Congress. He was for prompt and vigorous action. Other members concurred with him. Indeed, the measure itself seemed but a mere form, intended to reconcile the half-scrupulous; for subsequently, when it was carried, Congress, in face of it, went on to assume and exercise the powers of a sovereign authority. A federal union was formed, leaving to each colony the right of regulating its internal affairs according to its own individual constitution, but vesting in Congress the power of making peace or

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<sup>40</sup> Read the Declaration of Independence at [www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/declaration-of-independence](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/declaration-of-independence).

war; of entering into treaties and alliances; of regulating general commerce; in a word, of legislating on all such matters as regarded the security and welfare of the whole community.

The executive power was to be vested in a council of twelve, chosen by Congress from among its own members, and to hold office for a limited time. Such colonies as had not sent delegates to Congress, might yet become members of the confederacy by agreeing to its conditions. Georgia, which had hitherto hesitated, soon joined the league, which thus extended from Nova Scotia to Florida.

Congress lost no time in exercising their federated powers. In virtue of them, they ordered the enlistment of troops, the construction of forts in various parts of the colonies, the provision of arms, ammunition, and military stores; while to defray the expense of these, and other measures, avowedly of self-defense, they authorized the emission of notes to the amount of three millions of dollars, bearing the inscription of "The United Colonies;" the faith of the confederacy being pledged for their redemption.

A retaliating decree was passed, prohibiting all supplies of provisions to the British fisheries; and another, declaring the province of Massachusetts Bay absolved from its compact with the crown, by the violation of its charter; and recommending it to form an internal government for itself.

The public sense of Washington's military talents and experience, was evinced in his being chairman of all the committees appointed for military affairs. Most of the rules and regulations for the army, and the measures for defense, were devised by him.

The situation of the New England army, actually besieging Boston, became an early and absorbing consideration. It was without munitions of war, without arms, clothing, or pay; in fact, without legislative countenance or encouragement. Unless sanctioned and assisted by Congress, there was danger of its dissolution. If dissolved, how could another be collected? If dissolved, what would there be to prevent the British from sallying out of Boston, and spreading desolation throughout the country?

All this was the subject of much discussion out of doors. The disposition to uphold the army was general; but the difficult question was, who should be commander-in-chief? Adams, in his diary, gives us glimpses of the conflict of opinions and interests within doors. There was a southern party, he said, which could not brook the idea of a New England army, commanded by a New England general. "Whether this jealousy was sincere," writes he, "or whether it was mere pride, and a haughty ambition of furnishing a southern general to command the northern army, I cannot say; but the intention was very visible to me, that Colonel Washington was their object; and so many of our stanchest men were in the plan, that we could carry nothing without conceding to it. There was another embarrassment, which was never publicly known, and which was carefully concealed by those who knew it: the Massachusetts and other New England delegates were divided. Mr. Hancock and Mr. Cushing hung back; Mr. Paine did not come forward, and even Mr. Samuel Adams was irresolute. Mr. Hancock himself had an ambition to be

appointed commander-in-chief. Whether he thought an election a compliment due to him, and intended to have the honor of declining it, or whether he would have accepted it, I know not. To the compliment, he had some pretensions; for, at that time, his exertions, sacrifices, and general merits in the cause of his country, had been incomparably greater than those of Colonel Washington. But the delicacy of his health, and his entire want of experience in actual service, though an excellent militia officer, were decisive objections to him in my mind. . . ."

The opinion evidently inclined in favor of Washington; yet it was promoted by no clique of partisans or admirers. More than one of the Virginia delegates, says Adams, were cool on the subject of this appointment; and particularly Mr. Pendleton, was clear and full against it. It is scarcely necessary to add, that Washington in this, as in every other situation in life, made no step in advance to clutch the impending honor.

Adams, in his diary, claims the credit of bringing the members of Congress to a decision. Rising in his place, one day, and stating briefly, but earnestly, the exigencies of the case, he moved that Congress should adopt the army at Cambridge, and appoint a general. Though this was not the time to nominate the person, "yet," adds he, "as I had reason to believe this was a point of some difficulty, I had no hesitation to declare, that I had but one gentleman in my mind for that important command, and that was a gentleman from Virginia, who was among us and very well known to all of us; a gentleman, whose skill and experience as an officer, whose independent fortune, great talents, and excellent universal character would command the approbation of all America, and unite the cordial exertions of all the colonies better than any other person in the Union. Mr. Washington, who happened to sit near the door, as soon as he heard me allude to him, from his usual modesty, darted into the library-room. Mr. Hancock, who was our president, which gave me an opportunity to observe his countenance, while I was speaking on the state of the colonies, the army at Cambridge, and the enemy, heard me with visible pleasure; but when I came to describe Washington for the commander, I never remarked a more sudden and striking change of countenance. Mortification and resentment were expressed as forcibly as his face could exhibit them."

"When the subject came under debate, several delegates opposed the appointment of Washington; not from personal objections, but because the army were all from New England, and had a general of their own, General Artemas Ward, with whom they appeared well satisfied; and under whose command they had proved themselves able to imprison the British army in Boston; which was all that was to be expected or desired."

The subject was postponed to a future day. In the interim, pains were taken out of doors to obtain a unanimity, and the voices were in general so clearly in favor of Washington, that the dissentient members were persuaded to withdraw their opposition.

On the 15th of June, the army was regularly adopted by Congress, and the pay of the commander-in-chief fixed at five hundred dollars a month. Many still clung to the idea, that in all these proceedings they were merely opposing the measures of the ministry, and not the authority of the crown, and thus the army before Boston was designated as the

Continental Army, in contradistinction to that under General Gage, which was called the Ministerial Army.

In this stage of the business Mr. Johnson of Maryland, rose, and nominated Washington for the station of commander-in-chief. The election was by ballot, and was unanimous. It was formally announced to him by the president, on the following day, when he had taken his seat in Congress. Rising in his place, he briefly expressed his high and grateful sense of the honor conferred on him, and his sincere devotion to the cause. "But," added he, "lest some unlucky event should happen unfavorable to my reputation, I beg it may be remembered by every gentleman in the room, that I this day declare, with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the command I am honored with. As to pay, I beg leave to assure the Congress that, as no pecuniary consideration could have tempted me to accept this arduous employment, at the expense of my domestic ease and happiness, I do not wish to make any profit of it. I will keep an exact account of my expenses. Those, I doubt not, they will discharge, and that is all I desire."

"There is something charming to me in the conduct of Washington," writes Adams to a friend; "a gentleman of one of the first fortunes upon the continent, leaving his delicious retirement, his family and friends, sacrificing his ease, and hazarding all, in the cause of his country. His views are noble and disinterested. He declared, when he accepted the mighty trust, that he would lay before us an exact account of his expenses, and not accept a shilling of pay. . . ."

In this momentous change in his condition, which suddenly altered all his course of life, and called him immediately to the camp, Washington's thoughts recurred to Mount Vernon, and its rural delights, so dear to his heart, whence he was to be again exiled. His chief concern, however, was on account of the distress it might cause to his wife. His letter to her on the subject is written in a tone of manly tenderness. [*The letter is presented in the next selection.*] . . .

And to his favorite brother, John Augustine, he writes: "I am now to bid adieu to you, and to every kind of domestic ease, for a while. I am embarked on a wide ocean, boundless in its prospect, and in which, perhaps, no safe harbor is to be found. I have been called upon by the unanimous voice of the colonies to take the command of the continental army; an honor I neither sought after, nor desired, as I am thoroughly convinced that it requires great abilities, and much more experience, than I am master of." And subsequently, referring to his wife: "I shall hope that my friends will visit, and endeavor to keep up the spirits of my wife as much as they can, for my departure will, I know, be a cutting stroke upon her; and on this account alone I have many disagreeable sensations."

On the 20th of June, he received his commission from the president of Congress. The following day was fixed upon for his departure for the army. He reviewed previously, at the request of their officers, several militia companies of horse and foot. Every one was anxious to see the new commander, and rarely has the public *beau ideal* of a commander been so fully answered. He was now in the vigor of his days, forty-three years of age,

stately in person, noble in his demeanor, calm and dignified in his deportment; as he sat his horse, with manly grace, his military presence delighted every eye, and wherever he went the air rang with acclamations.

# Letter to Martha Washington

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*Three days after receiving his commission from the Continental Congress, General George Washington wrote this letter to his wife Martha. The letter may very well strike modern ears as overly formal and insufficiently affectionate. But giving the letter a closer reading, do you think that Washington is really indifferent or insensitive to his wife's feelings and concerns? What is Washington's understanding of the relation between his public duties and his (and their) private life and happiness? How does Washington explain to Mrs. Washington his acceptance of the position? What does he mean by saying "it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown upon me this service"? And what does he then mean by saying, in response, that he hopes "that my undertaking it is designed to answer to some good purpose?" How does Washington address his wife's possible concerns? Imagining yourself the recipient of this letter, how would you feel and respond? What sort of a man could write such a letter?*

June 18, 1775  
Philadelphia

My Dearest,

I am now set down to write to you on a subject, which fills me with inexpressible concern—and this concern is greatly aggravated and increased, when I reflect upon the uneasiness I know it will give you—It has been determined in Congress, that the whole army raised for the defense of the American cause shall be put under my care, and that it is necessary for me to proceed immediately to Boston to take upon me the Command of it. You may believe me, my dear Patsy, when I assure you, in the most solemn manner that, so far from seeking this appointment, I have used every endeavor in my power to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and the Family, but from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my Capacity, and that I should enjoy more real happiness in one month with you at home, than I have the most distant prospect of finding abroad, if my stay were to be Seven times Seven years. But as it has been a kind of destiny, that has thrown me upon this Service, I shall hope that my undertaking it is designed to answer some good purpose—You might, and I suppose did perceive, from the Tenor of my letters, that I was apprehensive I could not avoid this appointment, as I did not pretend to intimate when I should return—that was the case—it was utterly out of my power to refuse this appointment, without exposing my Character to such censures, as would have reflected dishonor upon myself, and given pain to my friends. This, I am sure, could not, and ought not, to be pleasing to you, and must have lessened me considerably in my own esteem. I shall rely, therefore, confidently on that Providence, which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall—I shall feel no pain from the Toil or the danger of the Campaign—My unhappiness will flow from the uneasiness I know you will feel from being left alone—I therefore beg of you to summon your whole fortitude and Resolution,

and pass your time as agreeably as possible—nothing will give me so much sincere satisfaction as to hear this, and to hear it from your own Pen. . . .

My earnest and ardent desire is, that you would pursue any Plan that is most likely to produce content, and a tolerable degree of Tranquility; as it must add greatly to my uneasy feelings to hear, that you are dissatisfied or complaining at what I really could not avoid.

As Life is always uncertain, and common prudence dictates to every Man the necessity of settling his temporal Concerns, while it is in his power—and while the Mind is calm and undisturbed, I have, since I came to this place (for I had not time to do it before I left home) got Colonel Pendleton to Draft a Will for me, by the directions I gave him, which Will I now enclose—The provision made for you in case of my death will, I hope, be agreeable. . . .

I shall add nothing more, as I have several Letters to write, but to desire that you will remember me to Milly<sup>41</sup> and all Friends, and to assure you that I am with the most unfeigned regard, my dear Patsy,

Your Affectionate, &c.

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<sup>41</sup> *Amelia Posey, daughter of Captain John Posey and a friend of Martha Parke Custis (Washington's stepdaughter), who lived at Mount Vernon for most of the Revolutionary War.*

*(2) Commanding:  
Washington in His Glory*

# *The Crisis, No. 1*

THOMAS PAINE

*In retrospect, especially looking from the perspective of today, 230 years after the end of the War of Independence, it is easy to forget how uncertain was the revolutionary cause, how perilous the risk of failure, and, especially, how divided were the colonists on the rightness of the revolt and the wisdom of joining what seemed at first to be the losing side. Allow, therefore, the fiery words of Thomas Paine (1737–1809) to recreate for you the situation that faced Washington and the revolution as the campaign moved, in late 1776, into the mid-Atlantic states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In 1776, Paine, influential essayist and editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine in Philadelphia, had already written Common Sense, an immensely influential pamphlet that made the case for declaring independence from Britain. His The American Crisis was a series of essays, published between the end of 1776 and 1783, in which Paine addressed the many crises faced by the revolution and the fledgling nation struggling to be born alive. George Washington found this, the first of those essays (published December 23, 1776), with its famous opening lines, so inspiring that he ordered it read aloud to his troops at Valley Forge, just days before the treacherous Christmas Day crossing of the Delaware River and their subsequent morale-boosting triumph in the Battle of Trenton.*

*Read the essay slowly and carefully, trying to state the point of each paragraph and the overall argument. What is Paine’s purpose in this essay? To which groups is he most trying to appeal, and why might they need to be addressed in the manner he chooses? What, exactly, is “the crisis” of the day? How, and to what end, does Paine use references to God? What is Paine’s case against the Tories? What is his argument and appeal to the neutrals, who just want to be left alone to live in peace? How does Paine justify the revolution? Why does he claim that it will succeed? Were you to have been a peace-loving farmer or shopkeeper or merchant—with spouse, children, and an income that depended in no small part on commerce with the British—do you think that you would have been moved by the essay? Which arguments would have persuaded or inspired you to join the revolutionary cause and fight?*

These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer-soldier and the sun-shine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheaply, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has a right not only to TAX but “to BIND us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER;” and if being bound in that manner is not slavery, there is no such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious; for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.

Whether the independence of the continent was declared too soon, or delayed too long, I will not now enter into as an argument; my own simple opinion is, that had it been eight months earlier, it would have been much better. We did not make a proper use of last winter, neither could we, while we were in a dependent situation. However, the fault, if it were one, was all our own. But no great deal is lost yet. All that [General Sir William] Howe<sup>42</sup> has been doing for this month past, is rather a ravage than a conquest, which the spirit of the Jerseys, a year ago, would have quickly repulsed, and which time and a little resolution will soon recover.

I have as little superstition in me as any man living; but my secret opinion has ever been, and still is, that God will not give up a people to military destruction, or leave them unsupportedly to perish, who had so earnestly and so repeatedly sought to avoid the calamities of war, by every decent method which wisdom could invent. Neither have I so much of the infidel in me, as to suppose that He has relinquished the government of the world, and given us up to the care of devils; and as I do not, I cannot see on what grounds the King can look up to heaven for help against us: a common murderer or highwayman has as good a pretence as he.

It is surprising to see how rapidly a panic will sometimes run through a country. All Nations and ages have been subject to them. Britain has trembled like an ague<sup>43</sup> at the report of a French fleet of flat-bottomed boats; and in the fourteenth century, the whole English army, after ravaging the Kingdom of France, was driven back, like men petrified with fear; and this brave exploit was performed by a few broken forces, collected and headed by a woman, Joan of Arc. Would that heaven might inspire some Jersey maid to spirit up her countrymen, and save her fair fellow sufferers from ravage and ravishment! Yet panics, in some cases, have their uses: they produce as much good as hurt. Their duration is always short: the mind soon grows through them, and acquires a firmer habit than before. But their peculiar advantage is, that they are the touchstones of sincerity and hypocrisy, and bring things and men to light, which might otherwise have lain forever undiscovered. In fact, they have the same effect on secret traitors, which an imaginary apparition would have upon a private murderer. They sift out the hidden thoughts of man, and hold them up in public to the world. Many a disguised Tory has lately shown his head, that shall penitentially solemnize with curses the day on which Howe arrived upon the Delaware. . . .

I shall not now attempt to give all the particulars of our retreat to the Delaware. Suffice it, for the present, to say, that both officers and men, though greatly harassed and fatigued, frequently without rest, covering, or provision, the inevitable consequences of a long retreat, bore it with a manly and martial spirit. All their wishes were one; which was, that the country would turn out, and help them to drive the enemy back. Voltaire has remarked that King William never appeared to full advantage, but in difficulties and in action. The same remark may be made on General Washington, for the character fits him. There is a natural firmness in some minds, which cannot be unlocked by trifles, but which, when unlocked, discovers a cabinet of fortitude; and I reckon it among those kind

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<sup>42</sup> *Commander in chief of the British forces in America.*

<sup>43</sup> *A fever marked by fits of shivering.*

of public blessings which we do not immediately see, that God hath blessed him with uninterrupted health, and given him a mind that can even flourish upon care.

I shall conclude this paper with some miscellaneous remarks on the state of our affairs; and shall begin with asking the following question. Why is it that the enemy hath left the New England provinces, and made these middle ones the seat of war? The answer is easy. New England is not infested with Tories, and we are. I have been tender in raising the cry against these men, and used numberless arguments to show them their danger: but it will not do to sacrifice a world either to their folly or their baseness. The period is now arrived, in which either they or we must change our sentiments, or one or both must fall. And what is a Tory? Good God! what is he? I should not be afraid to go with an hundred Whigs against a thousand Tories, were they to attempt to get into arms. Every Tory is a coward: for servile, slavish, self-interested fear is the foundation of Toryism: and a man under such influence, though he may be cruel, never can be brave.

But, before the line of irrecoverable separation may be drawn between us, let us reason the matter together. Your conduct is an invitation to the enemy; yet not one in a thousand of you has heart enough to join him. Howe is as much deceived by you, as the American cause is injured by you. He expects you will all take up arms, and flock to his standard with muskets on your shoulders. Your opinions are of no use to him, unless you support him personally; for it is soldiers, and not Tories, that he wants.

I once felt all that kind of anger which a man ought to feel against the mean principles that are held by the Tories. A noted one, who kept a tavern at Amboy, was standing at his door, with as pretty a child in his hand, about eight or nine months old, as I ever saw; and after speaking his mind as freely as he thought was prudent, finished with the unfatherly expression, "Well, give me peace in my days." Not a man lives on the continent, but fully believes that separation must some time or other finally take place, and a generous parent would have said, "If there must be trouble, let it be in my days, that my child may have peace;" and this single reflection, well applied, is sufficient to awaken every man to duty. Not a place upon earth might be so happy as America. Her situation is remote from all the wrangling world, and she has nothing to do but to trade with them. A man may easily distinguish in himself between temper and principle, and I am as confident, as I am that God governs the world, that America will never be happy till she gets clear of foreign dominion. Wars, without ceasing, will break out till that period arrives, and the continent must, in the end, be conqueror; for though the flame of liberty may sometimes cease to shine, the coal can never expire.

America did not, nor does not want [lack] force; but she wanted a proper application of that force. Wisdom is not the purchase of a day, and it is no wonder that we should err at first setting off. From an excess of tenderness, we were unwilling to raise an army, and trusted our cause to the temporary defence of a well-meaning militia. A summer's experience has now taught us better; yet with those troops, while they were collected, we were able to set bounds to the progress of the enemy; and, thank God, they are again assembling. I always considered militia as the best troops in the world for a sudden exertion, but they will not do for a long campaign. Howe, it is probable, will make an

attempt on this city [Philadelphia]; should he fail on this side of the Delaware, he is ruined; if he succeeds, our cause is not ruined. He stakes all on his side against a part on ours; admitting he succeeds, the consequence will be, that armies from both ends of the continent will march to assist their suffering friends in the middle states; for he cannot go every where: it is impossible. I consider Howe as the greatest enemy the Tories have; he is bringing a war into their country, which, had it not been for him, and partly for themselves, they had been clear of. Should he now be expelled, I wish, with all the devotion of a Christian, that the names of Whig and Tory may never more be mentioned; but should the Tories give him encouragement to come, or assistance if he come, I as sincerely wish that our next year's arms may expel them from the continent, and the Congress appropriate their possessions to the relief of those who have suffered in well-doing. A single successful battle next year will settle the whole. America could carry on a two-years war by the confiscation of the property of disaffected persons, and be made happy by their expulsion. Say not that this is revenge; call it rather the soft resentment of a suffering people, who, having no object in view but the good of all, have staked their own all upon a seemingly doubtful event. Yet it is folly to argue against determined hardness. Eloquence may strike the ear, and the language of sorrow draw forth the tear of compassion, but nothing can reach the heart that is steeled with prejudice.

Quitting this class of men, I turn, with the warm ardor of a friend, to those who have nobly stood, and are yet determined, to stand the matter out: I call not upon a few, but upon all: not on this state or that state, but on every state. Up and help us. Lay your shoulders to the wheel. Better have too much force than too little, when so great an object is at stake. Let it be told to the future world, that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive, that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet and to repulse it. Say not that thousands are gone: turn out your tens of thousands: throw not the burden of the day upon Providence, but show your faith by your good works, that God may bless you. It matters not where you live, or what rank of life you hold; the evil or the blessing will reach you all. The far and the near, the home counties and the back, the rich and the poor, shall suffer or rejoice alike. The heart that feels not now is dead. The blood of his children will curse his cowardice, who shrinks back at a time when a little might have saved the whole, and made them happy. I love the man that can smile in trouble—that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. It is the business of little minds to shrink; but he, whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death. My own line of reasoning is to myself, as straight and clear as a ray of light. Not all the treasures of the world, so far as I believe, could have induced me to support an offensive war, for I think it murder; but if a thief breaks into my house—burn and destroy my property, and kill, or threaten to kill me and those that are in it, and to “bind me in all cases whatsoever,” to his absolute will, am I to suffer it? What signifies it to me, whether he who does it is a King or a common man; my countryman, or not my countryman; whether it be done by an individual villain, or an army of men? If we reason to the root of things we shall find no difference; neither can any just cause be assigned, why we should punish in the one case, and pardon in the other. Let them call me rebel, and welcome; I feel no concern from it; but I should suffer the misery of devils, were I to make a whore of my soul, by swearing allegiance to one whose character is that of a sottish, stupid,

stubborn, worthless, brutish man. I conceive, likewise, a horrid idea in receiving mercy from a being who, at the last day, shall be shrieking to the rocks and mountains to cover him, and fleeing with terror from the orphan, the widow, and the slain of America.

There are cases which cannot be overdone by language; and this is one. There are persons too, who see not the full extent of the evil which threatens them. They solace themselves with hopes, that the enemy, if they succeed, will be merciful. It is the madness of folly, to expect mercy from those who have refused to do justice; and even mercy, where conquest is the object, is only a trick of war. The cunning of the fox is as murderous as the violence of the wolf, and we ought to guard equally against both. Howe's first object is partly by threats, and partly by promises, to terrify or seduce the people to deliver up their arms, and receive mercy. The Ministry recommended the same plan to Gage, and this is what the Tories call making their peace—"a peace which passeth all understanding" indeed. A peace which would be the immediate forerunner of a worse ruin than any we have yet thought of. Ye men of Pennsylvania, do reason upon these things! Were the back counties to give up their arms, they would fall an easy prey to the Indians, who are all armed. This, perhaps, is what some Tories would not be sorry for. Were the home counties to deliver up their arms, they would be exposed to the resentment of the back counties, who would then have it in their power to chastise their defection at pleasure. And were any one state to give up its arms, that state must be garrisoned by all Howe's army of Britons and Hessians, to preserve it from the anger of the rest. Mutual fear is the principal link in the chain of mutual love, and woe be to that state that breaks the compact. Howe is mercifully inviting you to barbarous destruction, and men must be either rogues or fools that will not see it. I dwell not upon the vapors of imagination; I bring reason to your ears, and, in language as plain as A, B, C, hold up truth to your eyes.

I thank God, that I fear not. I see no real cause for fear. I know our situation well, and can see the way out of it. While our army was collected, Howe dared not risk a battle; and it is no credit to him that he decamped from the White Plains, and waited a mean opportunity to ravage the defenceless Jerseys; but it is great credit to us, that, with a handful of men, we sustained an orderly retreat, for near an hundred miles, brought off our ammunition, all our field pieces, the greatest part of our stores, and had four rivers to pass. None can say, that our retreat was precipitate; for we were near three weeks in performing it, that the country might have time to come in. Twice we marched back to meet the enemy, and remained out till dark. The sign of fear was not seen in our camp; and had not some of the cowardly and disaffected inhabitants spread false alarms through the country, the Jerseys had never been ravaged. Once more, we are again collected and collecting. Our new army, at both ends of the continent, is recruiting fast; and we shall be able to open the next campaign with sixty thousand men, well armed and clothed. This is our situation—and who will, may know it. By perseverance and fortitude we have the prospect of a glorious issue; by cowardice and submission, the sad choice of a variety of evils—a ravaged country—a depopulated city—habitations without safety—and slavery without hope—our homes turned into barracks and bawdyhouses for Hessians—and a future race to provide for, whose fathers we shall doubt of! Look on this picture, and

weep over it! and if there yet remains one thoughtless wretch, who believes it not, let him suffer it unlamented.

# When George Washington Became Great

MYRON MAGNET

*This selection is excerpted from the first of two essays on the centrality of George Washington in American history, written by American author and editor Myron Magnet (b. 1944) and published in 2012 in City Journal.<sup>44</sup> It deals with Washington's career as commander in chief of the Continental Army, from the beginning to the end of the Revolutionary War. The study questions about the text are grouped by theme and coincide with the order of the essay:*

## *Commander in Chief*

*When Washington was selected as the commander in chief of the American armies in 1775, he was the first ever to hold that position. When America declared its independence the following year, his position took on even greater weight as he not only had to equip an army to fight against a world superpower, but he also had to convince others—both Americans and those in other nations whose support the Continentals dearly needed—that the American cause was just and that victory was possible. How, according to Magnet, do these responsibilities affect Washington's actions? What challenges did he face? How did he try to fulfill both his political and military roles as commander in chief?*

## *Boston and New York*

*From what Magnet provides, describe the Boston and New York campaigns. What were Washington's goals? Why did he choose to defend a city he knew was indefensible—and would later lose anyway? What mistakes did he make, and what realizations came with them? Describe the men whom Washington commanded. How do they differ from the British forces they were fighting? Do they reflect something particularly American?*

## *Valley Forge*

*What lessons did Washington learn from his defeat at New York? Why did he consider it so important to “win hearts and minds”? Describe the state of Washington's army. What would it have been like to be a soldier following General Washington? Is there anything that would have kept you in the army after your enlistment ran up at the end of the year?*

## *The American Crisis*

*Describe Washington's famous crossing of the Delaware. Why was it so important to Washington that he strike a victory when he did? If you were a soldier with Washington,*

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<sup>44</sup> Three excerpts from Magnet's second essay, “Washingtonianism,” are also included in this anthology, appearing both above and below.

*what do you think the victory would have meant to you? Would it change how you felt about your commander? Did it change how Washington felt about the men he led?*

*A Leader Out Front*

*Throughout Magnet's account, he describes how Washington's men were inspired by their leader. Describe, using examples from the text, ways in which Washington inspired his men. Is this how and "when George Washington became great"?*

In the summer of 1755, 23-year-old George Washington galloped back and forth across a blood-soaked battlefield near present-day Pittsburgh, trying heroically but unsuccessfully to rally the panicked British force in which he served to withstand a withering attack by Britain's French and Indian enemies in a war his own hotheadedness had ignited two years earlier. An Indian chief ordered his braves to shoot down the seemingly fearless six-footer, conspicuous not only for his height and daring but also for being, as Thomas Jefferson later marveled, "the best horseman of his age and the most graceful figure that could ever be seen on horseback." The Indians fired volley after volley, putting four bullets through his coat and killing two horses out from under him, but he fought on unscathed. Fifteen years later, the same chief told him how vividly he remembered that day, which convinced him that the Great Spirit must have a brilliant future in store for the young officer whom his braves miraculously couldn't kill no matter how hard they tried.

Read the rest of Magnet's essay at *City Journal*:  
[www.city-journal.org/2012/22\\_1\\_urb-george-washington.html](http://www.city-journal.org/2012/22_1_urb-george-washington.html)

## Address on the Newburgh Conspiracy

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*As commander in chief, George Washington had to reckon not only with a dangerous enemy but also on occasion with uprisings among his men. Here, too, he performed superbly. In March 1783, Cornwallis having long since surrendered and with the war now officially coming to an end, a different sort of trouble was brewing in the Continental Army headquartered at Newburgh, New York. The troops, angry at the Congress of the Confederation because they had not been properly paid, concerned that their promised pensions would go unfunded, and spurred by an anonymous letter that urged them to act, planned to assemble to consider taking action against the Congress. On Washington's intervention, the meeting scheduled for March 10 was canceled, and was replaced by a meeting of the officers on March 15. To everyone's surprise, Washington made an unexpected appearance at the officers' meeting, and read the following address. When he had finished and left, the conspiracy collapsed, and resolutions affirming loyalty to the government and expressing confidence in the Congress passed overwhelmingly.*

*A month later, in April 1783, Captain Samuel Shaw of Massachusetts (1754–94), who had been present, wrote a letter to a Reverend Mr. Eliot describing Washington's performance on the occasion:*

*Every eye was fixed upon the illustrious man, and attention to their beloved General held the assembly mute. He opened the meeting by apologizing for his appearance there, which was by no means his intention when he published the order which directed them to assemble. But the diligence used in circulating the anonymous pieces rendered it necessary that he should give his sentiments to the army on the nature and tendency of them, and determined him to avail himself of the present opportunity; and, in order to do it with greater perspicuity, he had committed his thoughts to writing, which, with the indulgence of his brother officers, he would take the liberty of reading to them. It is needless for me to say any thing of this production; it speaks for itself. After he had concluded his address, he said, that, as a corroborating testimony of the good disposition in Congress towards the army, he would communicate to them a letter received from a worthy member of that body, and one who on all occasions had ever approved himself their fast friend. This was an exceedingly sensible letter; and, while it pointed out the difficulties and embarrassments of Congress, it held up very forcibly the idea that the army should, at all events, be generously dealt with. One circumstance in reading this letter must not be omitted. His Excellency, after reading the first paragraph, made a short pause, took out his spectacles, and begged the indulgence of his audience while he put them on, observing at the same time, that he had grown gray in their service, and now found himself growing blind. There was something so natural, so unaffected, in this appeal, as rendered it superior to the most studied oratory; it forced its way to the heart, and you might see sensibility moisten every eye. The General, having finished, took leave of the assembly.*

*How, in his address, does Washington try to calm the men? To what does he appeal? Why was he successful? Imagine yourself among the troops. Taking into account both Washington's own words and Shaw's description of his performance, would you have been persuaded, and, if so, how and by what?*

Gentlemen:

By an anonymous summons, an attempt has been made to convene you together; how inconsistent with the rules of propriety! how unmilitary! and how subversive of all order and discipline, let the good sense of the Army decide. . . .

Thus much, gentlemen, I have thought it incumbent on me to observe to you, to show upon what principles I opposed the irregular and hasty meeting which was proposed to have been held on Tuesday last: and not because I wanted a disposition to give you every opportunity consistent with your own honor, and the dignity of the Army, to make known your grievances. If my conduct heretofore, has not evinced to you, that I have been a faithful friend to the Army, my declaration of it at this time would be equally unavailing and improper. But as I was among the first who embarked in the cause of our common Country. As I have never left your side one moment, but when called from you on public duty. As I have been the constant companion and witness of your Distresses, and not among the last to feel, and acknowledge your Merits. As I have ever considered my own Military reputation as inseparably connected with that of the Army. As my Heart has ever expanded with joy, when I have heard its praises, and my indignation has arisen, when the mouth of detraction has been opened against it, it can *scarcely be supposed*, at this late stage of the War, that I am indifferent to its interests. But, how are they to be promoted? The way is plain, says the anonymous Addresser. If War continues, remove into the unsettled Country; there establish yourselves, and leave an ungrateful Country to defend itself. But who are they to defend? Our Wives, our Children, our Farms, and other property which we leave behind us. Or, in this state of hostile separation, are we to take the two first (the latter cannot be removed) to perish in a Wilderness, with hunger, cold and nakedness? If Peace takes place, never sheathe your Swords, Says he, until you have obtained full and ample justice; this dreadful alternative, of either deserting our Country in the extremest hour of her distress or turning our Arms against it, (which is the apparent object, unless Congress can be compelled into instant compliance), has something so shocking in it, that humanity revolts at the idea. My God! what can this writer have in view, by recommending such measures? Can he be a friend to the Army? Can he be a friend to this Country? Rather, is he not an insidious Foe? Some Emissary, perhaps, from New York, plotting the ruin of both, by sowing the seeds of discord and separation between the Civil and Military powers of the Continent? And what a Compliment does he pay to our Understandings when he recommends measures in either alternative, impracticable in their Nature? . . .

I cannot, in justice to my own belief, and what I have great reason to conceive is the intention of Congress, conclude this Address, without giving it as my decided opinion, that that Honorable Body, entertain exalted sentiments of the Services of the Army; and, from a full conviction of its merits and sufferings, will do it complete justice. That their

endeavors, to discover and establish funds for this purpose, have been unwearied, and will not cease, till they have succeeded, I have not a doubt. But, like all other large Bodies, where there is a variety of different interests to reconcile, their deliberations are slow. Why then should we distrust them? and, in consequence of that distrust, adopt measures, which may cast a shade over that glory which, has been so justly acquired; and tarnish the reputation of an Army which is celebrated through all Europe, for its fortitude and Patriotism? and for what is this done? to bring the object we seek nearer? No! most certainly, in my opinion, it will cast it at a greater distance.

For myself (and I take no merit in giving the assurance, being induced to it from principles of gratitude, veracity and justice), a grateful sense of the confidence you have ever placed in me, a recollection of the cheerful assistance and prompt obedience I have experienced from you, under every vicissitude of fortune, and the sincere affection I feel for an Army, I have so long had the honor to Command, will oblige me to declare, in this public and solemn manner, that, in the attainment of complete justice for all your toils and dangers, and in the gratification of every wish, so far as may be done consistently with the great duty I owe my Country, and those powers we are bound to respect, you may freely command my Services to the utmost of my abilities.

While I give you these assurances, and pledge myself in the most unequivocal manner, to exert whatever ability I am possessed of, in your favor, let me entreat you, Gentlemen, on your part, not to take any measures, which, viewed in the calm light of reason, will lessen the dignity, and sully the glory you have hitherto maintained; let me request you to rely on the plighted faith of your Country, and place a full confidence in the purity of the intentions of Congress; that, previous to your dissolution as an Army they will cause all your Accounts to be fairly liquidated, as directed in their resolutions, which were published to you two days ago, and that they will adopt the most effectual measures in their power, to render ample justice to you, for your faithful and meritorious Services. And let me conjure you, in the name of our common Country, as you value your own sacred honor, as you respect the rights of humanity, and as you regard the Military and National character of America, to express your utmost horror and detestation of the Man who wishes, under any specious pretenses, to overturn the liberties of our Country, and who wickedly attempts to open the flood gates of Civil discord, and deluge our rising Empire in Blood. By thus determining, and thus acting, you will pursue the plain and direct road to the attainment of your wishes. You will defeat the insidious designs of our Enemies, who are compelled to resort from open force to secret Artifice. You will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism and patient virtue, rising superior to the pressure of the most complicated sufferings; And you will, by the dignity of your Conduct, afford occasion for Posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to Mankind, "had this day been wanting, the World had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining."

# A Frenchman's Estimate of Washington in 1781

CLAUDE C. ROBIN

*By the end of the Revolutionary War, Washington's reputation for greatness had spread far and wide, gaining the admiration of many Europeans, especially among the French. One such admirer, the Abbé Claude C. Robin (1750–94), was for a time during the American Revolution a chaplain (recommended by Benjamin Franklin) in the French army in America (serving under General Rochambeau). This letter bears the place and date "Camp of Phillipsburg, August 4, 1781," a few weeks after his arrival in this country and shortly before the battle of Yorktown, where Robin witnessed Cornwallis' final surrender to Washington. The letter was the first of a series of 13 letters written by the Abbé while he was in America, all of which were first published in Paris in 1782, and then translated and published in Philadelphia in 1783, with the title "New Travels through North America, in a series of letters exhibiting the victorious campaign of the allied armies under his Excellency Gen. Washington, and the Count de Rochambeau, in the year 1781." The letter is of special interest because of its view of the relation between Washington and his fellow countrymen.*

*With what attitude does Robin approach Washington, and what does he hope to see in his personal appearance? How does he actually describe Washington? What does he mean by suggesting that Washington "may now grasp at the most unbounded power, without provoking envy or exciting suspicion"? What is Robin's view of the American people, and of their relation to their godlike hero? Do we Americans today like heroes? Need heroes? Of what sort, and for what purposes? Can our dead heroes—like George Washington—still meet that need and serve those purposes? How would you describe our—your own—relation to Washington?*

I have seen General Washington, that most singular man—the soul and support of one of the greatest revolutions that has ever happened, or can happen. I fixed my eyes upon him with that keen attention which the sight of a great man always inspires. We naturally entertain a secret hope of discovering in the features of such illustrious persons some traces of that genius which distinguishes them from, and elevates them above, their fellow mortals.

Perhaps the exterior of no man was better calculated to gratify these expectations than that of General Washington. He is of a tall and noble stature, well proportioned, a fine, cheerful, open countenance, a simple and modest carriage; and his whole mien has something in it that interests the French, the Americans, and even enemies themselves, in his favor. Placed in a military view, at the head of a nation where each individual has a share in the supreme legislative authority, and where coercive laws are yet in a degree destitute of vigor, where the climate and manners can add but little to their energy, where the spirit of party, private interest, slowness and national indolence, slacken, suspend, and overthrow the best concerted measures; although so situated he has found out a method of keeping his troops in the most absolute subordination; making them rivals in praising

him; fearing him when he is silent, and retaining their full confidence in him after defeats and disgrace. His reputation has, at length, arisen to a most brilliant height; and he may now grasp at the most unbounded power, without provoking envy or exciting suspicion. He has ever shown himself superior to fortune, and in the most trying adversity has discovered resources until then unknown: and, as if his abilities only increased and dilated at the prospect of difficulty, he is never better supplied than when he seems destitute of everything, nor have his arms ever been so fatal to his enemies, as at the very instant when they thought they had crushed him forever. It is his to excite a spirit of heroism and enthusiasm in a people who are by nature very little susceptible of it; to gain over the respect and homage of those whose interest it is to refuse it, and to execute his plans and projects by means unknown even to those who are his instruments; he is intrepid in dangers, yet never seeks them but when the good of his country demands it, preferring rather to temporize and act upon the defensive, because he knows such a mode of conduct best suits the genius and circumstances of the nation, and all that he and they have to expect, depends upon time, fortitude, and patience; he is frugal and sober in regard to himself, but profuse in the public cause; like Peter the Great, he has by defeats conducted his army to victory; and like Fabius, but with fewer resources and more difficulty, he has conquered without fighting, and saved his country.<sup>45</sup>

Such are the ideas that arise in the mind at the sight of this great man, in examining the events in which he had a share, or in listening to those whose duty obliges them to be near his person, and consequently best display his character. In all these extensive States they consider him in the light of a beneficent god, dispensing peace and happiness around him. Old men, women, and children press about him when he accidentally passes along, and think themselves happy, once in their lives, to have seen him—they follow him through the towns with torches, and celebrate his arrival by public illuminations. The Americans, that cool and sedate people, who in the midst of their most trying difficulties, have attended only to the directions and impulses of plain method and common sense, are roused, animated, and inflamed at the very mention of his name: and the first songs that sentiment or gratitude has dictated, have been to celebrate General Washington.

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<sup>45</sup> *Peter the Great (1672–1725), tsar of Russia and later the Russian Empire; Fabius Maximus (c. 280 BC–203 BC), Roman politician and general during the Second Punic War.*

*(3) Surrendering Command:  
Washington Goes Home*

# Farewell Address to the Armies of the United States

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*On November 2, 1783, the war officially concluded, General Washington delivered his farewell orders to the Armies of the United States of America at Rocky Hill, New Jersey. After more than eight long years as commander in chief, George Washington was returning to private life. In the address, he briefly reviews past events, discusses the future prospects of his military men and the lines of conduct they should pursue, and expresses the obligations and gratitude he feels toward the men who had served under him. A particularly touching and affectionate speech, it conveyed Washington's hopes for post-war life in the new nation, not only for himself but also for the entire "patriotic band of Brothers" that fought to bring it into being.*

*How does Washington sum up the experience of the war? What does he recommend to his soldiers for the transition from war to peace, and why? How do the private virtues of civil life—economy, prudence, and industry—relate and compare to the "more splendid" military virtues—valor, perseverance, and enterprise? What is his "last injunction to every Officer and every Soldier," and why might he have thought it necessary to give it? What are his obligations to, and final wishes for, his fellow warriors? Imagine yourself among the troops hearing this farewell address. How would you have responded?*

The United States in Congress assembled, after giving the most honorable testimony to the Merits of the Federal Armies, and presenting them with the thanks of their Country for their long, eminent and faithful Services, having thought proper, by their Proclamation bearing date the 18th day of October last, to discharge such part of the Troops as were engaged for the War, and to permit the Officers on Furlough to retire from Service from and after tomorrow, which Proclamation having been communicated in the public papers for the information and government of all concerned. It only remains for the Commander in Chief to address himself once more, and that for the last time, to the Armies of the United States (however widely dispersed the Individuals who composed them may be) and to bid them an affectionate—a long farewell.

But before the Commander in Chief takes his final leave of those he holds most dear, he wishes to indulge himself a few moments in calling to mind a slight review of the past, He will then take the liberty of exploring with his Military friends their future prospects, of advising the general line of conduct which in his opinion ought to be pursued, and he will conclude the Address, by expressing the obligations he feels himself under for the spirited and able assistance he has experienced from them, in the performance of an arduous Office.

A contemplation of the compleat attainment (at a period earlier than could have been expected) of the object for which we contended, against so formidable a power, cannot but inspire us with astonishment and gratitude—The disadvantageous circumstances on

our part, under which the War was undertaken, can never be forgotten—The singular interpositions of Providence in our feeble condition were such, as could scarcely escape the attention of the most unobserving—where the unparalleled perseverance of the Armies of the United States, through almost every possible suffering and discouragement, for the space of eight long years was little short of a standing Miracle.

It is not the meaning nor within the compass of this Address, to detail the hardships peculiarly incident to our Service, or to discribe the distresses which in several instances have resulted from the extremes of hunger and nakedness, combined with the rigors of an inclement season. Nor is it necessary to dwell on the dark side of our past affairs. Every American Officer and Soldier must now console himself for any unpleasant circumstances which may have occurred, by a recollection of the uncommon scenes in which he has been called to act, no inglorious part; and the astonishing Events of which he has been a witness—Events which have seldom, if ever before, taken place on the stage of human action, nor can they probably ever happen again. For who has before seen a disciplined Army formed at once from such raw Materials? Who that was not a witness could imagine, that the most violent local prejudices would cease so soon, and that Men who came from the different parts of the Continent, strongly disposed by the habits of education, to dispise and quarrel with each other, would instantly become but one patriotic band of Brothers? Or who that was not on the spot can trace the steps by which such a wonderful Revolution has been effected, and such a glorious period put to all our Warlike toils?

It is universally acknowledged that the enlarged prospect of happiness, opened by the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, almost exceeds the power of description. And shall not the brave Men who have contributed so essentially to these inestimable acquisitions, retiring victorious from the Field of War, to the Field of Agriculture, participate in all the blessings which have been obtained? In such a Republic, who will exclude them from the rights of Citizens and the fruits of their labours? In such a Country so happily circumstanced the persuits of Commerce and the cultivation of the Soil, will unfold to industry the certain road to competence. To those hardy Soldiers, who are actuated by the spirit of adventure, the Fisheries will afford ample and profitable employment, and the extensive and fertile Regions of the West will yield a most happy Asylum to those, who, fond of domestic enjoyment are seeking for personal independence. Nor is it possible to conceive that any one of the United States will prefer a National Bankrupcy and a dissolution of the Union, to a compliance with the requisitions of Congress and the payment of its just debts—so that the Officers and Soldiers may expect considerable assistance in recommencing their civil occupations from the sums due to them from the Public, which must and will most inevitably be paid.

In order to effect this desirable purpose, and to remove the prejudices which may have taken possession of the Minds of any of the good People of the States, it is earnestly recommended to all the Troops that with strong attachments to the Union, they should carry with them into civil Society the most conciliating dispositions; and that they should prove themselves not less virtuous and usefull as Citizens, than they have been persevering and victorious as Soldiers. What tho' there should be some envious

Individuals who are unwilling to pay the Debt the public has contracted, or to yield the tribute due to Merit, yet let such unworthy treatment produce no invective, or any instance of intemperate conduct, let it be remembered that the unbiased voice of the Free Citizens of the United States has promised the just reward, and given the merited applause, let it be known and remembered that the reputation of the Federal Armies is established beyond the reach of Malevolence, and let a consciousness of their achievements and fame, still incite the Men who composed them to honorable Actions; under the persuasion that the private virtues of economy, prudence and industry, will not be less amiable in civil life, than the more splendid qualities of valour, perseverance and enterprise, were in the Field: Every one may rest assured that much, very much of the future happiness of the Officers and Men, will depend upon the wise and manly conduct which shall be adopted by them, when they are mingled with the great body of the Community. And altho', the General has so frequently given it as his opinion in the most public and explicit manner, that unless the principles of the Federal Government were properly supported, and the Powers of the Union increased, the honor, dignity and justice of the Nation would be lost for ever; yet he cannot help repeating on this occasion, so interesting a sentiment, and leaving it as his last injunction to every Officer and every Soldier, who may view the subject in the same serious point of light, to add his best endeavours to those of his worthy fellow Citizens towards effecting these great and valuable purposes, on which our very existence as a Nation so materially depends.

The Commander in Chief conceives little is now waiting to enable the Soldier to change the Military character into that of the Citizen, but that steady and decent tenor of behaviour which has generally distinguished, not only the Army under his immediate Command, but the different Detachments and separate Armies, through the course of the War; from their good sense and prudence he anticipates the happiest consequences; And while he congratulates them on the glorious occasion which renders their Services in the Field no longer necessary, he wishes to express the strong obligations he feels himself under, for the assistance he has received from every Class—and in every instance. He presents his thanks in the most serious and affectionate manner to the General Officers, as well for their Counsel on many interesting occasions, as for their ardor in promoting the success of the plans he had adopted—To the Commandants of Regiments and Corps, and to the other Officers for their great Zeal and attention in carrying his orders promptly into execution—To the Staff for their alacrity and exactness in performing the duties of their several Departments—And to the Non-commissioned officers and private Soldiers, for their extraordinary patience in suffering, as well as their invincible fortitude in Action—To the various branches of the Army, the General takes this last and solemn opportunity of professing his inviolable attachment & friendship—He wishes more than bare professions were in his power, that he was really able to be usefull to them all in future life; He flatters himself however, they will do him the justice to believe, that whatever could with propriety be attempted by him, has been done. And being now to conclude these his last public Orders, to take his ultimate leave, in a short time, of the Military Character, and to bid a final adieu to the Armies he has so long had the honor to Command—he can only again offer in their behalf his recommendations to their grateful Country, and his prayers to the God of Armies. May ample justice be done them here, and may the choicest of Heaven's favors both here and hereafter attend those, who under

the divine auspices have secured innumerable blessings for others: With these Wishes, and this benediction, the Commander in Chief is about to retire from service—The Curtain of separation will soon be drawn—and the Military Scene to him will be closed for ever.

# Farewell Address to the Continental Congress

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*George Washington's famous Farewell Address was given in 1796, at the conclusion of his second term as President of the United States. (It appears later in this anthology.) But this earlier and less well-known speech of farewell is also of great significance, and it too repays careful attention. After eight years of service, and more than two years after Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, George Washington traveled to Annapolis, Maryland, where he formally resigned his commission as commander in chief of the Armies of the nascent United States of America; he delivered these remarks to the Continental Congress on December 23, 1783. Washington here offers, with remarkable brevity, a few thoughts on the outcome of the war; his own feelings on accepting and laying down his commission; his regard (and requests) for the Army and especially for the "confidential Officers" who composed his "family" during the war; and his closing benediction on "our dearest Country."*

*What is the tone and mood of these remarks? To what does Washington attribute his original willingness to undertake the mission? To whom and for what does he express gratitude? What does he regard to be his closing "indispensable duty"? Can you understand why he thinks so? How does Washington look upon his relation to Congress? How does he view this supposed end of his employment in public life? Imagining yourself a member of the Continental Congress, how would you have heard and received Washington's Farewell Address?<sup>46</sup> Historian Gordon S. Wood, in an essay re-printed below, calls this deed "the greatest act of his life." Can you understand why?*

Mr President

The great events on which my resignation depended having at length taken place; I have now the honor of offering my sincere Congratulations to Congress & of presenting myself before them to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the Service of my Country.

Happy in the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, and pleased with the opportunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable Nation, I resign with satisfaction the Appointment I accepted with diffidence—A diffidence in my abilities to accomplish so arduous a task, which however was superseded by a confidence in the rectitude of our Cause, the support of the Supreme Power of the Union, and the patronage of Heaven.

The Successful termination of the War has verified the more sanguine expectations—and my gratitude for the interposition of Providence, and the assistance I have received from my Countrymen encreases with every review of the momentous Contest.

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<sup>46</sup> Read the Continental Congress's official response to George Washington here: <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/revolution/congress.html>. See also next selection.

While I repeat my obligations to the Army in general, I should do injustice to my own feelings not to acknowledge in this place the peculiar Services and distinguished merits of the Gentlemen who have been attached to my person during the War. It was impossible the choice of confidential Officers to compose my family should have been more fortunate. Permit me Sir, to recommend in particular those, who have continued in Service to the present moment, as worthy of the favorable notice & patronage of Congress.

I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my Official life, by commending the Interests of our dearest Country to the protection of Almighty God, and those Who have the superintendence of them, to his holy keeping.

Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of Action—and bidding an Affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my Commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life.

# Letters on Washington's Resignation

JAMES MCHENRY AND JOHN MARSHALL

*Americans today take for granted that military and political leaders voluntarily surrender the powers of office and return to private life. But in the 18th and 19th century-world of hereditary monarchs and men on horseback (e.g., Napoleon), such practices were exceedingly rare. One anecdote vividly makes the point. England's King George III once asked the painter Benjamin West, who was painting his portrait, "What do you think Washington will do after the war?" West replied, "Well, Your Majesty, I believe he will return to his farm." And the King said, "If he does that, then he is the greatest man in the world."*

*The two letters comprising this selection present contemporaneous American reactions to Washington's resignation of his commission. The Irish-born early American statesman James McHenry (1753–1816), delegate to the Continental Congress from Maryland, then a signer of the United States Constitution, and, later, Secretary of War under Presidents Washington and John Adams, was present on the occasion. In this letter from Annapolis to his fiancée Margaret Caldwell, dated December 23, 1783 (the same day as the resignation), McHenry describes the actual scene. Two weeks later, on January 3, 1784, John Marshall (1755–1835), whose 35-year tenure as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court would effectively establish the Court as an equal branch of the federal government, wrote this brief note to James Monroe (1758–1831), the future fifth president of the United States.*

*What do these letters add to your appreciation of the event, and of Washington's state of mind and heart on the occasion? What do they add to your understanding of the relation of Washington to his fellow American patriots? Can you square his modesty with their exalted view of him?*

James McHenry, Letter to his fiancée Margaret Caldwell  
Annapolis, December 23, 1783

Today my love the General at a public audience made a deposit of his commission and in a very pathetic [i.e., emotional] manner took leave of Congress. It was a Solemn and affecting spectacle; such an one as history does not present. The spectators all wept, and there was hardly a member of Congress who did not drop tears. The General's hand which held the address shook as he read it. When he spoke of the officers who had composed his family, and recommended those who had continued in it to the present moment to the favorable notice of Congress he was obliged to support the paper with both hands. But when he commended the interests of his dearest country to almighty God, and those who had the superintendence of them to his holy keeping, his voice faltered and sunk, and the whole house felt his agitations. After the pause which was necessary for him to recover himself, he proceeded to say in the most penetrating manner, "Having now finished the work assigned me I retire from the great theater of action, and

bidding an affectionate farewell to this august body under whose orders I have so long acted I here offer my commission and take my leave of all the employments of public life.” So saying he drew out from his bosom his commission and delivered it up to the president of Congress. He then returned to his station, when the president read the reply that had been prepared—but I thought without any showing of feeling, though with much dignity.

This is only a sketch of the scene. But, were I to write you a long letter I could not convey to you the whole. So many circumstances crowded into view and gave rise to so many affecting emotions. The events of the revolution just accomplished—the new situation into which it had thrown the affairs of the world—the great man who had borne so conspicuous a figure in it, in the act of relinquishing all public employments to return to private life—the past—the present—the future—the manner—the occasion—all conspired to render it a spectacle inexpressibly solemn and affecting.

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John Marshall, Letter to James Monroe  
Richmond, January 3, 1784

At length then the military career of the greatest Man on earth is closed. May happiness attend him wherever he goes. May he long enjoy those blessings he has secured to his Country. When I speak or think of that superior Man my full heart overflows with gratitude. May he ever experience from his Countrymen those attentions which such sentiments of themselves produce.

# Letter to the Marquis de Lafayette

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*George Washington's early thoughts about his retirement from public life are touchingly represented in this short letter, written from Mount Vernon on February 1, 1784 to the Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834), the French commander who had served with distinction as a major general under Washington in the Continental Army. His retirement was, as everyone knows, short-lived: Within three years he was called back to public life to head the Virginia delegation to the Constitutional Convention, over whose proceedings he would preside. Two years after that he became the nation's first president, and served for two terms.*

*In what terms does Washington here describe his present life in retirement? How does he describe the public world he left behind? Can you understand why a greatly successful public man might speak this way about the relative merits of public and private life? If so, can you understand also why a man who speaks this way would later return to demanding public service, presiding not only over the founding convention, but over the new republic as well? Is Washington's preference for retirement believable? Why might it be, paradoxically, part of what makes him both uniquely great and greatly beloved by the American people?*

At length my Dear Marquis I am become a private citizen on the banks of the Potomac, and under the shadow of my own Vine & my own Fig-tree, free from the bustle of a camp and the busy scenes of public life, I am solacing myself with those tranquil enjoyments, of which the Soldier who is ever in pursuit of fame, the Statesman whose watchful days and sleepless Nights are spent in devising schemes to promote the welfare of his own, perhaps the ruin of other countries, as if this Globe was insufficient for us all, and the Courtier who is always watching the countenance of his Prince, in hopes of catching a gracious smile, can have very little conception. I am not only retired from all public employments, but I am retiring within myself; and shall be able to view the solitary walk, and tread the paths of private life with heartfelt satisfaction. Envious of none, I am determined to be pleased with all; and this my dear friend, being the order for my march, I will move gently down the stream of life, until I sleep with my Fathers. . . .

And to tell you that . . . at Annapolis, where Congress were then, and are now sitting, I did, on the 23d. of December present them my commission, and made them my last bow, and on the Eve of Christmas entered these doors an older man by near nine years, than when I left them, is very uninteresting to any but myself.



*C. President Washington*



*(1) Constituting the Republic*

# Washington and the Constitutional Convention from “Washingtonianism”

MYRON MAGNET

*Independence had been won for the new nation, but the large problems of governance and political structure remained. As this selection by American author and editor Myron Magnet (b. 1944), excerpted from his 2012 essay titled “Washingtonianism” (other excerpts appear above and below) indicates, there was a growing sense that the original Articles of Confederation needed to be replaced if the new republic was to flourish. Although eager to continue in his retirement and enjoyment of private life, George Washington once again answered the call to public service. He presided over the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, and, as Magnet points out, played a key role in the outcome.*

*What, according to Magnet, did Washington see as the defects and dangers of the Articles of Confederation? Why did he favor an “energetic central government” and growth of commerce? How might Washington’s presence at the Constitutional Convention have influenced the Constitution’s provision for energetic executive power? Although Washington was a proponent of a vigorous national government and an energetic executive, he distinguished between what Magnet calls (a) the machinery of government and (b) the culture of liberty. What is meant by each? How might they be related to each other? Why, and for what purposes, does a culture of liberty matter? Can its perpetuation be taken for granted or does it require self-conscious cultivation? What does Washington mean by “the sacred fire of liberty,” and why is it so important for the preservation of the republic? Why does Washington believe that he will have to serve as the nation’s first president?*

The war was over, but neither George Washington nor George III knew it, so different does lived experience look from history crystallized in books. Almost two more years passed before the Paris peace treaty was signed in September 1783. Not until the 18th of April in '83, eight years to the day after Paul Revere’s midnight ride, could Washington announce to his troops the official end of hostilities. The war—in which one American soldier in four had died, compared with one in five in the Civil War and one in 40 in World War II—was really over, and all soldiers should be proud of “the dignified part they have been called to act . . . on the stage of human affairs” in “erecting this stupendous fabrick of Freedom and Empire . . . and establishing an Asylum for the poor and oppressed of all nations and religions,” he told them in his favorite theatrical imagery. “Nothing now remains but for the actors of this mighty Scene . . . to close the Drama with applause; and retire from the Military Theatre.”

Continue reading Magnet’s essay at *City Journal*: [www.city-journal.org/2012/22\\_2\\_urb-george-washington.html](http://www.city-journal.org/2012/22_2_urb-george-washington.html). This excerpt begins about halfway through the essay, at paragraph 49—“The war was over, but neither George Washington nor George III knew it”—and continues for 15 paragraphs, the final paragraph of which

begins: "As he saw, with 'a kind of gloom upon my mind,' that he would have to served as the nation's president. . . ."

## Letter to Henry Lee in Congress on Shays' Rebellion

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*As noted briefly in the last selection, George Washington's thoughts about the need for prompt constitutional reform may have been strengthened by the outbreak, in western Massachusetts, of Shays' Rebellion in the early autumn of 1786. Against a background of economic depression, newly imposed high state taxes, tight credit, no paper currency, and widespread judicial proceedings for tax and debt collection, groups of farmers—some of them veterans of the Revolutionary War who were missing back pay for their service—petitioned and protested, then seized confiscated property, later shut down several county courts, and, in January of 1787, took up arms and mounted an attack on the federal armory at Springfield, an attack that was put down by a specially recruited and privately funded militia. On October 31, 1786, George Washington offered his views of the rebellion in a letter, written from Mount Vernon, to Revolutionary War general Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee (1756–1818), then serving in the Continental Congress. Although brief, the letter reveals some of Washington's general ideas about human nature, government, and the rule of law.*

*Why is Washington distressed by Shays' Rebellion? Does he finally believe that "mankind, when left to themselves, are unfit for their own [self-]government"? What, according to the letter, is Washington's view of the purpose of government? How should grievances against, and defects in, the government be handled? Can you connect Washington's thoughts in this letter to his view of the Constitution, and in particular, its fifth article, the provision for Amendment?*

My dear Sir,

I am indebted to you for your several favors of the 1st, 11th, and 17th of this instant, and shall reply to them in the order of their dates; but first let me thank you for the interesting communications imparted by them.

The picture which you have exhibited, and the accounts which are published of the commotions and temper of numerous bodies in the Eastern States, are equally to be lamented and deprecated. They exhibit a melancholy proof of what our trans-Atlantic foe has predicted; and of another thing perhaps, which is still more to be regretted, and is yet more unaccountable, that mankind when left to themselves are unfit for their own Government. I am mortified beyond expression when I view the clouds that have spread over the brightest morn that ever dawned upon any Country. In a word, I am lost in amazement when I behold what intrigue, the interested views of desperate characters, ignorance and jealousy of the minor part, are capable of effecting, as a scourge on the major part of our fellow Citizens of the Union; for it is hardly to be supposed that the great body of the people, though they will not act, can be so shortsighted, or enveloped in darkness, as not to see rays of a distant sun through all this mist of intoxication and folly.

You talk, my good Sir, of employing influence to appease the present tumults in Massachusetts. I know not where that influence is to be found; and if attainable, that it would be a proper remedy for the disorders. Influence is no Government. Let us have one by which our lives, liberties and properties will be secured; or let us know the worst at once. Under these impressions, my humble opinion is, that there is a call for decision. Know precisely what the insurgents aim at. If they have *real* grievances, redress them if possible; or acknowledge the justice of them, and your inability to do it in the present moment. If they have not, employ the force of government against them at once. If this is inadequate, *all* will be convinced, that the superstructure is bad, or wants support. To be more exposed in the eyes of the world, and more contemptible than we already are, is hardly possible. To delay one or the other of these, is to exasperate on the one hand, or to give confidence on the other, and will add to their numbers; for, like snow-balls, such bodies increase by every movement, unless there is something in the way to obstruct and crumble them before the weight is too great and irresistible.

These are my sentiments. Precedents are dangerous things; let the reins of government then be braced and held with a steady hand, and every violation of the Constitution be reprehended: if defective, let it be amended, but not suffered to be trampled upon whilst it has an existence.

With respect to the navigation of the Mississippi, you already know my sentiments thereon: they have been uniformly the same, and, as I have observed to you in a former letter, are controverted by one consideration *only* of weight, and that is the operation which the conclusion of it may have on the minds of the western settlers, who will not consider the subject in a relative point of view or on a comprehensive scale, and may be influenced by the demagogues of the country to acts of extravagance and desperation, under a popular declamation, that their interests are sacrificed. Colonel Mason, at present, is in a fit of the gout; what [his] sentiments on the subject are, I know not, nor whether he will be able to attend the Assembly during the present Session. For some reasons, however, (which need not be mentioned,) I am inclined to believe he will advocate the navigation of that river. But in all matters of great national moment, the only true line of conduct, in my opinion, is, dispassionately to compare the advantages and disadvantages of the measure proposed, and decide from the balance. The lesser evil, where there is a choice of them, should always yield to the greater. What benefits (more than we now enjoy) are to be obtained by such a Treaty as you have delineated with Spain, I am not enough of a commercial man to give any opinion on. The China came to hand without much damage and I thank you for your attention in the procuring & forwarding it to me. Mrs. Washington joins me in best wishes for Mrs. Lee and yourself.

## *(2) Becoming President*

# Letter to George Washington

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

*Soon after the Constitution had been drafted, approved, and signed (on September 17, 1787) by the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and as the debates about ratification raged in the states, influential people not surprisingly were thinking about who should lead the nation. Also not surprisingly, George Washington's name was at the top of most everyone's list. The question was how to overcome Washington's clearly stated preference to remain in retirement at Mount Vernon. At the end of October 1787, Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania (1752–1816), one of the principal authors of the United States Constitution and later US Senator from New York, wrote this letter to Washington, urging him to stand for election as the republic's first president.*

*Why, according to Morris, is Washington the candidate most acceptable to public opinion? Why would even excellent men not resent the elevation of Washington? What reasons does Morris give for thinking Washington the person best suited to be president? Why, despite his preference for private life, does Morris suggest that Washington would in fact derive personal satisfaction from holding the office? Assuming that he knew well the character and mind of the man to whom he was writing, what does Morris' approach tell you about Washington? How do you think Washington might have responded to this letter and to Morris' particular appeal?*

I have observed that your Name to the new Constitution has been of infinite Service. Indeed I am convinced that if you had not attended the Convention, and the same Paper had been handed out to the World, it would have met with a colder Reception, with fewer and weaker Advocates, and with more and more strenuous Opponents. As it is, should the Idea prevail that you would not accept of the Presidency it would prove fatal in many Parts. Truth is, that your great and decided Superiority leads Men willingly to put you in a Place which will not add to your personal Dignity, nor raise you higher than you already stand: but they would not willingly put any other Person in the same Situation because they feel the Elevation of others as operating (by Comparison) the Degradation of themselves. And however absurd this Idea, you will agree with me that Men must be treated as Men and not as Machines, much less as Philosophers, & least of all Things as reasonable Creatures; seeing that in Effect they reason not to direct but to excuse their Conduct.

Thus much for the public Opinion on these Subjects, which must not be neglected in a Country where Opinion is every Thing. I will add my Conviction that of all Men you are best fitted to fill that Office. Your cool steady Temper is *indispensably necessary* to give a firm and manly Tone to the new Government. To constitute a well poised political Machine is the Task of no common Workman; but to set it in Motion requires still greater Qualities. When once a-going, it will proceed a long Time from the original Impulse. Time gives to primary Institutions the mighty Power of Habit, and Custom, the Law both of Wise Men and Fools, serves as the great Commentator of human Establishments, and

like other Commentators as frequently obscures as it explains the Text. No Constitution is the same on Paper and in Life. The Exercise of Authority depends on personal Character; and the Whip and Reins by which an able Charioteer governs unruly Steeds will only hurl the unskillful Presumer with more speedy & headlong Violence to the Earth. The Horses once trained may be managed by a Woman or a Child; not so when they first feel the Bit. And indeed among these thirteen Horses now about to be coupled together there are some of every Race and Character. They will listen to your Voice, and submit to your Control; you therefore must I say *must* mount the Seat. That the Result may be as pleasing to you as it will be useful to them I wish but do not expect. You will however on this, as on other Occasions, feel that interior Satisfaction & Self Approbation which the World cannot give; and you will have in every possible Event the Applause of those who know you enough to respect you properly.

# Washington's Inauguration

EDWARD EVERETT HALE

*The American colonies revolted against England's monarchic rule, declaring that governments exist to secure the equal rights of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. By the consent of the governed, they established a republic—a representative democracy—where the people are sovereign and their leaders are held accountable to them. Yet the inauguration of George Washington—and those of other presidents since—is accompanied by ceremonies that might strike a democratic temperament as resembling kingly coronations. This account, written by clergyman, prolific essayist, and story-writer Edward Everett Hale (1822–1909), best known for his story “The Man without a Country,”<sup>47</sup> describes Washington's first inauguration, with special attention to some of its ceremonial features.*

*Do Washington's inaugural events seem appropriate for a democratically elected leader—a man whom we regard as, at most, first among equals? What about the reception in Trenton, with the triumphal arch and the verses sung by the young maidens? Why did Washington find that “the acclamations of the people filled my mind with sensations as painful as pleasing”? How important is “the etiquette” of the new administration, and why? Why does the form of address matter? It is reported that President Washington, ever mindful that he was establishing precedent, would, when receiving visitors, hold a hat in his left hand and keep his right hand atop a ceremonial sword at his side, to discourage anyone who might be tempted familiarly to shake his hand. Is such conduct fitting for a president of the democratic United States? If so, why?*

On the fourth of March, 1789, Elbridge Gerry, who had been chosen to the Senate of the United States, wrote thus from New York to John Adams:

My Dear Friend: I find, on inquiry, that you are elected Vice-President, having three or four times the number of votes of any other candidate. Maryland threw away their votes on Colonel Harrison, and South Carolina on Governor Rutledge, being, with some other states which were not unanimous for you, apprehensive that this was a necessary step to prevent your election to the chair. On this point they were mistaken, for the President, as I am informed from pretty good authority, has a unanimous vote. It is the universal wish of all that I have conferred with, and indeed their expectation, that both General Washington and yourself will accept; and should either refuse, it will have a very disagreeable effect. The members present met to-day in the City Hall, there being about eleven Senators and thirteen Representatives, and not constituting a quorum in either house, they adjourned till to-morrow.

Mrs. Gerry and the ladies join me in sincere regards to yourself, your lady, Colonel and Mrs. Smith, and be assured I remain, etc.

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<sup>47</sup> Read Hale's “The Man without a Country” at [www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/the-man-without-a-country](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/the-man-without-a-country).

E. GERRY.

So slow was the movement of news in those days, and so doubtful, even after the election, were all men as to its results, Adams would not start from Braintree, his home, till he knew he was elected, nor Washington from Mt. Vernon. Charles Thompson, the Secretary of the old Congress, arrived at Mt. Vernon on the fourteenth of April and communicated to Washington the news of his election. No quorum of the House of Representatives had been formed until the first of April, nor of the Senate until the sixth. These bodies then counted the electoral vote, with the result predicted by Gerry in his letter written two days before.

Washington waited a day before starting to the seat of Government. On the sixteenth of April he started for New York. He writes in his diary:

About ten o'clock I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life and to domestic felicity; and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York in company with Mr. Thompson and Colonel Humphries, with the best dispositions to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations.

The journey began with a public dinner at Alexandria. Said the gentlemen of Alexandria in their address to him:

Farewell! . . . Go! . . . and make a grateful people happy, a people who will be doubly grateful when they contemplate this recent sacrifice for their interest.

And Washington in his reply said:

At my age, and in my circumstances, what prospects or advantages could I propose to myself, for embarking again on the tempestuous and uncertain ocean of public life?

The journey went on with similar interruptions. The rule so often laid down by the Virginians afterward that that is the best government which governs least, was certainly well kept until the thirteenth of April. To this hour the adventurous cyclist, stopping at some wayside inn to refresh himself, may find upon the wall the picture of the maidens and mothers of Trenton in New Jersey. Here Washington met a deputation sent to him by Congress. A triumphal arch had been erected, and a row of young girls dressed in white, a second row of ladies, and a third of their mothers, awaited him. As he passed, the girls scattered flowers, and sang the verses which Judge Marshall has preserved:

Welcome, mighty chief, once more  
Welcome to this grateful shore;  
Now no mercenary foe  
Aims again the fatal blow—  
Aims at thee the fatal blow.

Virgins fair and matrons grave,  
These thy conquering arm did save.  
Build for thee triumphal bowers,  
Strew, ye fair, his way with flowers—  
Strew your Hero's way with flowers.

His progress through New Jersey was everywhere accompanied by similar festivities—"festive illuminations, the ringing of bells, and the booming of cannon." He had written to Governor Clinton, that he hoped he might enter New York without ceremony; but this was hardly to be expected. A committee of both houses met him at Elizabethtown; he embarked in a splendid barge manned by thirteen pilots, masters of vessels, and commanded by Commodore Nicholson; other barges and boats fell in in the wake; and a nautical procession swept up the Bay of New York. On board two vessels were parties of ladies and gentlemen, who sang odes as Washington appeared. The ships in the harbor were dressed in colors and fired salutes as he passed. On landing at Murray's Wharf he was welcomed by Governor Clinton and General Knox. It is of the landing at this point that the anecdote is told that an officer asked Washington's orders, announcing himself as commanding his guard. Washington, with his ready presence of mind, begged him to follow any directions he had already received in the arrangements, but said that for the future the affection of his fellow-citizens was all the guard that he required.

At the end of the day, in his diary, the sad man says:

The acclamations of the people filled my mind with sensations as painful as pleasing.

It was some days before the formal inauguration. The two houses of Congress did not know by what title they should address him, and a committee had been appointed to discuss this subject. It was finally agreed that the address should be simply, "To the President of the United States"—a form which has remained to the present day.

The inauguration finally took place on the thirtieth of April.

On the thirtieth at last all things were ready, and the inauguration went forward. The place was at what they then called Federal Hall, in New York, and Chancellor Livingstone administered the oath:

I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully administer and execute the office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

A salute of thirteen guns followed, amid the cheers of thousands of people. Washington then delivered his inaugural speech to both houses in the Senate Chamber. After this ceremony he walked to St. Paul's Church, where the Bishop of New York read prayers. Maclay, who was a Senator in the first Congress, says:

He was agitated and embarrassed more than he ever was by the leveled cannon or pointed musket. He trembled and several times could scarce make out to read his speech, though it must be supposed he had often read it before.

Fisher Ames says:

He addressed the two houses in the Senate Chamber. It was a very touching scene, and quite of a solemn kind. His aspect, grave almost to sadness, his modesty, actually shaking, his voice deep, a little tremulous, and so low as to call for close attention.

John Adams had taken his place as President of the Senate two day before. As he did not always in after life speak any too cordially of Washington, it is worth noting that at this critical period he said that he congratulated the people of America on “the prospect of an executive authority in the hands of one whose portrait I shall not pretend to draw. . . . Were I blessed with powers to do justice to his character, it would be impossible to increase the confidence, or affection of his country, or make the smallest addition to his glory. This can only be effected by a discharge of the present exalted trust on the same principles, with the same abilities and virtues which have uniformly appeared in all his former conduct, public or private. May I nevertheless be indulged to inquire, if we look over the catalogue of the first magistrates of nations, whether they have been denominated presidents or consuls, kings or princes, where shall we find one whose commanding talents and virtues, whose overruling good fortune, have so completely united all hearts and voices in his favor? who enjoyed the esteem and admiration of foreign nations and fellow-citizens with equal unanimity? Qualities so uncommon are no common blessings to the country that possesses them. By these great qualities and their benign effects has Providence marked out the head of this Nation, with a hand so distinctly visible as to have been seen by all men, and mistaken by none.”

Whether on this occasion, there were too much ceremony was a question discussed at the time, in connection with the heated discussion as to the etiquette of the new Administration. There is a correspondence between Washington and an old friend, Stuart, of Virginia, who had told him that the people of that State accused him of “regal manners.”

Washington’s reply, with his usual good sense, answers a good many questions which are bruited to-day. Dr. Albert Shaw, in the *Review of Reviews*, once brought some of these questions forward. “How far is it right for the people of a free state to kill their magistrates by inches?” This is the question reduced to its simplest terms. It was generally understood, when the late Governor Greenhalge died in Massachusetts, that his career, invaluable to the people of that State and of the country, had been cut off untimely by a certain etiquette, which obtains in Massachusetts, that whenever there is a public dinner the Governor of the State must be present and make a speech. With reference to a somewhat similar notion, Washington says:

Before the present custom was established I was unable to attend to any business whatever. Gentlemen, consulting their own convenience rather than mine, were

calling from the time I rose from breakfast, often before, until I sat down to dinner. To please everybody was impossible. I therefore adopted that line of conduct which combined public advantage with private convenience.

In another place he says:

Had I not adopted the principle of returning no visits, I should have been unable to have attended to any sort of business.

In contrast with the simple ceremonies at which a sensitive democracy took exception, we find now that a great nation considers no honors too profuse for the ceremonies which attend the inauguration of its chief magistrate.

# First Inaugural Address

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*Presidential inaugural addresses have in our time become the occasion when newly elected (or re-elected) presidents, following custom, present in broad outline their visions of the national future and the plans for their administrations. As with everything else that he would do as president, Washington's First Inaugural Address was unprecedented—and he spoke and acted accordingly. After taking the oath of office on April 30, 1789, on the balcony of the Senate Chamber at Federal Hall on Wall Street, in New York City, Washington addressed a joint session of both houses of Congress inside the Senate Chamber. He spoke personally, rather than programmatically, seemingly largely to “impart to you my sentiments.” But a careful study of his remarks shows that, conscious as he would always be that he was setting a precedent, he sought to instruct and to set an example.*

*Analyze the content of each of the six paragraphs of the address. Can you explain the rationale of the order of topics, and the intended effect of each part on the audience? Why does he begin with his “anxieties,” the conflicting emotions he feels on assuming office, and the “hope” he expresses for the future judgment of his country? Why, and to what purpose, does he next offer supplication to “that Almighty Being” and “the Great Author of every public and private good”—and why does he make a point of emphasizing that his audience in Congress and the people at large must share these sentiments? In discussing his relation to Congress, he mainly pays tribute to the virtues of its members: for what does he praise them, and why does he do so? What is he trying to teach Congress about the Constitution, especially regarding Congress' power, under Article Five, to amend it? Why does he mention—and what do you think of the fact—that he intends to serve without compensation? Finally, why does he again turn, in closing, to “the benign Parent of the human race,” and for what, this time, does he invoke His blessings? Taking the speech as a whole, can you articulate Washington's vision and teaching for his administration—and for our country?*

Fellow-Citizens of the Senate and of the House of Representatives:

Among the vicissitudes incident to life, no event could have filled me with greater anxieties than that of which the notification was transmitted by your order, and received on the 14th day of the present month. On the one hand, I was summoned by my Country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love, from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest predilection, and, in my flattering hopes, with an immutable decision, as the asylum of my declining years: a retreat which was rendered every day more necessary as well as more dear to me, by the addition of habit to inclination, and of frequent interruptions in my health to the gradual waste committed on it by time. On the other hand, the magnitude and difficulty of the trust to which the voice of my Country called me, being sufficient to awaken in the wisest and most experienced of her citizens, a distrustful scrutiny into his qualifications, could not but overwhelm with despondence,

one, who inheriting inferior endowments from nature and unpracticed in the duties of civil administration, ought to be peculiarly conscious of his own deficiencies. In this conflict of emotions, all I dare aver, is, that it has been my faithful study to collect my duty from a just appreciation of every circumstance, by which it might be affected. All I dare hope, is, that, if in executing this task I have been too much swayed by a grateful remembrance of former instances, or by an affectionate sensibility to this transcendent proof, of the confidence of my fellow-citizens; and have thence too little consulted my incapacity as well as disinclination for the weighty and untried cares before me; my error will be palliated by the motives which misled me, and its consequences be judged by my Country with some share of the partiality in which they originated.

Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station; it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official Act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes: and may enable every instrument employed in its administration, to execute with success, the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the Great Author of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own; nor those of my fellow-citizens at large, less than either: No People can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the Affairs of men more than the People of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency. And in the important revolution just accomplished in the system of their United Government, the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct communities, from which the event has resulted, cannot be compared with the means by which most Governments have been established, without some return of pious gratitude along with an humble anticipation of the future blessings which the past seem to presage. These reflections, arising out of the present crisis, have forced themselves too strongly on my mind to be suppressed. You will join with me I trust in thinking, that there are none under the influence of which, the proceedings of a new and free Government can more auspiciously commence.

By the article establishing the Executive Department, it is made the duty of the President “to recommend to your consideration, such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.” The circumstances under which I now meet you, will acquit me from entering into that subject, further than to refer to the Great Constitutional Charter under which you are assembled; and which, in defining your powers, designates the objects to which your attention is to be given. It will be more consistent with those circumstances, and far more congenial with the feelings which actuate me, to substitute, in place of a recommendation of particular measures, the tribute that is due to the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and adopt them. In these honorable qualifications, I behold the surest pledges, that as on one side, no local prejudices, or attachments; no separate views, nor party animosities, will misdirect the comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great

Assemblage of communities and interests: so, on another, that the foundations of our national policy, will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality; and the pre-eminence of free Government, be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its Citizens, and command the respect of the world. I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my Country can inspire: since there is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness, between duty and advantage, between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity: Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained: And since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.

Besides the ordinary objects submitted to your care, it will remain with your judgment to decide, how far an exercise of the occasional power delegated by the Fifth article of the Constitution is rendered expedient at the present juncture by the nature of objections which have been urged against the System, or by the degree of inquietude which has given birth to them. Instead of undertaking particular recommendations on this subject, in which I could be guided by no lights derived from official opportunities, I shall again give way to my entire confidence in your discernment and pursuit of the public good: For I assure myself that whilst you carefully avoid every alteration which might endanger the benefits of an United and effective Government, or which ought to await the future lessons of experience; a reverence for the characteristic rights of freemen, and a regard for the public harmony, will sufficiently influence your deliberations on the question how far the former can be impregably fortified, or the latter be safely and advantageously promoted.

To the preceding observations I have one to add, which will be most properly addressed to the House of Representatives. It concerns myself; and will therefore be as brief as possible. When I was first honored with a call into the service of my Country, then on the eve of an arduous struggle for its liberties, the light in which I contemplated my duty required that I should renounce every pecuniary compensation. From this resolution I have in no instance departed—And being still under the impressions which produced it, I must decline as inapplicable to myself, any share in the personal emoluments, which may be indispensably included in a permanent provision for the Executive Department; and must accordingly pray that the pecuniary estimates for the Station in which I am placed, may, during my continuance in it, be limited to such actual expenditures as the public good may be thought to require.

Having thus imparted to you my sentiments, as they have been awakened by the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to the benign Parent of the human race, in humble supplication, that since he has been pleased to favor the American people, with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquillity, and dispositions for deciding with unparalleled unanimity on a form

of Government, for the security of their Union, and the advancement of their happiness; so this divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views—the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this Government must depend.

*(3) Being President*

# The Trials and Triumphs of Presiding from “Washingtonianism”

MYRON MAGNET

*In this final excerpt from his 2012 essay, “Washingtonianism,” Myron Magnet offers a synoptic account of Washington’s presidency, its trials and its successes. The position of popularly elected chief executive of a large republic was simply unprecedented, not only in America but throughout human history, and a crucial part of Washington’s task was “inventing the presidency.” In addition, he had to endure mounting public criticism and manage huge battles, with formidable opponents even within his cabinet, over policies domestic and foreign, regarding the nation’s financial system, economic development and commerce, the French Revolution and the ensuing war between France and England, the insurrection of the Whiskey Rebellion, and the opening of the Mississippi River and expansion into the Ohio territory and the southwest. But in the end, Magnet concludes, “despite all the rancor—irksome to him but mere static in the music of history—he had done what he set out to do.”*

*Imagining yourself in Washington’s unscripted position, how would you go about writing the script for the American presidency? Why would it be important to maintain a fine line between “superiority” and “equality,” and to separate private life and affections from public duties? Why was Washington so roundly criticized, and for what? Why did Washington back Hamilton’s plan for a national bank, and was he wise to do so? Why, despite great opposition from within his administration, and his own longing for home, did Washington take a second term of office? What challenges to Washington’s presidency, and to the new republic, were raised by the French Revolution and the activities of the undiplomatic French ambassador, Genêt? What was the significance of the Whiskey Rebellion, and why did Washington personally lead the troops against it? How would you assess the significance of the Neutrality Proclamation for the development of the United States? What, in sum, was the legacy of Washington’s presidency?*

After he took the oath of office in a trembling voice on the balcony of New York’s Federal Hall on April 30, 1789, he began his inaugural address by confessing his “anxieties” over accepting the presidency, and he described the “conflict of emotions” he felt over “the magnitude and difficulty of the trust” he was assuming, and his “despondence” over the “inferior endowments” he brought to it. This wasn’t just formulaic modesty. As he explained to Graham, he realized that he would have to play a role for which no one had written the script. There had never been such a thing as the president of the United States before, or a president of any modern republic. There was no State of the Union Address, no “Hail to the Chief,” no cabinet, no White House, no chief of protocol. “It was to be, in the first instance, in a considerable degree, a government of accomodation as well as a government of Laws. Much was to be done by *prudence*, much by *conciliation*, much by *firmness*.” There was so much he had to make up as he went along, out of his own judgment, experience, and instinct, and he had

to bring his audience along with him by force of character. “Few . . . can realise what a difficult and delicate part which a man in my situation had to act,” he wrote Graham. “I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any action, whose motives may not be subject to double interpretation. There is scarcely any part of my conduct wch may not hereafter be drawn into precedent.”

Continue reading Magnet’s essay at *City Journal*: [www.city-journal.org/2012/22\\_2\\_urb-george-washington.html](http://www.city-journal.org/2012/22_2_urb-george-washington.html). This selection is composed of the last 31 paragraphs of that essay.

## To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*This selection and the next provide important examples of President Washington's thoughts on the important subject of religion, politics, and national well-being. Developing our unique blend of religion and politics, the American Republic self-consciously pioneered a novel approach to the problems of religious zealotry and religious conflict that have long plagued—and still plague—other nations. The United States has no established national church and the Constitution proscribes any religious test for holding national office. But this “separation” of church and state, far from being indifferent to the religiosity of the people, was intended to support liberty of conscience and freedom of worship, privileges until then rare among the nations of the world—and today still precarious in many regimes. President Washington offered an early, generous expression of the principle of religious freedom even before the adoption of the Bill of Rights (1791) in this Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island (1790). Washington in fact wrote many similar letters to other denominations in response to their letters of congratulation upon his election as the nation's first president. The array of these letters illustrates early on the nation's vibrant and peaceful religious pluralism.*

*Nonetheless, many questions remain. Does vigorous religious pluralism enhance or diminish national identity and civic attachment? Are there limits to religious toleration? Are there religious sects or beliefs that put in doubt the beautiful image of each sitting “in safety under his own vine and fig-tree”? Is liberty of conscience, coupled with disestablishment, a sufficient solution to the problem of fanaticism in politics? Where religious and civic duties conflict, which should take precedence? Is the idea behind religious pluralism also indifferent to the distinction between religion and irreligion—that is, to atheism? What difference would it make if it were?*

Gentlemen

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for

having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

August 18, 1790

# Thanksgiving Proclamation

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*The present selection, the Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789, was Washington's (and the nation's) first presidential proclamation. Issued in the first year of his first term as president, in response to Congress' request that he recommend a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, Washington used the occasion also to express, in yet another way, his views on the relation between piety and politics, as well as to promote practices that would stand the nation in good stead long after he was gone.*

*In colonial times, Thanksgiving had been a harvest festival, in which the colonists offered thanks to God Almighty for a good harvest, sometimes by feasting, sometimes by fasting.<sup>48</sup> Thanksgiving would become a regularly celebrated national holiday only during the Civil War, when Abraham Lincoln in 1863 proclaimed a day of national Thanksgiving; each president since has annually issued Thanksgiving Day proclamations. But the first day of national Thanksgiving was proclaimed by George Washington in the first year of the new American republic, whose appearance on the world stage—after the perilous Revolutionary War, the failure of the Articles of Confederation, and the contentious Constitutional Convention—seemed little short of miraculous. Washington spoke not of harvests but (mainly) of matters political.*

*What reasons does Washington give for issuing this proclamation, and how are they related? Why does Washington emphasize that he is only doing his duty and acceding to Congress's request? What, according to the Proclamation, are the blessings for which the earliest citizens of the United States should have been grateful? For what things should they humbly offer God their prayers and supplications? What do you make of the double prayer "to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue and the encrease of science among them and Us" (emphasis added)? How does Washington see the relation between religion and science? What do you make of the qualification in the final prayer for temporal prosperity: that it be (only) of "such a degree . . . as he alone knows to be best"? What does Washington hope to accomplish with this Proclamation? What kind of unity is he proposing for his fellow citizens, and why does he think it important? Does Washington's Proclamation violate the principle of the separation of church and state? Conversely, can the United States—or any nation—survive and flourish without a connection to something higher than itself or without acknowledging its dependence on a higher power?*

By the President of the United States of America. A Proclamation.

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<sup>48</sup> Such a holiday was celebrated already in the Spanish colony of Florida in the sixteenth century, and in the British colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, most famously in 1621, when the Pilgrims at Plymouth Plantation celebrated their first successful harvest in the company of some of the Native American tribesmen.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and Whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th. day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the People of this country previous to their becoming a Nation, for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war, for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed, for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the People, by constantly being a government of wise, just and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed, to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shown kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease of science among them and Us, and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

# Farewell Address

GEORGE WASHINGTON

*As was evident from the beginning of his presidency (see, for example, his First Inaugural Address, above), George Washington was greatly concerned with the viability of our constitutional republic and, therefore, with the need to preserve and perpetuate our political institutions and culture of liberty. Near the end of his presidency (September 19, 1796), Washington spoke at length about these topics in his most famous speech, the Farewell Address. Published in newspapers, and addressed intimately to “Friends and Fellow-Citizens” (the only such intimate salutation in all of his writings), Washington’s advice was geared to protecting the Union and the Constitution and promoting the virtuous conduct of government, thereby preserving the independence, tranquility, peace, safety, prosperity, and, especially, the liberty that Americans “so highly prize.” Our national regard for the Farewell Address is best illustrated by the fact that it continues to be read aloud annually by a member of the United States Senate on the floor of the Senate, as part of the commemoration of George Washington’s birthday.*

*Why does Washington begin with the Union? What sort of patriotism does he seek to promote? What is his teaching respecting the Constitution and the rule of law? What connection does he make between morality and religion, and between both of them and the perpetuation of our institutions?<sup>49</sup> How important to our future flourishing are Washington’s positive recommendations? How dangerous to our well-being is partisan political division? May we conclude from the Senate’s annual reading of the Address that Washington’s warnings are still relevant for today’s America, a long-established superpower with global commercial connections and military alliances? Or is Washington’s advice simply passé? How healthy are the constitutional order and public morality today?<sup>50</sup>*

Friends, and Fellow-Citizens:

The period for a new election of a Citizen, to Administer the Executive government of the United States, being not far distant, and the time actually arrived, when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person, who is to be clothed with that important trust, it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those, out of whom a choice is to be made. . . .

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<sup>49</sup> *It would be fruitful to compare Washington’s remarks on religion and morality, and the Farewell Address as a whole, with Abraham Lincoln’s speech “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions” (above), and in particular with Lincoln’s call for a “political religion.” Do Washington and Lincoln differ on the subject of religion and politics?*

<sup>50</sup> *For an excellent analysis of the Farewell Address, see “The Wisdom of George Washington” by Diana Schaub, in the Appendix, below.*

In looking forward to the moment, which is intended to terminate the career of my public life, my feelings do not permit me to suspend the deep acknowledgment of that debt of gratitude which I owe to my beloved country, for the many honors it has conferred upon me; still more for the stedfast confidence with which it has supported me; and for the opportunities I have thence enjoyed of manifesting my inviolable attachment, by services faithful and persevering, though in usefulness unequal to my zeal. If benefits have resulted to our country from these services, let it always be remembered to your praise, and as an instructive example in our annals, that, under circumstances in which the Passions agitated in every direction were liable to mislead, amidst appearances sometimes dubious, vicissitudes of fortune often discouraging, in situations in which not unfrequently want of Success has countenanced the spirit of criticism, the constancy of your support was the essential prop of the efforts, and a guarantee of the plans by which they were effected. Profoundly penetrated with this idea, I shall carry it with me to my grave, as a strong incitement to unceasing vows that Heaven may continue to you the choicest tokens of its beneficence; that your Union and brotherly affection may be perpetual; that the free constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained; that its Administration in every department may be stamped with wisdom and Virtue; that, in fine, the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete, by so careful a preservation and so prudent a use of this blessing as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it.

Here, perhaps, I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments; which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all important to the permanency of your felicity as a People. These will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel. Nor can I forget, as an encouragement to it, your indulgent reception of my sentiments on a former and not dissimilar occasion.

Interwoven as is the love of liberty with every ligament of your hearts, no recommendation of mine is necessary to fortify or confirm the attachment.

The Unity of Government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so; for it is a main Pillar in the Edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home; your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very Liberty which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee, that from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed, to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment, that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national Union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the

Palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned, and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our Country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

For this you have every inducement of sympathy and interest. Citizens by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of AMERICAN, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same Religion, Manners, Habits and political Principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together. The independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint councils, and joint efforts; of common dangers, sufferings and successes.

But these considerations, however powerfully they address themselves to your sensibility are greatly outweighed by those which apply more immediately to your Interest. Here every portion of our country finds the most commanding motives for carefully guarding and preserving the Union of the whole.

The *North*, in an unrestrained intercourse with the *South*, protected by the equal Laws of a common government, finds in the productions of the latter, great additional resources of Maritime and commercial enterprise and precious materials of manufacturing industry. The *South* in the same Intercourse, benefiting by the Agency of the *North*, sees its agriculture grow and its commerce expand. Turning partly into its own channels the seamen of the *North*, it finds its particular navigation invigorated; and while it contributes, in different ways, to nourish and increase the general mass of the National navigation, it looks forward to the protection of a Maritime strength, to which itself is unequally adapted. The *East*, in a like intercourse with the *West*, already finds, and in the progressive improvement of interior communications, by land and water, will more and more find a valuable vent for the commodities which it brings from abroad, or manufactures at home. The *West* derives from the *East* supplies requisite to its growth and comfort, and what is perhaps of still greater consequence, it must of necessity owe the *secure* enjoyment of indispensable *outlets* for its own productions to the weight, influence, and the future Maritime strength of the Atlantic side of the Union, directed by an indissoluble community of Interest as *one Nation*. . . .

While then every part of our country thus feels an immediate and particular Interest in Union, all the parts combined cannot fail to find in the united mass of means and efforts greater strength, greater resource, proportionably greater security from external danger, a less frequent interruption of their Peace by foreign Nations; and, what is of inestimable value! they must derive from Union an exemption from those broils and Wars between themselves, which so frequently afflict neighbouring countries, not tied together by the same government; which their own rivalships alone would be sufficient to produce, but which opposite foreign alliances, attachments and intrigues would stimulate and embitter. Hence likewise they will avoid the necessity of those overgrown Military

establishments, which under any form of Government are inauspicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican Liberty: In this sense it is, that your Union ought to be considered as a main prop of your liberty, and that the love of the one ought to endear to you the preservation of the other.

These considerations speak a persuasive language to every reflecting and virtuous mind, and exhibit the continuance of the UNION as a primary object of Patriotic desire. Is there a doubt, whether a common government can embrace so large a sphere? Let experience solve it. To listen to mere speculation in such a case were criminal. We are authorized to hope that a proper organization of the whole, with the auxiliary agency of governments for the respective Sub divisions, will afford a happy issue to the experiment. 'Tis well worth a fair and full experiment. With such powerful and obvious motives to Union, affecting all parts of our country, while experience shall not have demonstrated its impracticability, there will always be reason, to distrust the patriotism of those, who in any quarter may endeavor to weaken its bands.

In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs as matter of serious concern, that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by *Geographical* discriminations: *Northern* and *Southern*; *Atlantic* and *Western*; whence designing men may endeavour to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of Party to acquire influence, within particular districts, is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other Districts. You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart burnings which spring from these misrepresentations. They tend to render Alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection. . . .

To the efficacy and permanency of Your Union, a Government for the whole is indispensable. No Alliances however strict between the parts can be an adequate substitute. They must inevitably experience the infractions and interruptions which all Alliances in all times have experienced. Sensible of this momentous truth, you have improved upon your first essay, by the adoption of a Constitution of Government, better calculated than your former for an intimate Union, and for the efficacious management of your common concerns. This government, the offspring of our own choice uninfluenced and unawed, adopted upon full investigation and mature deliberation, completely free in its principles, in the distribution of its powers, uniting security with energy, and containing within itself a provision for its own amendment, has a just claim to your confidence and your support. Respect for its authority, compliance with its Laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true Liberty. The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their Constitutions of Government. But the Constitution which at any time exists, 'till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole People, is sacredly obligatory upon all. The very idea of the power and the right of the People to establish Government presupposes the duty of every Individual to obey the established Government.

All obstructions to the execution of the Laws, all combinations and Associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, controul, counteract, or

awe the regular deliberation and action of the Constituted authorities are destructive of this fundamental principle and of fatal tendency. They serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put in the place of the delegated will of the Nation, the will of a party; often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the Community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the Mirror of the ill concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common counsels and modified by mutual interests. However combinations or Associations of the above description may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the Power of the People, and to usurp for themselves the reins of Government; destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.

Towards the preservation of your Government and the permanency of your present happy state, it is requisite, not only that you steadily discountenance irregular oppositions to its acknowledged authority, but also that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles however specious the pretexts. One method of assault may be to effect, in the forms of the Constitution, alterations which will impair the energy of the system, and thus to undermine what cannot be directly overthrown. In all the changes to which you may be invited, remember that time and habit are at least as necessary to fix the true character of Governments, as of other human institutions; that experience is the surest standard, by which to test the real tendency of the existing Constitution of a country; that facility in changes upon the credit of mere hypotheses and opinion exposes to perpetual change, from the endless variety of hypotheses and opinion: and remember, especially, that for the efficient management of your common interests, in a country so extensive as ours, a Government of as much vigour as is consistent with the perfect security of Liberty is indispensable. Liberty itself will find in such a Government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest Guardian. It is indeed little else than a name, where the Government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction, to confine each member of the Society within the limits prescribed by the laws and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property. . . .

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation *desert* the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

'Tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free Government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?

Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.

As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is to use it as sparingly as possible: avoiding occasions of expence by cultivating peace, but remembering also that timely disbursements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it; avoiding likewise the accumulation of debt, not only by shunning occasions of expence, but by vigorous exertion in time of Peace to discharge the Debts which unavoidable wars may have occasioned, not ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burthen which we ourselves ought to bear. The execution of these maxims belongs to your Representatives, but it is necessary that public opinion should co-operate. To facilitate to them the performance of their duty, it is essential that you should practically bear in mind, that towards the payment of debts there must be Revenue; that to have Revenue there must be taxes; that no taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant; that the intrinsic embarrassment inseparable from the selection of the proper objects (which is always a choice of difficulties) ought to be a decisive motive for a candid construction of the Conduct of the Government in making it, and for a spirit of acquiescence in the measures for obtaining Revenue which the public exigencies may at any time dictate.

Observe good faith and justice towards all Nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct; and can it be that good policy does not equally enjoin it? It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and, at no distant period, a great Nation, to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a People always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence. Who can doubt that in the course of time and things the fruits of such a plan would richly repay any temporary advantages which might be lost by a steady adherence to it? Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a Nation with its virtue? The experiment, at least, is recommended by every sentiment which ennobles human Nature. Alas! is it rendered impossible by its vices?

In the execution of such a plan nothing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular Nations and passionate attachments for others should be excluded; and that in place of them just and amicable feelings towards all should be cultivated. The Nation, which indulges towards another a habitual hatred, or a habitual fondness, is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest. . . .

The Great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign Nations is in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little *political* connection as possible. So far as

we have already formed engagements let them be fulfilled, with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. . . .

If we remain one People, under an efficient government, the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon to be scrupulously respected; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation; when we may choose peace or war, as our interest guided by our justice shall Counsel. . . .

'Tis our true policy to steer clear of permanent Alliances, with any portion of the foreign world. . . .

Taking care always to keep ourselves, by suitable establishments, on a respectably defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.

Harmony, liberal intercourse with all Nations, are recommended by policy, humanity and interest. But even our Commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand: neither seeking nor granting exclusive favours or preferences; consulting the natural course of things; diffusing and deversifying by gentle means the streams of Commerce, but forcing nothing; establishing with Powers so disposed; in order to give to trade a stable course, to define the rights of our Merchants, and to enable the Government to support them; conventional rules of intercourse, the best that present circumstances and mutual opinion will permit, but temporary, and liable to be from time to time abandoned or varied, as experience and circumstances shall dictate; constantly keeping in view, that 'tis folly in one Nation to look for disinterested favors from another; that it must pay with a portion of its Independence for whatever it may accept under that character; that by such acceptance, it may place itself in the condition of having given equivalents for nominal favours and yet of being reproached with ingratitude for not giving more. There can be no greater error than to expect, or calculate upon real favours from Nation to Nation. 'Tis an illusion which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.

In offering to you, my Countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression, I could wish; that they will controul the usual current of the passions, or prevent our Nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the Destiny of Nations: But if I may even flatter myself, that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign Intrigue, to guard against the Impostures of pretended patriotism; this hope will be a full recompence for the solicitude for your welfare, by which they have been dictated.

How far in the discharge of my Official duties, I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public Records and other evidences of my conduct must

Witness to You and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience is, that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them. . . .

Though in reviewing the incidents of my Administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my Country will never cease to view them with indulgence; and that after forty five years of my life dedicated to its Service, with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the Mansions of rest.

Relying on its kindness in this as in other things, and actuated by that fervent love towards it, which is so natural to a Man, who views in it the native soil of himself and his progenitors for several Generations; I anticipate with pleasing expectation that retreat, in which I promise myself to realize, without alloy, the sweet enjoyment of partaking, in the midst of my fellow Citizens, the benign influence of good Laws under a free Government, the ever favourite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labours, and dangers.

*(4) The Death of a Hero*

# George Washington! A Funeral Oration on his Death

HENRY LEE

*On December 14, 1799, at the age of 67, George Washington died at home in Mount Vernon of pneumonia, contracted a mere two days earlier. His death was widely and deeply mourned in the United States and abroad. On December 26, 1799, at the request of Congress, Representative Henry “Light-Horse Harry” Lee III (1756–1818) of Virginia—former cavalry commander in the Revolutionary War, later governor of Virginia, and father of Robert E. Lee—delivered the following funeral oration before a joint session of both houses of Congress. Lee reviews in order the significant events in Washington’s life of devoted service, from the French and Indian War to his final letter to President Adams; offers a stirring two-paragraph summation; describes his comportment as he lay painfully dying; and finishes by conjuring a vision of Washington’s ghost, offering posthumous comfort and instruction to his people. The epithet “First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen” we owe to Henry Lee.*

*What are the dominant themes of Lee’s eulogy of Washington? Which parts of it do you find most impressive or most moving? What, according to Lee, is the core of Washington’s character? The core of his achievement? What is the meaning of each line of praise in the paragraph fourth from the end (“To his equals . . .”)? With what final impression are you left? What does the United States today owe to Washington? What do we owe to his memory?*

In obedience to your will, I rise, your humble organ, with the hope of executing a part of the system of public mourning which you have been pleased to adopt, commemorative of the death of the most illustrious and most beloved personage this country has ever produced; and which, while it transmits to posterity your sense of the awful event, faintly represents your knowledge of the consummate excellence you so cordially honor.

Desperate, indeed, is any attempt on earth to meet correspondingly this dispensation of Heaven; for, while with pious resignation we submit to the will of an all-gracious Providence, we can never cease lamenting, in our finite view of Omnipotent Wisdom, the heart-rending privation for which our nation weeps. When the civilized world shakes to its centre; when every moment gives birth to strange and momentous changes; when our peaceful quarter of the globe, exempt as it happily has been from any share in the slaughter of the human race, may yet be compelled to abandon her pacific policy, and to risk the doleful casualties of war; what limit is there to the extent of our loss? None within the reach of my words to express; none which your feelings will not disavow.

The founder of our federate republic—our bulwark in war, our guide in peace, is no more! Oh, that this were but questionable! Hope, the comforter of the wretched, would pour into our agonizing hearts its balmy dew. But, alas! there is no hope for us; our Washington is removed forever! Possessing the stoutest frame and purest mind, he had

passed nearly to his sixty-eighth year in the enjoyment of high health, when, habituated by his care of us to neglect himself, a slight cold, disregarded, became inconvenient on Friday, oppressive on Saturday, and, defying every medical interposition, before the morning of Sunday put an end to the best of men. An end, did I say? His fame survives! bounded only by the limits of the earth, and by the extent of the human mind. He survives in our hearts—in the growing knowledge of our children—in the affection of the good throughout the world. And when our monuments shall be done away; when nations now existing shall be no more; when even our young and far-spreading empire shall have perished; still will our Washington's glory unfaded shine, and die not, until love of virtue cease on earth, or earth itself sinks into chaos!

How, my fellow-citizens, shall I single to your grateful hearts his pre-eminent worth? Where shall I begin, in opening to your view a character throughout sublime? Shall I speak of his warlike achievements, all springing from obedience to his country's will, all directed to his country's good?

Will you go with me to the banks of the Monongahela, to see your youthful Washington supporting, in the dismal hour of Indian victory, the ill-fated Braddock, and saving, by his judgment and by his valor, the remains of a defeated army, pressed by the conquering savage foe? or when, oppressed America nobly resolving to risk her all in defense of her violated rights, he was elevated by the unanimous voice of Congress to the command of her armies? Will you follow him to the high grounds of Boston, where, to an undisciplined, courageous, and virtuous yeomanry, his presence gave the stability of system, and infused the invincibility of love of country? Or shall I carry you to the painful scenes of Long Island, Work Island, and New Jersey, when, combating superior and gallant armies, aided by powerful fleets, and led by chiefs high in the roll of fame, he stood the bulwark of our safety, undismayed by disaster, unchanged by change of fortune? Or will you view him in the precarious fields of Trenton, where deep gloom, unnerving every arm, reigned triumphant through our thinned, worn down, unaided ranks—himself unmoved? Dreadful was the night. It was about this time of winter. The storm raged. The Delaware, rolling furiously with floating ice, forbade the approach of man. Washington, self-collected, viewed the tremendous scene. His country called. Unappalled by surrounding dangers, he passed to the hostile shore; he fought; he conquered. The morning sun cheered the American world. Our country rose on the event; and her dauntless chief, pursuing his blow, completed in the lawns of Princeton what his vast soul had conceived on the shores of Delaware.

Thence to the strong grounds of Morristown he led his small but gallant band; and through an eventful winter, by the high efforts of his genius, whose matchless force was measurable only by the growth of difficulties, he held in check formidable hostile legions, conducted by a chief experienced in the art of war, and famed for his valor on the ever memorable heights of Abraham, where fell Wolfe, Montcalm, and since, our much lamented Montgomery;<sup>51</sup> all covered with glory. In this fortunate interval, produced by

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<sup>51</sup> *The Battle of the Plains of Abraham, fought on September 13, 1759 outside of Quebec City, was a decisive battle in the Seven Years' War; as a result of the battle, the British gained control of much of modern-day Canada. Both Louis-Joseph de Montcalm (1712–59), the French commander, and James*

his masterly conduct, our fathers, ourselves, animated by his resistless example, rallied around our country's standard, and continued to follow her beloved chief through the various and trying scenes to which the destinies of our Union led.

Who is there that has forgotten the vales of Brandywine, the fields of Germantown, or the plains of Monmouth? Everywhere present, wants of every kind obstructing, numerous and valiant armies encountering, himself a host, he assuaged our sufferings, limited our privations, and upheld our tottering republic. Shall I display to you the spread of the fire of his soul, by rehearsing the praises of the hero of Saratoga, and his much loved compeer of the Carolinas? No; our Washington wears not borrowed glory. To Gates, to Greene,<sup>52</sup> he gave without reserve the applause due to their eminent merit; and long may the chiefs of Saratoga and of Eutaws receive the grateful respect of a grateful people.

Moving in his own orbit, he imparted heat and light to his most distant satellites; and combining the physical and moral force of all within his sphere, with irresistible weight he took his course, commiserating folly, disdainng vice, dismaying treason, and invigorating despondency; until the auspicious hour arrived, when, united with the intrepid forces of a potent and magnanimous ally, he brought to submission the since conqueror of India; thus finishing his long career of military glory with a lustre corresponding to his great name, and, in this his last act of war, affixing the seal of fate to our nation's birth.

To the horrid din of battle sweet peace succeeded; and our virtuous chief, mindful only of the common good, in a moment tempting personal aggrandizement, hushed the discontents of growing sedition, and, surrendering his power into the hands from which he had received it, converted his sword into a ploughshare; teaching an admiring world that to be truly great you must be truly good.

Were I to stop here, the picture would be incomplete, and the task imposed unfinished. Great as was our Washington in war, and as much as did that greatness contribute to produce the American republic, it is not in war alone his pre-eminence stands conspicuous. His various talents, combining all the capacities of a statesman with those of a soldier, fitted him alike to guide the councils and the armies of our nation. Scarcely had he rested from his martial toils, while his invaluable parental advice was still sounding in our ears, when he, who had been our shield and our sword, was called forth to act a less splendid, but more important part.

Possessing a clear and penetrating mind, a strong and sound judgment, calmness and temper for deliberation, with invincible firmness and perseverance in resolutions maturely formed; drawing information from all; acting from himself, with incorruptible integrity and unvarying patriotism; his own superiority and the public confidence alike

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*Wolfe (1727–59), the British commander, were killed in the course of the battle. Richard Montgomery (1738–75), a major general in the Continental Army, was killed near Quebec City during Benedict Arnold's invasion of Canada in November 1775.*

<sup>52</sup> *Horatio Gates (1727–1806) and Nathanael Greene (1742–1786) served as generals under George Washington during the Revolutionary War.*

marked him as the man designed by Heaven to lead in the great political as well as military events which have distinguished the era of his life.

The finger of an over-ruling Providence, pointing at Washington, was neither mistaken or unobserved, when, to realize the vast hopes to which our revolution had given birth, a change of political system became indispensable.

How novel, how grand the spectacle! Independent States stretched over an immense territory, and known only by common difficulty, clinging to their union as the rock of their safety; deciding, by frank comparison of their relative condition, to rear on that rock, under the guidance of reason, a common government, through whose commanding protection, liberty and order, with their long train of blessings, should be safe to themselves, and the sure inheritance of their posterity.

This arduous task devolved on citizens selected by the people, from knowledge of their wisdom and confidence in their virtue. In this august assembly of sages and of patriots, Washington of course was found; and, as if acknowledged to be most wise where all were wise, with one voice he was declared their chief. How well he merited this rare distinction, how faithful were the labors of himself and his compatriots, the work of their hands, and our union, strength, and prosperity, the fruits of that work, best attest.

But to have essentially aided in presenting to his country this consummation of our hopes, neither satisfied the claims of his fellow-citizens on his talents, nor those duties which the possession of those talents imposed. Heaven had not infused into his mind such an uncommon share of its ethereal spirit to remain unemployed, nor bestowed on him his genius unaccompanied with the corresponding duty of devoting it to the common good. To have framed a Constitution was showing only, without realizing, the general happiness. This great work remained to be done; and America, steadfast in her preference, with one voice summoned her beloved Washington, unpracticed as he was in the duties of civil administration, to execute this last act in the completion of the national felicity. Obedient to her call, he assumed the high office with that self-distrust peculiar to his innate modesty, the constant attendant of pre-eminent virtue. What was the burst of joy through our anxious land on this exhilarating event is known to us all. The aged, the young, the brave, the fair, rivaled each other in demonstrations of their gratitude: and this high-wrought, delightful scene was heightened in its effect by the singular contest between the zeal of the bestowers and the avoidance of the receiver of the honors bestowed.

Commencing his administration, what heart is not charmed with the recollection of the pure and wise principles announced by himself, as the basis of his political life? He best understood the indissoluble union between virtue and happiness, between duty and advantage, between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity and individual felicity. Watching with an equal and comprehensive eye over this great assemblage of communities and interests, he laid the foundations of our national policy in the unerring, immutable principles of morality,

based on religion, exemplifying the pre-eminence of a free government by all the attributes which win the affections of its citizens, or command the respect of the world.

*“O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint!”<sup>53</sup>*

Leading through the complicated difficulties produced by previous obligations and conflicting interests, seconded by succeeding Houses of Congress, enlightened and patriotic, he surmounted all original obstruction, and brightened the path of our national felicity.

The Presidential term expiring, his solicitude to exchange exaltation for humility returned with a force increased with increase of age; and he had prepared his Farewell Address to his countrymen, proclaiming his intention, when the united interposition of all around him, enforced by the eventful prospects of the epoch, produced a further sacrifice of inclination to duty. The election of President followed; and Washington, by the unanimous vote of the nation, was called to resume the chief magistracy. What a wonderful fixture of confidence! Which attracts most our admiration, a people so correct, or a citizen combining an assemblage of talents forbidding rivalry, and stifling even envy itself? Such a nation ought to be happy; such a chief must be forever revered.

War, long menaced by the Indian tribes, now broke out; and the terrible conflict, deluging Europe with blood, began to shed its baneful influence over our happy land. To the first, outstretching his invincible arm, under the orders of the gallant Wayne,<sup>54</sup> the American eagle soared triumphant through distant forests. Peace followed victory; and the melioration of the condition of the enemy followed peace. Godlike virtue! which uplifts even the subdued savage.

To the second he opposed himself. New and delicate was the conjuncture, and great was the stake. Soon did his penetrating mind discern and seize the only course, continuing to us all the felicity enjoyed. He issued his proclamation of neutrality. This index to his whole subsequent conduct was sanctioned by the approbation of both Houses of Congress, and by the approving voice of the people.

To this sublime policy he inviolably adhered, unmoved by foreign intrusion, unshaken by domestic turbulence.

*“Justum et tenacem propositi virum,  
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,  
Non vultus instantis tyranni,  
Mente quatit solida.”<sup>55</sup>*

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<sup>53</sup> Virgil, “O, how happy are the tillers of the ground, if only they knew their blessings!”

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Wayne (1745–96), a general in the Continental Army.

<sup>55</sup> Horace, “The just man, firm of purpose, cannot be shaken in his rocklike soul, by the heat of fellow citizens clamouring for what is wrong, nor by the presence of a threatening tyrant.”

Maintaining his pacific system at the expense of no duty, America, faithful to herself, and unstained in her honor, continued to enjoy the delights of peace, while afflicted Europe mourns in every quarter under the accumulated miseries of an unexampled war; miseries in which our happy country must have shared, had not our pre-eminent Washington been as firm in council as he was brave in the field.

Pursuing steadfastly his course, he held safe the public happiness, preventing foreign war, and quelling internal discord, till the revolving period of a third election approached, when he executed his interrupted, but inextinguishable desire of returning to the humble walks of private life.

The promulgation of his fixed resolution stopped the anxious wishes of an affectionate people from adding a third unanimous testimonial of their unabated confidence in the man so long enthroned in their hearts. When before was affection like this exhibited on earth? Turn over the records of ancient Greece; review the annals of mighty Rome; examine the volumes of modern Europe—you search in vain. America and her Washington only afford the dignified exemplification.

The illustrious personage called by the national voice in succession to the arduous office of guiding a free people had new difficulties to encounter. The amicable effort of settling our difficulties with France, begun by Washington, and pursued by his successor in virtue as in station, proving abortive, America took measures of self-defense. No sooner was the public mind roused by a prospect of danger, than every eye was turned to the friend of all, though secluded from public view, and gray in public service. The virtuous veteran, following his plough, received the unexpected summons with mingled emotions of indignation at the unmerited ill treatment of his country, and of a determination once more to risk his all in her defense.

The annunciation of these feelings in his affecting letter to the President, accepting the command of the army, concludes his official conduct.

First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life. Pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere; uniform, dignified, and commanding, his example was as edifying to all around him as were the effects of that example lasting.

To his equals he was condescending, to his inferiors kind, and to the dear object of his affections exemplarily tender. Correct throughout, vice shuddered in his presence, and virtue always felt his fostering hand. The purity of his private character gave effulgence to his public virtues.

His last scene comported with the whole tenor of his life. Although in extreme pain, not a sigh, not a groan escaped him; and with undisturbed serenity he closed his well-spent life. Such was the man America has lost! Such was the man for whom our nation mourns.

Methinks I see his august image, and hear, falling from his venerable lips, these deep sinking words:

“Cease, Sons of America, lamenting our separation. Go on, and confirm by your wisdom the fruits of our joint councils, joint efforts, and common dangers. Reverence religion; diffuse knowledge throughout your land; patronize the arts and sciences; let liberty and order be inseparable companions; control party spirit, the bane of free government; observe good faith to, and cultivate peace with all nations; shut up every avenue to foreign influence; contract rather than extend national connection; rely on yourselves only: be American in thought and deed. Thus will you give immortality to that union, which was the constant object of my terrestrial labors; thus will you preserve undisturbed to the latest posterity the felicity of a people to me most dear; and thus will you supply (if my happiness is now aught to you) the only vacancy in the round of pure bliss high Heaven bestows.”

# Letter to Mary Cranch

ABIGAIL ADAMS

*A different appreciation of George Washington, offered in a decidedly different tone, is contained in this letter (December 22, 1799) by Abigail Adams (1744–1818), written to her oldest sister, Mary Cranch (1741–1811). Adams was the wife of John Adams, the first Vice President and, at the time of this letter, the second President of the United States. One of her five children, John Quincy Adams, became the nation's sixth president. Though not formally educated, Abigail Adams was taught to read and write at home, and took advantage of her family's large library to become well versed in poetry, philosophy, and politics. When in 1774 John Adams went to Philadelphia to serve as a Massachusetts delegate to the First Continental Congress, she began the still famous lifelong correspondence with him. These letters, like the many additional letters she penned to friends and relations, tell us much about the Revolutionary and Federal eras and about the leading people and contested issues of our fledgling nation.*

*Here, despite the rift that had occurred between her husband and George Washington during Washington's presidency, Abigail Adams conveys her enormously high regard for George Washington and what he meant to our country—though she cannot help referring at the end to “a successor filling his place, persueing [sic] the same system which he had adopted, and that in times which have been equally dangerous and Critical.” But Adams emphasizes something that Lee's eulogy almost makes one forget, namely, that Washington was a human being with human frailties and human sufferings. Is it important that we remember these things about him, and, if so, why? Or is Abigail Adams' account rather too private a view of the public man, less relevant to assessing the significance of his life for the nation? Is it really desirable that we “humanize” our heroes?*

My Dear Sister:

I wrote to you the day after we received the account of the death of Gen'll Washington. This Event so important to our Country at this period, will be universally deplored. No Man ever lived, more deservedly beloved and Respected. The praise and I may say addulation which followed his administration for several years, never made him forget that he was a Man, subject to the weakness and frailty attached to humane Nature. He never grew giddy, but ever mantaind a modest diffidence of his own talents, and if that was an error, it was of the amiable and engaging kind, tho it might lead sometimes to a want of decisions in some great Emergencys. Possesst of power, posest of an extensive influence, he never used it but for the benifit of his Country. Witness his retirement to private Life when Peace closed the scenes of War; When call'd by the unanimous suffrages of the People to the chief Majestracy of the Nation, he acquitted himself to the satisfaction and applause of all Good Men. When assailed by faction, when reviled by Party, he sufferd with dignity, and Retired from his exalted station with a Character which malice could not wound, nor envy tarnish. If we look through the whole

tenor of his Life, History will not produce to us a Parrallel. Heaven has seen fit to take him from us. Our Mourning is sincere, in the midst of which, we ought not to lose sight of the Blessings we have enjoy'd and still partake of, that he was spaired to us, untill he saw a successor filling his place, persueing the same system which he had adopted, and that in times which have been equally dangerous and Critical. It becomes not me to say more upon this Head.

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## Washington Assessed and Remembered



## *A. Washington's Greatness*



# Letter to Walter Jones

THOMAS JEFFERSON

*The most suitable mirror for taking the measure of a great man, it has been commonly observed, is a man of comparable greatness, good if a friend, sometimes even better if a rival or an enemy. Throughout their long association, culminating in his serving as Secretary of State in Washington's first administration, Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) was at various times Washington's friend, rival, and, on important matters of policy, an opponent, if not quite an enemy. Writing to Virginia physician, scholar, and member of Congress, Dr. Walter Jones (1745–1815), 15 years after Washington's death, Jefferson describes Washington's character and assesses his stature, providing information to Jones who was apparently planning to write something about Washington.*

*What virtues does Jefferson ascribe to Washington? What shortcomings does he report? Why does he so often adopt formulations that qualify or balance his praise (for example, "His mind was great and powerful, without being of the very first order; his penetration strong, though, not so acute as that of a Newton, Bacon, or Locke;" or "In his expenses he was honorable, but exact.")? Do you think Jefferson is being sincere or ironic when he sums up as follows: "His character was, in its mass, perfect . . . [N]ever did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great, and to place him in the same constellation with whatever worthies have merited from man an everlasting remembrance"? Do you detect ongoing signs of Jefferson's rivalry with Washington (for example, in the comments about Washington's intellect and reading habits), enough to say that the letter reveals more about Jefferson than about Washington? Or do you think that the evidence of rivalry make Jefferson's praise all the more impressive?*

Monticello, January 2, 1814

You say that in taking General Washington on your shoulders, to bear him harmless through the federal coalition, you encounter a perilous topic. I do not think so. You have given the genuine history of the course of his mind through the trying scenes in which it was engaged, and of the seductions by which it was deceived, but not depraved. I think I knew General Washington intimately and thoroughly; and were I called on to delineate his character, it should be in terms like these.

His mind was great and powerful, without being of the very first order; his penetration strong, though not so acute as that of a Newton, Bacon, or Locke; and as far as he saw, no judgment was ever sounder. It was slow in operation, being little aided by invention or imagination, but sure in conclusion. Hence the common remark of his officers, of the advantage he derived from councils of war, where hearing all suggestions, he selected whatever was best; and certainly no General ever planned his battles more judiciously. But if deranged during the course of the action, if any member of his plan was dislocated by sudden circumstances, he was slow in a re-adjustment. The consequence was, that he often failed in the field, and rarely against an enemy in station,

as at Boston and York. He was incapable of fear, meeting personal dangers with the calmest unconcern. Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighed; refraining if he saw a doubt, but, when once decided, going through with his purpose, whatever obstacles opposed. His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known, no motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship or hatred, being able to bias his decision. He was, indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good, and a great man. His temper was naturally irritable and high-toned; but reflection and resolution had obtained a firm and habitual ascendancy over it. If ever, however, it broke its bonds, he was most tremendous in his wrath. In his expenses he was honorable, but exact; liberal in contributions to whatever promised utility; but frowning and unyielding on all visionary projects, and all unworthy calls on his charity. His heart was not warm in its affections; but he exactly calculated every man's value, and gave him a solid esteem proportioned to it. His person, you know, was fine, his stature exactly what one would wish, his deportment easy, erect, and noble; the best horseman of his age, and the most graceful figure that could be seen on horseback. Although in the circle of his friends, where he might be unreserved with safety, he took a free share in conversation, his colloquial talents were not above mediocrity, possessing neither copiousness of ideas, nor fluency of words. In public, when called on for a sudden opinion, he was unready, short and embarrassed. Yet he wrote readily, rather diffusely, in an easy and correct style. This he had acquired by conversation with the world, for his education was merely reading, writing, and common arithmetic, to which he added surveying at a later day. His time was employed in action chiefly, reading little, and that only in agriculture and English history. His correspondence became necessarily extensive, and, with journalizing his agricultural proceedings, occupied most of his leisure hours within doors. On the whole, his character was, in its mass, perfect, in nothing bad, in few points indifferent; and it may truly be said, that never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great, and to place him in the same constellation with whatever worthies have merited from man an everlasting remembrance. For his was the singular destiny and merit, of leading the armies of his country successfully through an arduous war, for the establishment of its independence; of conducting its councils through the birth of a government, new in its forms and principles, until it had settled down into a quiet and orderly train; and of scrupulously obeying the laws through the whole of his career, civil and military, of which the history of the world furnishes no other example.

How, then, can it be perilous for you to take such a man on your shoulders? I am satisfied the great body of republicans think of him as I do. We were, indeed, dissatisfied with him on his ratification of the British treaty. But this was short-lived. We knew his honesty, the wiles with which he was encompassed, and that age had already begun to relax the firmness of his purposes; and I am convinced he is more deeply seated in the love and gratitude of the republicans, than in the Pharisaical homage of the federal monarchists. For he was no monarchist from preference of his judgment. The soundness of that gave him correct views of the rights of man, and his severe justice devoted him to them. He has often declared to me that he considered our new constitution as an experiment on the practicability of republican government, and with what dose of liberty man could be trusted for his own good; that he was determined the experiment should

have a fair trial, and would lose the last drop of his blood in support of it. And these declarations he repeated to me the oftener and the more pointedly, because he knew my suspicions of Colonel Hamilton's views, and probably had heard from him the same declarations which I had, to wit, "that the British constitution, with its unequal representation, corruption, and other existing abuses, was the most perfect government which had ever been established on earth, and that a reformation of these abuses would make it an impracticable government." I do believe that General Washington had not a firm confidence in the durability of our government. He was naturally distrustful of men, and inclined to gloomy apprehensions: and I was ever persuaded that a belief that we must at length end in something like a British constitution, had some weight in his adoption of the ceremonies of levees, birth-days, pompous meetings with Congress, and other forms of the same character, calculated to prepare us gradually for a change which he believed possible, and to let it come on with as little shock as might be to the public mind.

These are my opinions of General Washington, which I would vouch at the judgment-seat of God, having been formed on an acquaintance of thirty years. I served with him in the Virginia legislature from 1769 to the Revolutionary war, and again, a short time in Congress, until he left us to take command of the army. During the war and after it we corresponded occasionally, and in the four years of my continuance in the office of Secretary of State, our intercourse was daily, confidential and cordial. After I retired from that office, great and malignant pains were taken by our federal monarchists, and not entirely without effect, to make him view me as a theorist, holding French principles of government, which would lead infallibly to licentiousness and anarchy. And to this he listened the more easily, from my known disapprobation of the British treaty. I never saw him afterwards, or these malignant insinuations should have been dissipated before his just judgment, as mists before the sun. I felt on his death, with my countrymen, that "verily a great man hath fallen this day in Israel."

# The Genius of Washington

EDWIN P. WHIPPLE

*By the middle of the 19th century, Washington was heartily celebrated as a man of impeccable character and ethical excellence—"wise, good, and great," as Jefferson had put it—but he was unfavorably compared to men of genius and intellectual excellence (such as Jefferson himself). Taking exception to this disparagement of Washington's mind, the American essayist and critic Edwin Percy Whipple (1819–86) came to Washington's defense in this July 4th oration, given in Boston in 1850 (published posthumously in 1916). The talk raises interesting questions about the nature of genius and the role of the mind in the life of action.*

*Why does Whipple think that the "illustrious" Washington is "at once the world's admiration and enigma"? What does Whipple mean by and think of "genius"? What does he mean when he says that Washington "had that greatness of character which is the highest expression and the last result of greatness of mind"? How successful do you find Whipple's defense of Washington's "genius"? How do you personally compare the greatness of "the creator of an epic" and the "creator of a country," and which do you admire most?*

The history, so sad and so glorious, which chronicles the stern struggle in which our rights and liberties passed through the awful baptism of fire and blood, is eloquent with the deeds of many patriots, warriors, and statesmen; but these all fall into relations to one prominent and commanding figure, towering up above the whole group in unapproachable majesty, whose exalted character, warm and bright with every public and private virtue, and vital with the essential spirit of wisdom, has burst all sectional and national bounds, and made the name of Washington the property of all mankind.

This illustrious man, at once the world's admiration and enigma, we are taught by a fine instinct to venerate, and by a wrong opinion to misjudge. The might of his character has taken strong hold upon the feelings of great masses of men; but, in translating this universal sentiment into an intelligent form, the intellectual element of his wonderful nature is as much depressed as the moral element is exalted, and consequently we are apt to misunderstand both. Mediocrity has a bad trick of idealizing itself in eulogizing him, and drags him down to its own level while assuming to lift him to the skies. How many times have we been told that he was not a man of genius, but a person of "excellent common sense," of "admirable judgment," of "rare virtues"! and, by a constant repetition of this odious cant, we have nearly succeeded in divorcing comprehension from his sense, insight from his judgment, force from his virtues, and life from the man. Accordingly, in the panegyric<sup>56</sup> of cold spirits, Washington disappears in a cloud of commonplaces; in the rhodomontade<sup>57</sup> of boiling patriots, he expires in the agonies of rant. Now, the sooner this bundle of mediocre talents and moral qualities, which its

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<sup>56</sup> *Formal or elaborate praise, usually eulogistic.*

<sup>57</sup> *Pretentious boasting.*

contrivers have the audacity to call George Washington, is hissed out of existence, the better it will be for the cause of talent and the cause of morals; contempt of that is the condition of insight. He had no genius, it seems. O no! genius, we must suppose, is the peculiar and shining attribute of some orator, whose tongue can spout patriotic speeches, or some versifier, whose muse can "Hail Columbia," but not of the man who supported states on his arm, and carried America in his brain. The madcap Charles Townshend,<sup>58</sup> the motion of whose pyrotechnic mind was like the whiz of a hundred rockets, is a man of genius; but George Washington raised up above the level of even eminent statesmen, and with a nature moving with the still and orderly celerity of a planet round the sun,—he dwindles, in comparison, into a kind of angelic dunce! What is genius? Is it worth anything? Is splendid folly the measure of its inspiration? Is wisdom that which it recedes from, or tends towards? And by what definition do you award the name to the creator of an epic, and deny it to the creator of a country? On what principle is it to be lavished on him who sculpts in perishing marble the image of possible excellence, and withheld from him who built up in himself a transcendent character indestructible as the obligations of Duty, and beautiful as her rewards?

Indeed, if by the genius of action you mean will enlightened by intelligence, and intelligence energized by will,—if force and insight be its characteristics, and influence its test,—and, especially, if great effects suppose a cause proportionately great, that is, a vital causative mind,—then is Washington most assuredly a man of genius, and one whom no other American has equaled in the power of working morally and mentally on other minds. His genius, it is true, was of a peculiar kind, the genius of character, of thought, and the objects of thought solidified and concentrated into active faculty. He belongs to that rare class of men,—rare as Homers and Miltons, rare as Platos and Newtons, who have impressed their characters upon nations without pampering national vices. Such men have natures broad enough to include all the facts of a people's practical life, and deep enough to discern the spiritual laws which underlie, animate, and govern those facts. Washington, in short, had that greatness of character which is the highest expression and last result of greatness of mind; for there is no method of building up character except through mind. Indeed, character like his is not *built* up, stone upon stone, precept upon precept, but *grows* up, through an actual contact of thought with things,—the assimilative mind transmuting the impalpable but potent spirit of public sentiment, and the life of visible facts, and the power of spiritual laws, into individual life and power, so that their mighty energies put on personality, as it were, and act through one centralizing human will. This process may not, if you please, make the great philosopher or the great poet; but it does make the great *man*,—the man in whom thought and judgment seem identical with volition,— the man whose vital expression is not in words, but deeds,—the man whose sublime ideas issue necessarily in sublime acts, not in sublime art. It was because Washington's character was thus composed of the inmost substance and power of facts and principles, that men instinctively felt the perfect reality of his comprehensive manhood. This reality enforced universal respect, married strength to repose, and threw into his face that commanding majesty which made men of the speculative audacity of Jefferson, and the lucid genius of Hamilton, recognize, with unwonted meekness, his awful superiority.

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<sup>58</sup> *Charles Townshend (1725–67), a British politician known for his wit.*

## **A Trip to Mount Vernon** **from *Democracy: An American Novel***

HENRY BROOKS ADAMS

*Not everyone in the American past has stood in awe of George Washington. As the country prospered and as manners became more democratic, here and there envy and resentment took aim at his elevated standing. Some prominent people who might have esteemed him begrudged his reputation for moral excellence, inasmuch as it stood as a permanent rebuke to their own moral weakness. The resulting habit of debunking the great man, today a common practice, is already on display in this (fictional) selection from *Democracy: An American Novel* by American journalist and historian Henry Brooks Adams (1838–1918), published anonymously in 1880. Adams, grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson of John Adams, is best known for his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, as well as for the salon he and Mrs. Adams hosted in Washington, DC, where the personal and the political mixed at the highest level. In this chapter, a group of the sort that would have gathered at the Adamases take a boat trip down the Potomac to visit Mount Vernon. Though some of the characters in the novel, with their regard for titles, may seem less than democratic, their gossip and their disparagement of Washington and Mount Vernon show both their leveling tendencies and the belief that their life is superior to that of heroes past.*

*Do you find yourself sympathetic to any of the characters in Adams' narrative? If so, to whom and why? With which character, if any, do you think the author sympathizes? Do you think that Adams endorses the debunking of Washington, or is he in fact ridiculing it? What do you think of these remarks by Senator Ratcliffe: "Public men cannot be dressing themselves to-day in Washington's old clothes. If Washington were President today, he would have to learn our ways or lose his next election. . . . If virtue won't answer our purpose, we must use vice, or our opponents will put us out of office, and this was as true in Washington's day as it is now, and always will be"? If Ratcliffe is right about American politics, what then would you say about Washington's greatness?*

In February the weather became warmer and summer-like. In Virginia there comes often at this season a deceptive gleam of summer, slipping in between heavy storm-clouds of sleet and snow; days and sometimes weeks when the temperature is like June; when the earliest plants begin to show their hardy flowers, and when the bare branches of the forest trees alone protest against the conduct of the seasons. Then men and women are languid; life seems, as in Italy, sensuous and glowing with colour; one is conscious of walking in an atmosphere that is warm, palpable, radiant with possibilities; a delicate haze hangs over Arlington, and softens even the harsh white glare of the Capitol; the struggle of existence seems to abate; Lent throws its calm shadow over society; and youthful diplomatists, unconscious of their danger, are lured into asking foolish girls to marry them; the blood thaws in the heart and flows out into the veins, like the rills of sparkling water that trickle from every lump of ice or snow, as though all the ice and snow on earth, and all the hardness of heart, all the heresy and schism, all the works of the devil, had

yielded to the force of love and to the fresh warmth of innocent, lamb-like, confiding virtue. In such a world there should be no guile—but there is a great deal of it notwithstanding. Indeed, at no other season is there so much. This is the moment when the two whited sepulchres at either end of the Avenue reek with the thick atmosphere of bargain and sale. The old is going; the new is coming. Wealth, office, power are at auction. Who bids highest? who hates with most venom? who intrigues with most skill? who has done the dirtiest, the meanest, the darkest, and the most, political work? He shall have his reward.

Senator Ratcliffe was absorbed and ill at ease. A swarm of applicants for office dogged his steps and beleaguered his rooms in quest of his endorsement of their paper characters. The new President was to arrive on Monday. Intrigues and combinations, of which the Senator was the soul, were all alive, awaiting this arrival. Newspaper correspondents pestered him with questions. Brother senators called him to conferences. His mind was pre-occupied with his own interests. One might have supposed that, at this instant, nothing could have drawn him away from the political gaming-table, and yet when Mrs. Lee remarked that she was going to Mount Vernon on Saturday with a little party, including the British Minister and an Irish gentleman staying as a guest at the British Legation, the Senator surprised her by expressing a strong wish to join them. He explained that, as the political lead was no longer in his hands, the chances were nine in ten that if he stirred at all he should make a blunder; that his friends expected him to do something when, in fact, nothing could be done; that every preparation had already been made, and that for him to go on an excursion to Mount Vernon, at this moment, with the British Minister, was, on the whole, about the best use he could make of his time, since it would hide him for one day at least.

Lord Skye had fallen into the habit of consulting Mrs. Lee when his own social resources were low, and it was she who had suggested this party to Mount Vernon, with Carrington for a guide and Mr. Gore for variety, to occupy the time of the Irish friend whom Lord Skye was bravely entertaining. This gentleman, who bore the title of Dunbeg, was a dilapidated peer, neither wealthy nor famous. Lord Skye brought him to call on Mrs. Lee, and in some sort put him under her care. He was young, not ill-looking, quite intelligent, rather too fond of facts, and not quick at humour. He was given to smiling in a deprecatory way, and when he talked, he was either absent or excited; he made vague blunders, and then smiled in deprecation of offence, or his words blocked their own path in their rush. Perhaps his manner was a little ridiculous, but he had a good heart, a good head, and a title. He found favour in the eyes of Sybil and Victoria Dare, who declined to admit other women to the party, although they offered no objection to Mr. Ratcliffe's admission. As for Lord Dunbeg, he was an enthusiastic admirer of General Washington, and, as he privately intimated, eager to study phases of American society. He was delighted to go with a small party, and Miss Dare secretly promised herself that she would show him a phase.

The morning was warm, the sky soft, the little steamer lay at the quiet wharf with a few negroes lazily watching her preparations for departure. Carrington, with Mrs. Lee and the young ladies, arrived first, and stood leaning against the rail, waiting the arrival

of their companions. Then came Mr. Gore, neatly attired and gloved, with a light spring overcoat; for Mr. Gore was very careful of his personal appearance, and not a little vain of his good looks. Then a pretty woman, with blue eyes and blonde hair, dressed in black, and leading a little girl by the hand, came on board, and Carrington went to shake hands with her. On his return to Mrs. Lee's side, she asked about his new acquaintance, and he replied with a half-laugh, as though he were not proud of her, that she was a client, a pretty widow, well known in Washington. "Any one at the Capitol would tell you all about her. She was the wife of a noted lobbyist, who died about two years ago. Congressmen can refuse nothing to a pretty face, and she was their idea of feminine perfection. Yet she is a silly little woman, too. Her husband died after a very short illness, and, to my great surprise, made me executor under his will. I think he had an idea that he could trust me with his papers, which were important and compromising, for he seems to have had no time to go over them and destroy what were best out of the way. So, you see, I am left with his widow and child to look after. Luckily, they are well provided for."

"Still you have not told me her name."

"Her name is Baker—Mrs. Sam Baker. But they are casting off, and Mr. Ratcliffe will be left behind. I'll ask the captain to wait."

About a dozen passengers had arrived, among them the two Earls, with a footman carrying a promising lunch-basket, and the planks were actually hauled in when a carriage dashed up to the wharf, and Mr. Ratcliffe leaped out and hurried on board. "Off with you as quick as you can!" said he to the negro-hands, and in another moment the little steamer had begun her journey, pounding the muddy waters of the Potomac and sending up its small column of smoke as though it were a newly invented incense-burner approaching the temple of the national deity. Ratcliffe explained in great glee how he had barely managed to escape his visitors by telling them that the British Minister was waiting for him, and that he would be back again presently. "If they had known where I was going," said he, "you would have seen the boat swamped with office-seekers. Illinois alone would have brought you to a watery grave." He was in high spirits, bent upon enjoying his holiday, and as they passed the arsenal with its solitary sentry, and the navy-yard, with its one unseaworthy wooden war-steamer, he pointed out these evidences of national grandeur to Lord Skye, threatening, as the last terror of diplomacy, to send him home in an American frigate. They were thus indulging in senatorial humour on one side of the boat, while Sybil and Victoria, with the aid of Mr. Gore and Carrington, were improving Lord Dunbeg's mind on the other.

Miss Dare, finding for herself at last a convenient seat where she could repose and be mistress of the situation, put on a more than usually demure expression and waited with gravity until her noble neighbour should give her an opportunity to show those powers which, as she believed, would supply a phase in his existence. Miss Dare was one of those young persons, sometimes to be found in America, who seem to have no object in life, and while apparently devoted to men, care nothing about them, but find happiness only in violating rules; she made no parade of whatever virtues she had, and her chief pleasure was to make fun of all the world and herself.

"What a noble river!" remarked Lord Dunbeg, as the boat passed out upon the wide stream; "I suppose you often sail on it?"

"I never was here in my life till now," replied the untruthful Miss Dare; "we don't think much of it; it's too small; we're used to so much larger rivers."

"I am afraid you would not like our English rivers then; they are mere brooks compared with this."

"Are they indeed?" said Victoria, with an appearance of vague surprise; "how curious! I don't think I care to be an Englishwoman then. I could not live without big rivers."

Lord Dunbeg stared, and hinted that this was almost unreasonable.

"Unless I were a Countess!" continued Victoria, meditatively, looking at Alexandria, and paying no attention to his lordship; "I think I could manage if I were a C-c-countess. It is such a pretty title!"

"Duchess is commonly thought a prettier one," stammered Dunbeg, much embarrassed. The young man was not used to chaff from women.

"I should be satisfied with Countess. It sounds well. I am surprised that you don't like it." Dunbeg looked about him uneasily for some means of escape but he was barred in. "I should think you would feel an awful responsibility in selecting a Countess. How do you do it?"

Lord Dunbeg nervously joined in the general laughter as Sybil ejaculated: "Oh, Victoria!" but Miss Dare continued without a smile or any elevation of her monotonous voice:

"Now, Sybil, don't interrupt me, please. I am deeply interested in Lord Dunbeg's conversation. He understands that my interest is purely scientific, but my happiness requires that I should know how Countesses are selected. Lord Dunbeg, how would you recommend a friend to choose a Countess?"

Lord Dunbeg began to be amused by her impudence, and he even tried to lay down for her satisfaction one or two rules for selecting Countesses, but long before he had invented his first rule, Victoria had darted off to a new subject.

"Which would you rather be, Lord Dunbeg? an Earl or George Washington?"

"George Washington, certainly," was the Earl's courteous though rather bewildered reply.

“Really?” she asked with a languid affectation of surprise; “it is awfully kind of you to say so, but of course you can’t mean it.”

“Indeed I do mean it.”

“Is it possible? I never should have thought it.”

“Why not, Miss Dare?”

“You have not the air of wishing to be George Washington.”

“May I again ask, why not?”

“Certainly. Did you ever see George Washington?”

“Of course not. He died fifty years before I was born.”

“I thought so. You see you don’t know him. Now, will you give us an idea of what you imagine General Washington to have looked like?”

Dunbeg gave accordingly a flattering description of General Washington, compounded of Stuart’s portrait and Greenough’s statue of Olympian Jove with Washington’s features, in the Capitol Square. Miss Dare listened with an expression of superiority not unmingled with patience, and then she enlightened him as follows:

“All you have been saying is perfect stuff—excuse the vulgarity of the expression. When I am a Countess I will correct my language. The truth is that General Washington was a raw-boned country farmer, very hard-featured, very awkward, very illiterate and very dull; very bad tempered, very profane, and generally tipsy after dinner.”

“You shock me, Miss Dare!” exclaimed Dunbeg.

“Oh! I know all about General Washington. My grandfather knew him intimately, and often stayed at Mount Vernon for weeks together. You must not believe what you read, and not a word of what Mr. Carrington will say. “He is a Virginian and will tell you no end of fine stories and not a syllable of truth in one of them. We are all patriotic about Washington and like to hide his faults. If I weren’t quite sure you would never repeat it, I would not tell you this. The truth is that even when George Washington was a small boy, his temper was so violent that no one could do anything with him. He once cut down all his father’s fruit-trees in a fit of passion, and then, just because they wanted to flog him, he threatened to brain his father with the hatchet. His aged wife suffered agonies from him. My grandfather often told me how he had seen the General pinch and swear at her till the poor creature left the room in tears; and how once at Mount Vernon he saw Washington, when quite an old man, suddenly rush at an unoffending visitor, and chase him off the place, beating him all the time over the head with a great stick with knots in

it, and all just because he heard the poor man stammer; he never could abide s-s-stammering."

Carrington and Gore burst into shouts of laughter over this description of the Father of his country, but Victoria continued in her gentle drawl to enlighten Lord Dunbeg in regard to other subjects with information equally mendacious, until he decided that she was quite the most eccentric person he had ever met. The boat arrived at Mount Vernon while she was still engaged in a description of the society and manners of America, and especially of the rules which made an offer of marriage necessary. According to her, Lord Dunbeg was in imminent peril; gentlemen, and especially foreigners, were expected, in all the States south of the Potomac, to offer themselves to at least one young lady in every city: "and I had only yesterday," said Victoria, "a letter from a lovely girl in North Carolina, a dear friend of mine, who wrote me that she was right put out because her brothers had called on a young English visitor with shot guns, and she was afraid he wouldn't recover, and, after all, she says she should have refused him."

Meanwhile Madeleine, on the other side of the boat, undisturbed by the laughter that surrounded Miss Dare, chatted soberly and seriously with Lord Skye and Senator Ratcliffe. Lord Skye, too, a little intoxicated by the brilliancy of the morning, broke out into admiration of the noble river, and accused Americans of not appreciating the beauties of their own country.

"Your national mind," said he, "has no eyelids. It requires a broad glare and a beaten road. It prefers shadows which you can cut out with a knife. It doesn't know the beauty of this Virginia winter softness."

Mrs. Lee resented the charge. America, she maintained, had not worn her feelings threadbare like Europe. She had still her story to tell; she was waiting for her Burns and Scott, her Wordsworth and Byron, her Hogarth and Turner. "You want peaches in spring," said she. "Give us our thousand years of summer, and then complain, if you please, that our peach is not as mellow as yours. Even our voices may be soft then," she added, with a significant look at Lord Skye.

"We are at a disadvantage in arguing with Mrs. Lee," said he to Ratcliffe; "when she ends as counsel, she begins as witness. The famous Duchess of Devonshire's lips were not half as convincing as Mrs. Lee's voice."

Ratcliffe listened carefully, assenting whenever he saw that Mrs. Lee wished it. He wished he understood precisely what tones and half-tones, colours and harmonies, were.

They arrived and strolled up the sunny path. At the tomb they halted, as all good Americans do, and Mr. Gore, in a tone of subdued sorrow, delivered a short address—

"It might be much worse if they improved it," he said, surveying its proportions with the æsthetic eye of a cultured Bostonian. "As it stands, this tomb is a simple misfortune which might befall any of us; we should not grieve over it too much. What would our

feelings be if a Congressional committee reconstructed it of white marble with Gothic pepper-pots, and gilded it inside on machine-moulded stucco!”

Madeleine, however, insisted that the tomb, as it stood, was the only restless spot about the quiet landscape, and that it contradicted all her ideas about repose in the grave. Ratcliffe wondered what she meant.

They passed on, wandering across the lawn, and through the house. Their eyes, weary of the harsh colours and forms of the city, took pleasure in the worn wainscots and the stained walls. Some of the rooms were still occupied; fires were burning in the wide fire-places. All were tolerably furnished, and there was no uncomfortable sense of repair or newness. They mounted the stairs, and Mrs. Lee fairly laughed when she was shown the room in which General Washington slept, and where he died.

Carrington smiled too. “Our old Virginia houses were mostly like this,” said he; “suites of great halls below, and these gaunt barracks above. The Virginia house was a sort of hotel. When there was a race or a wedding, or a dance, and the house was full, they thought nothing of packing half a dozen people in one room, and if the room was large, they stretched a sheet across to separate the men from the women. As for toilet, those were not the mornings of cold baths. With our ancestors a little washing went a long way.”

“Do you still live so in Virginia?” asked Madeleine.

“Oh no, it is quite gone. We live now like other country people, and try to pay our debts, which that generation never did. They lived from hand to mouth. They kept a stable-full of horses. The young men were always riding about the country, betting on horse-races, gambling, drinking, fighting, and making love. No one knew exactly what he was worth until the crash came about fifty years ago, and the whole thing ran out.”

“Just what happened in Ireland!” said Lord Dunbeg, much interested and full of his article in the *Quarterly*; “the resemblance is perfect, even down to the houses.”

Mrs. Lee asked Carrington bluntly whether he regretted the destruction of this old social arrangement.

“One can’t help regretting,” said he, “whatever it was that produced George Washington, and a crowd of other men like him. But I think we might produce the men still if we had the same field for them.”

“And would you bring the old society back again if you could?” asked she.

“What for? It could not hold itself up. General Washington himself could not save it. Before he died he had lost his hold on Virginia, and his power was gone.”

The party for a while separated, and Mrs. Lee found herself alone in the great drawing-room. Presently the blonde Mrs. Baker entered, with her child, who ran about making more noise than Mrs. Washington would have permitted. Madeleine, who had the usual feminine love of children, called the girl to her and pointed out the shepherds and shepherdesses carved on the white Italian marble of the fireplace; she invented a little story about them to amuse the child, while the mother stood by and at the end thanked the story-teller with more enthusiasm than seemed called for. Mrs. Lee did not fancy her effusive manner, or her complexion, and was glad when Dunbeg appeared at the doorway.

"How do you like General Washington at home?" asked she.

"Really, I assure you I feel quite at home myself," replied Dunbeg, with a more beaming smile than ever. "I am sure General Washington was an Irishman. I know it from the look of the place. I mean to look it up and write an article about it."

"Then if you have disposed of him," said Madeleine, "I think we will have luncheon, and I have taken the liberty to order it to be served outside."

There a table had been improvised, and Miss Dare was inspecting the lunch, and making comments upon Lord Skye's cuisine and cellar.

"I hope it is very dry champagne," said she, "the taste for sweet champagne is quite awfully shocking."

The young woman knew no more about dry and sweet champagne than of the wine of Ulysses, except that she drank both with equal satisfaction, but she was mimicking a Secretary of the British Legation who had provided her with supper at her last evening party. Lord Skye begged her to try it, which she did, and with great gravity remarked that it was about five per cent, she presumed. This, too, was caught from her Secretary, though she knew no more what it meant than if she had been a parrot.

The luncheon was very lively and very good. When it was over, the gentlemen were allowed to smoke, and conversation fell into a sober strain, which at last threatened to become serious.

"You want half-tones!" said Madeleine to Lord Skye: "are there not half-tones enough to suit you on the walls of this house?"

Lord Skye suggested that this was probably owing to the fact that Washington, belonging, as he did, to the universe, was in his taste an exception to local rules.

"Is not the sense of rest here captivating?" she continued. "Look at that quaint garden, and this ragged lawn, and the great river in front, and the superannuated fort beyond the river! Everything is peaceful, even down to the poor old General's little bed-room. One

would like to lie down in it and sleep a century or two. And yet that dreadful Capitol and its office-seekers are only ten miles off.”

“No! that is more than I can bear!” broke in Miss Victoria in a stage whisper, “that dreadful Capitol! Why, not one of us would be here without that dreadful Capitol! except, perhaps, myself.”

“You would appear very well as Mrs. Washington, Victoria.”

“Miss Dare has been so very obliging as to give us her views of General Washington’s character this morning,” said Dunbeg, “but I have not yet had time to ask Mr. Carrington for his.”

“Whatever Miss Dare says is valuable,” replied Carrington, “but her strong point is facts.”

“Never flatter! Mr. Carrington,” drawled Miss Dare; “I do not need it, and it does not become your style. Tell me, Lord Dunbeg, is not Mr. Carrington a little your idea of General Washington restored to us in his prime?”

“After your account of General Washington, Miss Dare, how can I agree with you?”

“After all,” said Lord Skye, “I think we must agree that Miss Dare is in the main right about the charms of Mount Vernon. Even Mrs. Lee, on the way up, agreed that the General, who is the only permanent resident here, has the air of being confoundedly bored in his tomb. I don’t myself love your dreadful Capitol yonder, but I prefer it to a bucolic life here. And I account in this way for my want of enthusiasm for your great General. He liked no kind of life but this. He seems to have been greater in the character of a home-sick Virginia planter than as General or President. I forgive him his inordinate dulness, for he was not a diplomatist and it was not his business to lie, but he might once in a way have forgotten Mount Vernon.”

Dunbeg here burst in with an excited protest; all his words seemed to shove each other aside in their haste to escape first. “All our greatest Englishmen have been home-sick country squires. I am a home-sick country squire myself.”

“How interesting!” said Miss Dare under her breath.

Mr. Gore here joined in: “It is all very well for you gentlemen to measure General Washington according to your own private twelve-inch carpenter’s rule. But what will you say to us New Englanders who never were country gentlemen at all, and never had any liking for Virginia? What did Washington ever do for us? He never even pretended to like us. He never was more than barely civil to us. I’m not finding fault with him; everybody knows that he never cared for anything but Mount Vernon. For all that, we idolize him. To us he is Morality, Justice, Duty, Truth; half a dozen Roman gods with capital letters. He is austere, solitary, grand; he ought to be deified. I hardly feel easy,

eating, drinking, smoking here on his portico without his permission, taking liberties with his house, criticising his bedrooms in his absence. Suppose I heard his horse now trotting up on the other side, and he suddenly appeared at this door and looked at us. I should abandon you to his indignation. I should run away and hide myself on the steamer. The mere thought unmans me."

Ratcliffe seemed amused at Gore's half-serious notions. "You recall to me," said he, "my own feelings when I was a boy and was made by my father to learn the Farewell Address by heart. In those days General Washington was a sort of American Jehovah. But the West is a poor school for Reverence. Since coming to Congress I have learned more about General Washington, and have been surprised to find what a narrow base his reputation rests on. A fair military officer, who made many blunders, and who never had more men than would make a full army-corps under his command, he got an enormous reputation in Europe because he did not make himself king, as though he ever had a chance of doing it. A respectable, painstaking President, he was treated by the Opposition with an amount of deference that would have made government easy to a baby, but it worried him to death. His official papers are fairly done, and contain good average sense such as a hundred thousand men in the United States would now write. I suspect that half of his attachment to this spot rose from his consciousness of inferior powers and his dread of responsibility. This government can show to-day a dozen men of equal abilities, but we don't deify them. What I most wonder at in him is not his military or political genius at all, for I doubt whether he had much, but a curious Yankee shrewdness in money matters. He thought himself a very rich man, yet he never spent a dollar foolishly. He was almost the only Virginian I ever heard of, in public life, who did not die insolvent."

During this long speech, Carrington glanced across at Madeleine, and caught her eye. Ratcliffe's criticism was not to her taste. Carrington could see that she thought it unworthy of him, and he knew that it would irritate her. "I will lay a little trap for Mr. Ratcliffe," thought he to himself; "we will see whether he gets out of it." So Carrington began, and all listened closely, for, as a Virginian, he was supposed to know much about the subject, and his family had been deep in the confidence of Washington himself.

"The neighbours hereabout had for many years, and may have still, some curious stories about General Washington's closeness in money matters. They said he never bought anything by weight but he had it weighed over again, nor by tale but he had it counted, and if the weight or number were not exact, he sent it back. Once, during his absence, his steward had a room plastered, and paid the plasterer's bill. On the General's return, he measured the room, and found that the plasterer had charged fifteen shillings too much. Meanwhile the man had died, and the General made a claim of fifteen shillings on his estate, which was paid. Again, one of his tenants brought him the rent. The exact change of fourpence was required. The man tendered a dollar, and asked the General to credit him with the balance against the next year's rent. The General refused and made him ride nine miles to Alexandria and back for the fourpence. On the other hand, he sent to a shoemaker in Alexandria to come and measure him for shoes. The man returned word that he did not go to any one's house to take measures, and the General mounted his

horse and rode the nine miles to him. One of his rules was to pay at taverns the same sum for his servants' meals as for his own. An inn-keeper brought him a bill of three-and-ninepence for his own breakfast, and three shillings for his servant. He insisted upon adding the extra ninepence, as he did not doubt that the servant had eaten as much as he. What do you say to these anecdotes? Was this meanness or not?"

Ratcliffe was amused. "The stories are new to me," he said. "It is just as I thought. These are signs of a man who thinks much of trifles; one who fusses over small matters. We don't do things in that way now that we no longer have to get crops from granite, as they used to do in New Hampshire when I was a boy."

Carrington replied that it was unlucky for Virginians that they had not done things in that way then: if they had, they would not have gone to the dogs.

Gore shook his head seriously; "Did I not tell you so?" said he. "Was not this man an abstract virtue? I give you my word I stand in awe before him, and I feel ashamed to pry into these details of his life. What is it to us how he thought proper to apply his principles to nightcaps and feather dusters? We are not his body servants, and we care nothing about his infirmities. It is enough for us to know that he carried his rules of virtue down to a pin's point, and that we ought, one and all, to be on our knees before his tomb."

Dunbeg, pondering deeply, at length asked Carrington whether all this did not make rather a clumsy politician of the father of his country.

"Mr. Ratcliffe knows more about politics than I. Ask him," said Carrington.

"Washington was no politician at all, as we understand the word," replied Ratcliffe abruptly. "He stood outside of politics. The thing couldn't be done to-day. The people don't like that sort of royal airs."

"I don't understand!" said Mrs. Lee. "Why could you not do it now?"

"Because I should make a fool of myself," replied Ratcliffe, pleased to think that Mrs. Lee should put him on a level with Washington. She had only meant to ask why the thing could not be done, and this little touch of Ratcliffe's vanity was inimitable.

"Mr. Ratcliffe means that Washington was too respectable for our time," interposed Carrington.

This was deliberately meant to irritate Ratcliffe, and it did so all the more because Mrs. Lee turned to Carrington, and said, with some bitterness: "Was he then the only honest public man we ever had?"

"Oh no!" replied Carrington cheerfully; "there have been one or two others."

"If the rest of our Presidents had been like him," said Gore, "we should have had fewer ugly blots on our short history."

Ratcliffe was exasperated at Carrington's habit of drawing discussion to this point. He felt the remark as a personal insult, and he knew it to be intended. "Public men," he broke out, "cannot be dressing themselves to-day in Washington's old clothes. If Washington were President now, he would have to learn our ways or lose his next election. Only fools and theorists imagine that our society can be handled with gloves or long poles. One must make one's self a part of it. If virtue won't answer our purpose, we must use vice, or our opponents will put us out of office, and this was as true in Washington's day as it is now, and always will be."

"Come," said Lord Skye, who was beginning to fear an open quarrel; "the conversation verges on treason, and I am accredited to this government. Why not examine the grounds?"

A kind of natural sympathy led Lord Dunbeg to wander by the side of Miss Dare through the quaint old garden. His mind being much occupied by the effort of stowing away the impressions he had just received, he was more than usually absent in his manner, and this want of attention irritated the young lady. She made some comments on flowers; she invented some new species with startling names; she asked whether these were known in Ireland; but Lord Dunbeg was for the moment so vague in his answers that she saw her case was perilous.

"Here is an old sun-dial. Do you have sun-dials in Ireland, Lord Dunbeg?"

"Yes; oh, certainly! What! sun-dials? Oh, yes! I assure you there are a great many sun-dials in Ireland, Miss Dare."

"I am so glad. But I suppose they are only for ornament. Here it is just the other way. Look at this one! they all behave like that. The wear and tear of our sun is too much for them; they don't last. My uncle, who has a place at Long Branch, had five sun-dials in ten years."

"How very odd! But really now, Miss Dare, I don't see how a sun-dial could wear out."

"Don't you? How strange! Don't you see, they get soaked with sunshine so that they can't hold shadow. It's like me, you know. I have such a good time all the time that I can't be unhappy. Do you ever read the *Burlington Hawkeye*, Lord Dunbeg?"

"I don't remember; I think not. Is it an American serial?" gasped Dunbeg, trying hard to keep pace with Miss Dare in her reckless dashes across country.

"No, not serial at all!" replied Virginia; "but I am afraid you would find it very hard reading. I shouldn't try."

“Do you read it much, Miss Dare?”

“Oh, always! I am not really as light as I seem. But then I have an advantage over you because I know the language.”

By this time Dunbeg was awake again, and Miss Dare, satisfied with her success, allowed herself to become more reasonable, until a slight shade of sentiment began to flicker about their path.

The scattered party, however, soon had to unite again. The boat rang its bell for return, they filed down the paths and settled themselves in their old places. As they steamed away, Mrs. Lee watched the sunny hill-side and the peaceful house above, until she could see them no more, and the longer she looked, the less she was pleased with herself. Was it true, as Victoria Dare said, that she could not live in so pure an air? Did she really need the denser fumes of the city? Was she, unknown to herself, gradually becoming tainted with the life about her? or was Ratcliffe right in accepting the good and the bad together, and in being of his time since he was in it? Why was it, she said bitterly to herself, that everything Washington touched, he purified, even down to the associations of his house? and why is it that everything we touch seems soiled? Why do I feel unclean when I look at Mount Vernon? In spite of Mr. Ratcliffe, is it not better to be a child and to cry for the moon and stars?

The little Baker girl came up to her where she stood, and began playing with her parasol.

“Who is your little friend?” asked Ratcliffe.

Mrs. Lee rather vaguely replied that she was the daughter of that pretty woman in black; she believed her name was Baker.

“Baker, did you say?” repeated Ratcliffe.

“Baker—Mrs. Sam Baker; at least so Mr. Carrington told me; he said she was a client of his.”

In fact Ratcliffe soon saw Carrington go up to her and remain by her side during the rest of the trip. Ratcliffe watched them sharply and grew more and more absorbed in his own thoughts as the boat drew nearer and nearer the shore.

Carrington was in high spirits. He thought he had played his cards with unusual success. Even Miss Dare deigned to acknowledge his charms that day. She declared herself to be the moral image of Martha Washington, and she started a discussion whether Carrington or Lord Dunbeg would best suit her in the *rôle* of the General.

“Mr. Carrington is exemplary,” she said, “but oh, what joy to be Martha Washington and a Countess too!”

## The Passionate Bedrock of Genius from *Washington: A Biography*

NOEMIE EMERY

*Like Edwin P. Whipple in an earlier selection in this section, journalist and Washington biographer Noemie Emery (b. 1938) is also interested in probing the grounds of the greatness of Washington, whom she too finds an enigma. But whereas Whipple looks to qualities of his mind, Emery looks to the strength and energy of his passions. Puzzled by how history has managed “to make this man who tamed the fire-eaters of his lifetime seem so much the dimmest of them all,” Emery examines the emotional complexities and turbulence of Washington’s life, arguing that it was out of his struggle to control his great passions that Washington’s superiority arose. The present excerpt is taken from the Introduction to her *Washington: A Biography* (1976).*

*What does Emery mean by saying that Washington’s strength has been a burden on America and that our monument to him is a sign of our revenge? Examine Gilbert Stuart’s famous portrait of Washington:<sup>59</sup> Does it convey, as Emery claims, the “lineaments of all the strongest passions” that Washington fiercely possessed? Why, according to Emery, has Washington’s image been “blurred”? Which of the reasons that Emery offers, if any, do you find most compelling? Explain and assess her thesis: “His passions, gigantic and troubling, controlled to provide discipline, loosened to unleash the welding power that sustained and settled the nation he had helped to form. On these passions, now chained and now explosive, rested the United States.”*

The enigma of George Washington has never been resolved. Remote, brooding, inaccessible, he stares down from the Houdon statue, bones massive in the nose and jawline, melancholy in the downturn of the mouth. The eyes, wide-set and solemn, look into the middle distance, skirting contact and comprehension, sealing their secret in themselves.<sup>60</sup> The face presents a challenge that intrigues as it baffles and defies. In 1852, from the pit of a dissolving Union, Emerson took this stab into the mystery, seeking in that bleak moment solace from the source: “The heavy, laden eyes stare at you, as the eyes of an ox in pasture. And the mouth has gravity and depth of quiet, as if this MAN had absorbed all the serenity of America, and left none for his restless, rickety, hysterical countrymen.” For two centuries, this strength has brooded over the American democracy in the tense attraction of born opposites: its balance, its counterpoise, its resource—and its reproach.

This strength has been a burden on America, and America has taken its revenge. No great man in history has a name so lifeless or a monument so featureless and blank. Jefferson and Lincoln, adoptive saints of the democracy, dominate their own memorials;

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<sup>59</sup> View Gilbert Stuart’s 1796 portrait of Washington at [www.mfa.org/collections/object/george-washington-34341](http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/george-washington-34341).

<sup>60</sup> View a photo of Jean-Antoine Houdon’s (1741–1828) statue of George Washington at the Richmond capitol building: [www.virginiamemory.com/docs/hires/WashingtonSculpture.pdf](http://www.virginiamemory.com/docs/hires/WashingtonSculpture.pdf).

Andrew Jackson's very horse breathes fire; Washington's tribute alone reveals no warming touch of flesh. The lines describe the limits of the image: flawless aspiration—and what else?

More, apparently, than his countrymen have cared or dared to know. The reality is the inverse of the image, flawed and broken, violent, complex. Incident and irony weave strange and unexpected patterns in his life. He began a great world war when he was twenty-two years old, was branded an "assassin" in the courts of Europe, and chided for barbarity by Voltaire. In the war that followed, his pride, insolence, and insubordination were famous—and infamous—among British and colonial commanders in the skirmishes against the French. Eaten by a fierce ambition, he pursued fame relentlessly, missed it, and discovered later, when it came unbidden, that he had somehow lost the taste. He proposed to one woman while in love with another, married the first in a mood of almost bitter resignation, and found later that this, too, could change. Cool, aloof, and distant, he was known for the cold qualities of what Jefferson called his perfect justice, yet Jefferson, and others, sense the hidden violence; portraitist Gilbert Stuart observed the lineaments of all the strongest passions and said that if he had lived among the Indians, he would have been the most fierce of all the savage chiefs. The results of those banked fires were apparent then and still endure: the army saved, the union soldered, the ambitions, flames, and talents of Hamilton, Jefferson, John Adams—the most contentious lot to coexist in any house of government—overmastered and subdued.

What happened, then, to blur this image, to make this man who tamed the fire-eaters of his lifetime seem so much the dimmest of them all? Sometime after 1775, with the vast portion of his public life before him, he passed into the hands of propagandists and mythmakers, more interested in imagery than in character delineation, more concerned with a totem to hang morals on than in the picture of a flawed and living man. Part was in the temper of the time: the need of a scrabble nation, fighting its own impending dissolution, for a presence to counter its centrifugal forces; something of marble, colder than flesh. Washington himself conspired in his own entombment, refusing to publish his recollections or to let those of the men who knew him see the light of day. "Any memoirs of my life," he wrote James Craik in 1784 when he was a world-famous figure, as well as the national hero of a state that was not quite a nation, "would rather hurt my feelings than tickle my pride whilst I lived. I had rather glide gently down the stream of life, leaving it to posterity to think and say what they please of me, than by any act of mine to have vanity or ostentation imputed to me. . . . I do not think vanity is a trait of my character."

In this disavowal lie two preoccupations that bordered on obsessions in themselves: Washington's social bias against self-aggrandizement and Washington's fear that any close inspection of his career and character could serve only to underline those deficiencies of temperament and training of which he was so painfully and so persistently aware. At first glance, these insecurities sit oddly with that serenity that impressed Emerson; at second sight they form a balanced pattern of anxiety and accomplishment that governed his emotional development and ruled the inner rhythms of his life. Without the doubts, the achievements would not have been so dazzling, each sense of his own

insufficiencies driving him more surely toward his cold ideal. That stoic calm was a forced contrivance wrested out of inner turmoil; Washington had made himself, and then his country, from a tangle of disruptive forces in a prolonged and conscious effort of the will. The strains within the commonwealth are obvious, those within the man less clear. Yet they existed and they too must come to light. . . .

The question remains—how much did he bring upon himself? He had set the machine in motion when he turned from his mother to his half brothers and the ever-wider rhythms of their world. "My inclinations are strongly bent to arms." For years, he hurled himself at power, clawed for preference, forced himself over and over on the attentions of the colony, the empire, the world. If he failed in his first young objective—to become an ornament of empire—he had set the stage for his wider glories, the pieces ready to fall, at the tipping of fate, into their place. If not the ultra in every department, he was in each succeeding crisis the one man with the combination of requisites to fill a special need—the political choice for the army; the inevitable choice for the state. There was no choice ever for the shy and driven half brother for whom fame and service, duty and ambition were inextricably interwoven and set into his bones and blood. His intermittent efforts at "retirement" (always with a hopeless sound about them) were recuperations, repair between exertions, the background for his efforts, and the necessary relief. In these swings of light and dark are the terrain of his interior, iron and mercury, ambition and diffidence, shadow and sun. Each element had its own place in his greatness, sharpening or softening some native metal, taming power, giving tolerance its bite. His passions, gigantic and troubling, were the bedrock of his genius, controlled to provide discipline, loosened to unleash the welding power that sustained and settled the nation he had helped to form. On these passions, now chained and now explosive, rested the United States.

# The Greatness of George Washington

GORDON S. WOOD

*In this wide-ranging essay, published in 1992, the distinguished historian of the American Revolution and early republic Gordon S. Wood (b. 1933) offers a penetrating account of the character and career of George Washington, in defense of his thesis that Washington “was truly a great man and the greatest president we have ever had.” Wood’s review of Washington’s life and deeds revisits many matters presented in earlier selections—for example, Washington’s interest in “Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour” and Addison’s Cato, and Washington’s surrender of his commission as head of the American armies. But he weaves them together into a coherent picture that, he thinks, should clear up the apparent enigma of George Washington and re-establish Washington’s pre-eminence on the roster of American greatness.*

*Early in the essay, Wood calls Washington “a thoroughly 18th-century figure” and “our only true classical hero.” What does he mean by these characterizations? How does Wood explain and defend his claims (in Part II) that “Washington’s genius, his greatness, lay in his character”? What is the connection between Washington’s moral greatness and (1) his earnestness, (2) his modesty, and (3) his concern for fame—and how might they be important for his capacity to lead? Has Wood succeeded in defending Washington’s preoccupation with his reputation? Why does Wood regard Washington’s laying down his sword as “the greatest act of his life,” and, in combination with his 1783 circular letter<sup>61</sup> promising to retire from public life, as his “legacy” to his countrymen? What, according to Wood, are Washington’s greatest achievements as president, and why does he (again) regard his most important act as the one when he cedes power? Wood’s Washington became an anachronism even before the end of his life, no longer suited for the politics of the country he fathered. He was “an extraordinary heroic man who made rule by more ordinary mortals possible.” Is making the world safe for less excellent human beings to rise a sufficient reason to keep Washington first in our (more ordinary) hearts?*

George Washington may still be first in war and first in peace, but he no longer seems to be first in the hearts of his countrymen. Or at least in the hearts of American historians. A recent poll of 900 American historians shows that Washington has dropped to third place in presidential greatness behind Lincoln and FDR. Which only goes to show how little American historians know about American history.

Read the rest of Wood’s essay at [www.vqronline.org/articles/1992/spring/wood-greatness-george-washington/](http://www.vqronline.org/articles/1992/spring/wood-greatness-george-washington/).

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<sup>61</sup> Read Washington’s circular letter at [www.pbs.org/georgewashington/multimedia/heston/circular\\_letter.html](http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/multimedia/heston/circular_letter.html).



## *B. Washington as Inspiration*



# Valley Forge

HENRY ARMITT BROWN

*Throughout our nation's history, the memory and example of George Washington and his accomplishments in the Revolutionary War have been appropriated by many people and used to inspire their contemporaries to pursue what they regard as worthy purposes. For Henry Armit Brown (1844–78), author and orator, the cause was progress and enlightenment. On June 19, 1878, the hundredth anniversary of the departure of Washington's troops from Valley Forge—where they had wondrously held out against the British for six months despite snow, disease, and severe deprivation—Brown gave this oration to commemorate the moral victory that was Valley Forge.*

*What is Brown's view of the course of American history? How does he see the century past, and the century to come? What is his interpretation of the meaning of Valley Forge (and the American Revolution), and how does he use its memory? What does Brown encourage his listeners to "believe, with an abiding faith," about future generations? Is his wish for the preservation of "the institutions which have made us happy" compatible with his enthusiastic endorsement of indefinite change and progress? Do you find this speech inspiring? Why, or why not?*

The century that has gone by has changed the face of nature, and wrought a revolution in the habits of mankind. We stand to-day at the dawn of an extraordinary age. . . . [Man] has advanced with such astounding speed that, breathless, we have reached a moment when it seems as if distance had been annihilated, time made as nought, the invisible seen, the intangible felt, and the impossible accomplished. And already we knock at the door of a new century, which promises to be infinitely brighter and more enlightened and happier than this. . . .

We know that we are more fortunate than our fathers. We believe that our children shall be happier than we. We know that this century is more enlightened than the past. We believe that the time to come will be better and more glorious than this. We think, we believe, we hope, but we do not know. Across that threshold we may not pass; behind that veil we may not penetrate. . . . It may be vouchsafed us to behold it, wonderingly, from afar, but never to enter in. It matters not. The age in which we live is but a link in the endless and eternal chain. Our lives are like sands upon the shore; our voices like the breath of this summer breeze that stirs the leaf for a moment, and is forgotten. . . . [T]he last survivor of this mighty multitude shall stay but a little while. . . .

The endless generations are advancing to take our places as we fall. For them as for us shall the years march by in the sublime procession of the ages. And here, in this place of sacrifice, in this vale of humiliation, in this valley of the Shadow of Death out of which the Life of America rose, regenerate and free, let us believe with an abiding faith that to them Union will seem as dear, and Liberty as sweet, and Progress as glorious as they were to our fathers, and are to you and me, and that the institutions which have made

us happy, preserved by the virtue of our children, shall bless the remotest generations of the time to come. And unto Him who holds in the hollow of His hand the fate of nations, and yet marks the sparrow's fall, let us lift up our hearts this day, and into His eternal care commend ourselves, our children, and our country.

# Greatness and Commemoration

JANE ADDAMS

*In this speech, given in Chicago on February 23, 1903 to celebrate Washington's Birthday, Jane Addams (1860–1935), social reformer, community organizer, and political activist, uses the occasion and the memory of Washington to inspire her listeners to what she calls “wise patriotism.” She speaks about the moral spirit of great men, discusses the moral spirit of Washington as soldier, statesman, and citizen, and suggests the paths that Washington would follow “were he bearing our burdens now, and facing our problems at this moment.” Not surprisingly, her Washington rather resembles Jane Addams herself.*

*What exactly does Addams mean by “wise patriotism,” and how does it differ from the “patriotism of the tribe”? What, according to Addams, was Washington's guiding moral spirit? Which guiding principles does she emphasize in Washington as soldier? As statesman? As citizen? Addams' Washington appears to have been animated more by equality than by liberty: is that a fair representation? Do you find this speech inspiring? Why, or why not?*

We meet together upon these birthdays of our great men, not only to review their lives, but to revive and cherish our own patriotism. This matter is a difficult task. In the first place, we are prone to think that by merely reciting these great deeds we get a reflected glory, and that the future is secure to us because the past has been so fine.

In the second place, we are apt to think that we inherit the fine qualities of those great men, simply because we have had a common descent and are living in the same territory.

As for the latter, we know full well that the patriotism of common descent is the mere patriotism of the clan—the early patriotism of the tribe. We know that the possession of a like territory is merely an advance upon that, and that both of them are unworthy to be the patriotism of a great cosmopolitan nation whose patriotism must be large enough to obliterate racial distinction and to forget that there are such things as surveyor's lines. Then when we come to the study of great men it is easy to think only of their great deeds, and not to think enough of their spirit. What is a great man who has made his mark upon history? Every time, if we think far enough, he is a man who has looked through the confusion of the moment and has seen the moral issue involved; he is a man who has refused to have his sense of justice distorted; he has listened to his conscience until conscience becomes a trumpet call to like-minded men, so that they gather about him and together, with mutual purpose and mutual aid, they make a new period in history. . . .

If we go back to George Washington, and ask what he would be doing were he bearing our burdens now, and facing our problems at this moment, we would, of course, have to study his life bit by bit; his life as a soldier, as a statesman, and as a simple Virginia planter.

First, as a soldier. What is it that we admire about the soldier? It certainly is not that he goes into battle; what we admire about the soldier is that he has the power of losing his own life for the life of a larger cause; that he holds his personal suffering of no account; that he flings down in the gage of battle his all, and says, "I will stand or fall with this cause." That, it seems to me, is the glorious thing we most admire, and if we are going to preserve that same spirit of the soldier, we will have to found a similar spirit in the civil life of the people, the same pride in civil warfare, the spirit of courage, and the spirit of self-surrender which lies back of this. . . .

Let us take, for a moment, George Washington as a statesman. What was it he did, during those days when they were framing a constitution, when they were meeting together night after night, and trying to adjust the rights and privileges of every class in the community? What was it that sustained him during all those days, all those weeks, during all those months and years? It was the belief that they were founding a nation on the axiom that all men are created free and equal. What would George Washington say if he found that among us there were causes constantly operating against that equality? If he knew that any child which is thrust prematurely into industry has no chance in life with children who are preserved from that pain and sorrow; if he knew that every insanitary street, and every insanitary house, cripples a man so that he has no health and no vigor with which to carry on his life labor; if he knew that all about us are forces making against skill, making against the best manhood and womanhood, what would he say? He would say that if the spirit of equality means anything, it means like opportunity, and if we once lose like opportunity we lose the only chance we have toward equality throughout the nation.

Let us take George Washington as a citizen. What did he do when he retired from office, because he was afraid holding office any longer might bring a wrong to himself and harm to his beloved nation? . . . What were his thoughts during the all too short days that he lived there [Mount Vernon]? He thought of many possibilities, but, looking out over his country, did he fear that there should rise up a crowd of men who held office, not for their country's good, but for their own good? . . . He would tell us that anything which makes for better civic service, which makes for a merit system, which makes for fitness for office, is the only thing which will tell against this wrong, and that this course is the wisest patriotism. What did he write in his last correspondence? He wrote that he felt very unhappy on the subject of slavery, that there was, to his mind, a great menace in the holding of slaves. We know that he neither bought nor sold slaves himself, and that he freed his own slaves in his will. That was a century ago. A man who a century ago could do that, would he, do you think, be indifferent now to the great questions of social maladjustment which we feel all around us? . . . A wise patriotism, which will take hold of these questions by careful legal enactment, by constant and vigorous enforcement, because of the belief that if the meanest man in the republic is deprived of his rights, then every man in the republic is deprived of his rights, is the only patriotism by which public-spirited men and women, with a thoroughly aroused conscience, can worthily serve this republic. Let us say again that the lessons of great men are lost unless they re-enforce upon our minds the highest demands which we make upon ourselves; that they are lost unless they drive our sluggish wills forward in the direction of their highest ideals.

## Making an American from *The Promised Land*

MARY ANTIN

*America, it is rightly said, is a nation of immigrants. Each new immigrant, in his or her own way, must negotiate the passage to becoming an American. Yet the study of American history, political principles, and national heroes has long played a crucial part in their Americanization. This selection from her autobiography (1912) offers a particularly moving example of what learning about George Washington meant to Mary Antin (1881–1949), a young girl who at age 13 arrived in the United States from Polotsk, a small town in Russia, just before the turn of the twentieth century. Antin and her family spent their early years in the United States moving from crowded slum to crowded slum, living in gloomy tenements alongside dark alleys littered with gamblers, junkies, and drunks. But Mary Antin was never fazed. Antin appreciated what America offered compared with the life she left behind. True heir to her father's dreams, she embraced her new country, becoming an author and lecturer who addressed the themes of immigration and patriotism.*

*How exactly did Antin's encounter with George Washington make her into an American? What discoveries did she make about herself from learning about him? Can you appreciate why she is both thrilled and sobered by realizing that she and Washington were "Fellow Citizens"? What made it possible for her to "adopt" her new country? What do you think of her efforts to write a poem about Washington, and what is your reaction to the poem itself? Do you find her memoir inspiring? Why, or why not? Does Mary Antin, like many other immigrants, appreciate her new country and its heroes more than those of us who are born here? More than you do? Why might that be so?*

Now I was not exactly an infant when I was set down, on a May day some fifteen years ago, in this pleasant nursery of America. I had long since acquired the use of my faculties, and had collected some bits of experience, practical and emotional, and had even learned to give an account of them. Still, I had very little perspective, and my observations and comparisons were superficial. I was too much carried away to analyze the forces that were moving me. My Polotzk I knew well before I began to judge it and experiment with it. America was bewilderingly strange, unimaginably complex, delightfully unexplored. I rushed impetuously out of the cage of my provincialism and looked eagerly about the brilliant universe. My question was, What have we here?—not, What does this mean? That query came much later. . . .

Our initiation into American ways began with the first step on the new soil. My father found occasion to instruct or correct us even on the way from the pier to Wall Street [Boston], which journey we made crowded together in a rickety cab. He told us not to lean out of the windows, not to point, and explained the word "greenhorn." We did not want to be "greenhorns," and gave the strictest attention to my father's instructions. I do not know when my parents found opportunity to review together the history of Polotzk in

the three years past, for we children had no patience with the subject; my mother's narrative was constantly interrupted by irrelevant questions, interjections, and explanations.

The first meal was an object lesson of much variety. My father produced several kinds of food, ready to eat, without any cooking, from little tin cans that had printing all over them. He attempted to introduce us to a queer, slippery kind of fruit, which he called "banana," but had to give it up for the time being. After the meal, he had better luck with a curious piece of furniture on runners, which he called "rocking-chair." There were five of us newcomers, and we found five different ways of getting into the American machine of perpetual motion, and as many ways of getting out of it. One born and bred to the use of a rocking-chair cannot imagine how ludicrous people can make themselves when attempting to use it for the first time. We laughed immoderately over our various experiments with the novelty, which was a wholesome way of letting off steam after the unusual excitement of the day.

In our flat we did not think of such a thing as storing the coal in the bathtub. There was no bathtub. So in the evening of the first day my father conducted us to the public baths. As we moved along in a little procession, I was delighted with the illumination of the streets. So many lamps, and they burned until morning, my father said, and so people did not need to carry lanterns. In America, then, everything was free, as we had heard in Russia. Light was free; the streets were as bright as a synagogue on a holy day. Music was free; we had been serenaded, to our gaping delight, by a brass band of many pieces, soon after our installation on Union Place.

Education was free. That subject my father had written about repeatedly, as comprising his chief hope for us children, the essence of American opportunity, the treasure that no thief could touch, not even misfortune or poverty. It was the one thing that he was able to promise us when he sent for us; surer, safer than bread or shelter. On our second day I was thrilled with the realization of what this freedom of education meant. A little girl from across the alley came and offered to conduct us to school. My father was out, but we five between us had a few words of English by this time. We knew the word school. We understood. This child, who had never seen us till yesterday, who could not pronounce our names, who was not much better dressed than we, was able to offer us the freedom of the schools of Boston! No application made, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions; no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open for every one of us. The smallest child could show us the way.

This incident impressed me more than anything I had heard in advance of the freedom of education in America. It was a concrete proof—almost the thing itself. One had to experience it to understand it.

It was a great disappointment to be told by my father that we were not to enter upon our school career at once. It was too near the end of the term, he said, and we were going to move to Crescent Beach in a week or so. We had to wait until the opening of the schools in September. What a loss of precious time—from May till September!

Not that the time was really lost. Even the interval on Union Place was crowded with lessons and experiences. We had to visit the stores and be dressed from head to foot in American clothing; we had to learn the mysteries of the iron stove, the washboard, and the speaking-tube; we had to learn to trade with the fruit peddler through the window, and not to be afraid of the policeman; and, above all, we had to learn English.

The kind people who assisted us in these important matters form a group by themselves in the gallery of my friends. If I had never seen them from those early days till now, I should still have remembered them with gratitude. When I enumerate the long list of my American teachers, I must begin with those who came to us on Wall Street and taught us our first steps. To my mother, in her perplexity over the cookstove, the woman who showed her how to make the fire was an angel of deliverance. A fairy godmother to us children was she who led us to a wonderful country called "uptown," where, in a dazzlingly beautiful palace called a "department store," we exchanged our hateful homemade European costumes, which pointed us out as "greenhorns" to the children on the street, for real American machine-made garments, and issued forth glorified in each other's eyes.

With our despised immigrant clothing we shed also our impossible Hebrew names. A committee of our friends, several years ahead of us in American experience, put their heads together and concocted American names for us all. Those of our real names that had no pleasing American equivalents they ruthlessly discarded, content if they retained the initials. My mother, possessing a name that was not easily translatable, was punished with the undignified nickname of Annie. Fetchke, Joseph, and Deborah issued as Frieda, Joseph, and Dora, respectively. As for poor me, I was simply cheated. The name they gave me was hardly new. My Hebrew name being Maryashe in full, Mashke for short, Russianized into Marya (*Mar-ya*), my friends said that it would hold good in English as *Mary*; which was very disappointing, as I longed to possess a strange-sounding American name like the others.

I am forgetting the consolation I had, in this matter of names, from the use of my surname, which I have had no occasion to mention until now. I found on my arrival that my father was "Mr. Antin" on the slightest provocation, and not, as in Polotzk, on state occasions alone. And so I was "Mary Antin," and I felt very important to answer to such a dignified title. It was just like America that even plain people should wear their surnames on week days. . . .

In after years, when I passed as an American among Americans, if I was suddenly made aware of the past that lay forgotten,—if a letter from Russia, or a paragraph in the newspaper, or a conversation overheard in the street-car, suddenly reminded me of what I might have been,—I thought it miracle enough that I, Mashke, the granddaughter of Raphael the Russian, born to a humble destiny, should be at home in an American metropolis, be free to fashion my own life, and should dream my dreams in English phrases. But in the beginning my admiration was spent on more concrete embodiments of the splendors of America; such as fine houses, gay shops, electric engines and apparatus,

public buildings, illuminations, and parades. My early letters to my Russian friends were filled with boastful descriptions of these glories of my new country. No native citizen of Chelsea took such pride and delight in its institutions as I did. It required no fife and drum corps, no Fourth of July procession, to set me tingling with patriotism. Even the common agents and instruments of municipal life, such as the letter carrier and the fire engine, I regarded with a measure of respect. I know what I thought of people who said that Chelsea was a very small, dull, unambitious town, with no discernible excuse for a separate name or existence.

The apex of my civic pride and personal contentment was reached on the bright September morning when I entered the public school. That day I must always remember, even if I live to be so old that I cannot tell my name. To most people their first day at school is a memorable occasion. In my case the importance of the day was a hundred times magnified, on account of the years I had waited, the road I had come, and the conscious ambitions I entertained.

I am wearily aware that I am speaking in extreme figures, in superlatives. I wish I knew some other way to render the mental life of the immigrant child of reasoning age. I may have been ever so much an exception in acuteness of observation, powers of comparison, and abnormal self-consciousness; none the less were my thoughts and conduct typical of the attitude of the intelligent immigrant child toward American institutions. And what the child thinks and feels is a reflection of the hopes, desires, and purposes of the parents who brought him overseas, no matter how precocious and independent the child may be. Your immigrant inspectors will tell you what poverty the foreigner brings in his baggage, what want in his pockets. Let the overgrown boy of twelve, reverently drawing his letters in the baby class, testify to the noble dreams and high ideals that may be hidden beneath the greasy caftan of the immigrant. Speaking for the Jews, at least, I know I am safe in inviting such an investigation. . . .

Father himself conducted us to school. He would not have delegated that mission to the President of the United States. He had awaited the day with impatience equal to mine, and the visions he saw as he hurried us over the sun-flecked pavements transcended all my dreams. Almost his first act on landing on American soil, three years before, had been his application for naturalization. He had taken the remaining steps in the process with eager promptness, and at the earliest moment allowed by the law, he became a citizen of the United States. It is true that he had left home in search of bread for his hungry family, but he went blessing the necessity that drove him to America. The boasted freedom of the New World meant to him far more than the right to reside, travel, and work wherever he pleased; it meant the freedom to speak his thoughts, to throw off the shackles of superstition, to test his own fate, unhindered by political or religious tyranny. He was only a young man when he landed—thirty-two; and most of his life he had been held in leading-strings. He was hungry for his untasted manhood.

Three years passed in sordid struggle and disappointment. He was not prepared to make a living even in America. . . . Wherever the blame for his disabilities be placed, he

reaped their bitter fruit. "Give me bread!" he cried to America. "What will you do to earn it?" the challenge came back. And he found that he was master of no art, of no trade; that even his precious learning was of no avail, because he had only the most antiquated methods of communicating it.

So in his primary quest he had failed. There was left him the compensation of intellectual freedom. That he sought to realize in every possible way. He had very little opportunity to prosecute his education, which, in truth, had never been begun. His struggle for a bare living left him no time to take advantage of the public evening school; but he lost nothing of what was to be learned through reading, through attendance at public meetings, through exercising the rights of citizenship. Even here he was hindered by a natural inability to acquire the English language. In time, indeed, he learned to read, to follow a conversation or lecture; but he never learned to write correctly, and his pronunciation remains extremely foreign to this day.

If education, culture, the higher life were shining things to be worshipped from afar, he had still a means left whereby he could draw one step nearer to them. He could send his children to school, to learn all those things that he knew by fame to be desirable. The common school, at least, perhaps high school; for one or two, perhaps even college! His children should be students, should fill his house with books and intellectual company; and thus he would walk by proxy in the Elysian Fields of liberal learning. As for the children themselves, he knew no surer way to their advancement and happiness.

So it was with a heart full of longing and hope that my father led us to school on that first day. He took long strides in his eagerness, the rest of us running and hopping to keep up.

At last the four of us stood around the teacher's desk; and my father, in his impossible English, gave us over in her charge, with some broken word of his hopes for us that his swelling heart could no longer contain. I venture to say that Miss Nixon was struck by something uncommon in the group we made, something outside of Semitic features and the abashed manner of the alien. My little sister was as pretty as a doll, with her clear pink-and-white face, short golden curls, and eyes like blue violets when you caught them looking up. My brother might have been a girl, too, with his cherubic contours of face, rich red color, glossy black hair, and fine eyebrows. Whatever secret fears were in his heart, remembering his former teachers, who had taught with the rod, he stood up straight and uncringing before the American teacher, his cap respectfully doffed. Next to him stood a starved-looking girl with eyes ready to pop out, and short dark curls that would not have made much of a wig for a Jewish bride.

All three children carried themselves rather better than the common run of "green" pupils that were brought to Miss Nixon. But the figure that challenged attention to the group was the tall, straight father, with his earnest face and fine forehead, nervous hands eloquent in gesture, and a voice full of feeling. This foreigner, who brought his children to school as if it were an act of consecration, who regarded the teacher of the primer class with reverence, who spoke of visions, like a man inspired, in a common schoolroom, was

not like other aliens, who brought their children in dull obedience to the law; was not like the native fathers, who brought their unmanageable boys, glad to be relieved of their care. I think Miss Nixon guessed what my father's best English could not convey. I think she divined that by the simple act of delivering our school certificates to her he took possession of America. . . .

How long would you say, wise reader, it takes to make an American? By the middle of my second year in school I had reached the sixth grade. When, after the Christmas holidays, we began to study the life of Washington, running through a summary of the Revolution, and the early days of the Republic, it seemed to me that all my reading and study had been idle until then. The reader, the arithmetic, the song book, that had so fascinated me until now, became suddenly sober exercise books, tools wherewith to hew a way to the source of inspiration. When the teacher read to us out of a big book with many bookmarks in it, I sat rigid with attention in my little chair, my hands tightly clasped on the edge of my desk; and I painfully held my breath, to prevent sighs of disappointment escaping, as I saw the teacher skip the parts between bookmarks. When the class read, and it came my turn, my voice shook and the book trembled in my hands. I could not pronounce the name of George Washington without a pause. Never had I prayed, never had I chanted the songs of David, never had I called upon the Most Holy, in such utter reverence and worship as I repeated the simple sentences of my child's story of the patriot. I gazed with adoration at the portraits of George and Martha Washington, till I could see them with my eyes shut. And whereas formerly my self-consciousness had bordered on conceit, and I thought myself an uncommon person, parading my schoolbooks through the streets, and swelling with pride when a teacher detained me in conversation, now I grew humble all at once, seeing how insignificant I was beside the Great.

As I read about the noble boy who would not tell a lie to save himself from punishment, I was for the first time truly repentant of my sins. Formerly I had fasted and prayed and made sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, but it was more than half play, in mimicry of my elders. I had no real horror of sin, and I knew so many ways of escaping punishment. I am sure my family, my neighbors, my teachers in Polotzk—all my world, in fact—strove together, by example and precept, to teach me goodness. Saintliness had a new incarnation in about every third person I knew. I did respect the saints, but I could not help seeing that most of them were a little bit stupid, and that mischief was much more fun than piety. Goodness, as I had known it, was respectable, but not necessarily admirable. The people I really admired, like my Uncle Solomon, and Cousin Rachel, were those who preached the least and laughed the most. My sister Frieda was perfectly good, but she did not think the less of me because I played tricks. What I loved in my friends was not inimitable. One could be downright good if one really wanted to. One could be learned if one had books and teachers. One could sing funny songs and tell anecdotes if one travelled about and picked up such things, like one's uncles and cousins. But a human being strictly good, perfectly wise, and unfailingly valiant, all at the same time, I had never heard or dreamed of. This wonderful George Washington was as inimitable as he was irreproachable. Even if I had never, never told a lie, I could not

compare myself to George Washington; for I was not brave—I was afraid to go out when snowballs whizzed—and I could never be the First President of the United States.

So I was forced to revise my own estimate of myself. But the twin of my new-born humility, paradoxical as it may seem, was a sense of dignity I had never known before. For if I found that I was a person of small consequence, I discovered at the same time that I was more nobly related than I had ever supposed. I had relatives and friends who were notable people by the old standards,—I had never been ashamed of my family,—but this George Washington, who died long before I was born, was like a king in greatness, and he and I were Fellow Citizens. There was a great deal about Fellow Citizens in the patriotic literature we read at this time; and I knew from my father how he was a Citizen, through the process of naturalization, and how I also was a citizen, by virtue of my relation to him. Undoubtedly I was a Fellow Citizen, and George Washington was another. It thrilled me to realize what sudden greatness had fallen on me; and at the same time it sobered me, as with a sense of responsibility. I strove to conduct myself as befitted a Fellow Citizen.

Before books came into my life, I was given to stargazing and daydreaming. When books were given me, I fell upon them as a glutton pounces on his meat after a period of enforced starvation. I lived with my nose in a book, and took no notice of the alternations of the sun and stars. But now, after the advent of George Washington and the American Revolution, I began to dream again. I strayed on the common after school instead of hurrying home to read. I hung on fence rails, my pet book forgotten under my arm, and gazed off to the yellow-streaked February sunset, and beyond, and beyond. I was no longer the central figure of my dreams; the dry weeds in the lane crackled beneath the tread of Heroes.

What more could America give a child? Ah, much more! As I read how the patriots planned the Revolution, and the women gave their sons to die in battle, and the heroes led to victory, and the rejoicing people set up the Republic, it dawned on me gradually what was meant by *my country*. The people all desiring noble things, and striving for them together, defying their oppressors, giving their lives for each other—all this it was that made *my country*. It was not a thing that I *understood*; I could not go home and tell Frieda about it, as I told her other things I learned at school. But I knew one could say “my country” and *feel* it, as one felt “God” or “myself.” My teacher, my schoolmates, Miss Dillingham, George Washington himself could not mean more than I when they said “my country,” after I had once felt it. For the Country was for all the Citizens, and *I was a Citizen*. And when we stood up to sing “America,” I shouted the words with all my might. I was in very earnest proclaiming to the world my love for my new-found country.

“I love thy rocks and rills,  
Thy woods and templed hills.”

Boston Harbor, Crescent Beach, Chelsea Square—all was hallowed ground to me. As the day approached when the school was to hold exercises in honor of Washington’s Birthday, the halls resounded at all hours with the strains of patriotic songs; and I, who

was a model of the attentive pupil, more than once lost my place in the lesson as I strained to hear, through closed doors, some neighboring class rehearsing "The Star-Spangled Banner." If the doors happened to open, and the chorus broke out unveiled—

"O! say, does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave?"—

delicious tremors ran up and down my spine, and I was faint with suppressed enthusiasm.

Where had been my country until now? What flag had I loved? What heroes had I worshipped? The very names of these things had been unknown to me. Well I knew that Polotzk was not my country. It was *goluth*—exile. On many occasions in the year we prayed to God to lead us out of exile. The beautiful Passover service closed with the words, "Next year, may we be in Jerusalem." On childish lips, indeed, those words were no conscious aspiration; we repeated the Hebrew syllables after our elders, but without their hope and longing. Still not a child among us was too young to feel in his own flesh the lash of the oppressor. We knew what it was to be Jews in exile, from the spiteful treatment we suffered at the hands of the smallest urchin who crossed himself; and thence we knew that Israel had good reason to pray for deliverance. But the story of the Exodus was not history to me in the sense that the story of the American Revolution was. It was more like a glorious myth, a belief in which had the effect of cutting me off from the actual world, by linking me with a world of phantoms. Those moments of exaltation which the contemplation of the Biblical past afforded us, allowing us to call ourselves the children of princes, served but to tinge with a more poignant sense of disinheritance the long humdrum stretches of our life. In very truth we were a people without a country. Surrounded by mocking foes and detractors, it was difficult for me to realize the persons of my people's heroes or the events in which they moved. Except in moments of abstraction from the world around me, I scarcely understood that Jerusalem was an actual spot on the earth, where once the Kings of the Bible, real people, like my neighbors in Polotzk, ruled in puissant majesty. For the conditions of our civil life did not permit us to cultivate a spirit of nationalism. The freedom of worship that was grudgingly granted within the narrow limits of the Pale by no means included the right to set up openly any ideal of a Hebrew State, any hero other than the Czar. What we children picked up of our ancient political history was confused with the miraculous story of the Creation, with the supernatural legends and hazy associations of Bible lore. As to our future, we Jews in Polotzk had no national expectations; only a lifeworn dreamer here and there hoped to die in Palestine. If Fetchke and I sang, with my father, first making sure of our audience, "Zion, Zion, Holy Zion, not forever is it lost," we did not really picture to ourselves Judaea restored.

So it came to pass that we did not know what *my country* could mean to a man. And as we had no country, so we had no flag to love. It was by no far-fetched symbolism that the banner of the House of Romanoff became the emblem of our latter-day bondage in our eyes. Even a child would know how to hate the flag that we were forced, on pain of severe penalties, to hoist above our housetops, in celebration of the advent of one of our oppressors. And as it was with country and flag, so it was with heroes of war. We hated

the uniform of the soldier, to the last brass button. On the person of a Gentile, it was the symbol of tyranny; on the person of a Jew, it was the emblem of shame.

So a little Jewish girl in Polotzk was apt to grow up hungry-minded and empty-hearted; and if, still in her outreaching youth, she was set down in a land of outspoken patriotism, she was likely to love her new country with a great love, and to embrace its heroes in a great worship. Naturalization, with us Russian Jews, may mean more than the adoption of the immigrant by America. It may mean the adoption of America by the immigrant.

On the day of the Washington celebration I recited a poem that I had composed in my enthusiasm. But "composed" is not the word. The process of putting on paper the sentiments that seethed in my soul was really very discomposing. I dug the words out of my heart, squeezed the rhymes out of my brain, forced the missing syllables out of their hiding-places in the dictionary. May I never again know such travail of the spirit as I endured during the fevered days when I was engaged on the poem. It was not as if I wanted to say that snow was white or grass was green. I could do that without a dictionary. It was a question now of the loftiest sentiments, of the most abstract truths, the names of which were very new in my vocabulary. It was necessary to use polysyllables, and plenty of them; and where to find rhymes for such words as "tyranny," "freedom," and "justice," when you had less than two years' acquaintance with English! The name I wished to celebrate was the most difficult of all. Nothing but "Washington" rhymed with "Washington." It was a most ambitious undertaking, but my heart could find no rest till it had proclaimed itself to the world; so I wrestled with my difficulties, and spared not ink, till inspiration perched on my penpoint, and my soul gave up its best.

When I had done, I was myself impressed with the length, gravity, and nobility of my poem. My father was overcome with emotion as he read it. His hands trembled as he held the paper to the light, and the mist gathered in his eyes. My teacher, Miss Dwight, was plainly astonished at my performance, and said many kind things, and asked many questions; all of which I took very solemnly, like one who had been in the clouds and returned to earth with a sign upon him. When Miss Dwight asked me to read my poem to the class on the day of celebration, I readily consented. It was not in me to refuse a chance to tell my schoolmates what I thought of George Washington.

I was not a heroic figure when I stood up in front of the class to pronounce the praises of the Father of his Country. Thin, pale, and hollow, with a shadow of short black curls on my brow, and the staring look of prominent eyes, I must have looked more frightened than imposing. My dress added no grace to my appearance. "Plaids" were in fashion, and my frock was of a red-and-green "plaid" that had a ghastly effect on my complexion. I hated it when I thought of it, but on the great day I did not know I had any dress on. Heels clapped together, and hands glued to my sides, I lifted up my voice in praise of George Washington. It was not much of a voice; like my hollow cheeks, it suggested consumption. My pronunciation was faulty, my declamation flat. But I had the courage of my convictions. I was face to face with two score Fellow Citizens, in clean blouses and

extra frills. I must tell them what George Washington had done for their country—for *our* country—for me.

I can laugh now at the impossible metres, the grandiose phrases, the verbose repetitions of my poem. Years ago I must have laughed at it, when I threw my only copy into the wastebasket. The copy I am now turning over was loaned me by Miss Dwight, who faithfully preserved it all these years, for the sake, no doubt, of what I strove to express when I laboriously hitched together those dozen and more ungraceful stanzas. But to the forty Fellow Citizens sitting in rows in front of me it was no laughing matter. Even the bad boys sat in attitudes of attention, hypnotized by the solemnity of my demeanor. If they got any inkling of what the hail of big words was about, it must have been through occult suggestion. I fixed their eighty eyes with my single stare, and gave it to them, stanza after stanza, with such emphasis as the lameness of the lines permitted.

He whose courage, will, amazing bravery,  
Did free his land from a despot's rule,  
From man's greatest evil, almost slavery,  
And all that's taught in tyranny's school,  
Who gave his land its liberty,  
Who was he?

'Twas he who e'er will be our pride,  
Immortal Washington,  
Who always did in truth confide.  
We hail our Washington!

The best of the verses were no better than these, but the children listened. They had to. Presently I gave them news, declaring that Washington

Wrote the famous Constitution; sacred's the hand  
That this blessed guide to man had given, which says, "One  
And all of mankind are alike, excepting none."

This was received in respectful silence, possibly because the other Fellow Citizens were as hazy about historical facts as I at this point. "Hurrah for Washington!" they understood, and "Three cheers for the Red, White, and Blue!" was only to be expected on that occasion. But there ran a special note through my poem—a thought that only Israel Rubinstein or Beckie Aronovitch could have fully understood, besides myself. For I made myself the spokesman of the "luckless sons of Abraham," saying—

Then we weary Hebrew children at last found rest  
In the land where reigned Freedom, and like a nest  
To homeless birds your land proved to us, and therefore  
Will we gratefully sing your praise evermore.

The boys and girls who had never been turned away from any door because of their father's religion sat as if fascinated in their places. But they woke up and applauded heartily when I was done, following the example of Miss Dwight, who wore the happy face which meant that one of her pupils had done well.

# Radio Address on Washington's Birthday

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

*A rather different George Washington, invoked for a different purpose, is the subject of this radio address to the nation by our 32nd president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945), delivered in the dark days of the Second World War. Roosevelt appeals especially to the memory of how Washington “conducted himself in the midst of great adversities” in order to inspire his listeners to imitate Washington’s example. Roosevelt’s Washington emerges not as a military hero or noble gentleman, but as a man of faith, hope, and charity. Indeed, Roosevelt concludes by quoting the Beatitudes, which he calls “the words which helped shape the character and career of George Washington,” “the truths which are the eternal heritage of our civilization,” and our “guiding light . . . to the fulfillment of our hopes for victory, for freedom, and for peace.”*

*Why might Roosevelt, in the midst of World War II, invoke Washington’s faith, hope, and charity in order to inspire the American people? How closely does Roosevelt’s Washington resemble the Washington you have learned about from the historical record of his life and thought? Given Washington’s frequent references to the deity (see, for example, his First Inaugural Address, Thanksgiving Proclamation, and Farewell Address, above), is there some basis for Roosevelt’s picture and use of Washington? Do you find this speech inspiring? Why, or why not? Were you the leader of the United States in the dark days of war, how might you choose to speak on Washington’s Birthday?*

Today this Nation, which George Washington helped so greatly to create, is fighting all over this earth in order to maintain for ourselves and for our children the freedom which George Washington helped so greatly to achieve. As we celebrate his birthday, let us remember how he conducted himself in the midst of great adversities. We are inclined, because of the total sum of his accomplishments, to forget his days of trial.

Throughout the Revolution, Washington commanded an army whose very existence as an army was never a certainty from one week to another. Some of his soldiers, and even whole regiments, could not or would not move outside the borders of their own States. Sometimes, at critical moments, they would decide to return to their individual homes to get the plowing done, or the crops harvested. Large numbers of the people of the colonies were either against independence or at least unwilling to make great personal sacrifice toward its attainment.

And there were many in every colony who were willing to cooperate with Washington only if the cooperation were based on their own terms.

Some Americans during the War of the Revolution sneered at the very principles of the Declaration of Independence. It was impractical, they said—it was “idealistic”—to

claim that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights.”

The skeptics and the cynics of Washington’s day did not believe that ordinary men and women have the capacity for freedom and self-government. They said that liberty and equality were idle dreams that could not come true—just as today there are many Americans who sneer at the determination to attain freedom from want and freedom from fear, on the ground that these are ideals which can never be realized. They say it is ordained that we must always have poverty, and that we must always have war.

You know, they are like the people who carp at the Ten Commandments because some people are in the habit of breaking one or more of them.

We Americans of today know that there would have been no successful outcome to the Revolution, even after eight long years—the Revolution that gave us liberty—had it not been for George Washington’s faith, and the fact that that faith overcame the bickerings and confusion and the doubts which the skeptics and cynics provoked.

When kind history books tell us of Benedict Arnold, they omit dozens of other Americans who, beyond peradventure of a doubt, were also guilty of treason.

We know that it was Washington’s simple, steadfast faith that kept him to the essential principles of first things first. His sturdy sense of proportion brought to him and his followers the ability to discount the smaller difficulties and concentrate on the larger objectives. And the objectives of the American Revolution were so large—so unlimited—that today they are among the primary objectives of the entire civilized world.

It was Washington’s faith—and, with it, his hope and his charity—which was responsible for the stamina of Valley Forge—and responsible for the prayer at Valley Forge.

The Americans of Washington’s day were at war. We Americans of today are at war.

The Americans of Washington’s day faced defeat on many occasions. We faced, and still face, reverses and misfortunes.

In 1777, the victory over General Burgoyne’s army at Saratoga led thousands of Americans to throw their hats in the air, proclaiming that the war was practically won and that they should go back to their peacetime occupations—and, shall I say, their peacetime “normalcies.”

Today, the great successes on the Russian front have led thousands of Americans to throw their hats in the air and proclaim that victory is just around the corner.

Others among us still believe in the age of miracles. They forget that there is no Joshua in our midst. We cannot count on great walls crumbling and falling down when the trumpets blow and the people shout.

It is not enough that we have faith and that we have hope. Washington himself was the exemplification of the other great need.

Would that all of us could live our lives and direct our thoughts and control our tongues as did the Father of our Country in seeking day by day to follow those great verses:

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

“Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil:

“Rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth.”

I think that most of us Americans seek to live up to those precepts. But there are some among us who have forgotten them. There are Americans whose words and writings are trumpeted by our enemies to persuade the disintegrating people of Germany and Italy and their captives that America is disunited—that America will be guilty of faithlessness in this war, and will thus enable the Axis powers to control the earth.

It is perhaps fitting that on this day I should read a few more words spoken many years ago—words which helped to shape the character and the career of George Washington, words that lay behind the prayer at Valley Forge.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Those are the truths which are the eternal heritage of our civilization. I repeat them, to give heart and comfort to all men and women everywhere who fight for freedom.

Those truths inspired Washington, and the men and women of the thirteen colonies.

Today, through all the darkness that has descended upon our Nation and our world, those truths are a guiding light to all.

We shall follow that light, as our forefathers did, to the fulfillment of our hopes for victory, for freedom, and for peace.



*C. A Hero for Our Time?*



## Introduction from *Founding Father*

RICHARD BROOKHISER

*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>62</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>63</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>64</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 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.

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<sup>62</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>63</sup> Both of these documentaries can be viewed here: <http://manifoldproductions.com/>.

<sup>64</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.

Read the rest of Brookhiser's "Introduction" in *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*: [www.amazon.com/Founding-Father-Rediscovering-George-Washington/dp/0684831422](http://www.amazon.com/Founding-Father-Rediscovering-George-Washington/dp/0684831422).

## George Washington, Model Executive?

HARVEY MANSFIELD

*George Washington, in being first, set many precedents for the American presidency. To be sure, times have changed, and so have the ways in which our presidents view and discharge their office. Nevertheless, certain persistent features and challenges of the presidency within our constitutional republic can be generalized. In these brief remarks, prepared for a panel discussion celebrating Washington's Birthday, ("First Among Equals: George Washington and the American Presidency"<sup>65</sup>), Harvard University political scientist Harvey Mansfield (b. 1932) examines the ambiguous idea and practice of executive power. Based on his analysis, and without challenging Washington's overall greatness, Mansfield concludes with a question about whether Washington as president provides the best model for current presidents to follow.*

*What was novel about the American presidency? What are the two meanings of "executive," and how do they affect the conception of the function and power of the American president within the constitutional republic? What is meant by "energy in the executive"? How does the United States Constitution handle the need for both rule of law and discretion? Given your understanding of how Washington conducted himself in office (see, for example, Myron Magnet's selection above on "The Trials and Triumphs of Presiding"), would you say that Washington was, in Mansfield's terms, a strong president? What does Mansfield mean by his final questions about Washington and Lincoln? How would you begin to answer them?*

George Washington was the first president in the first republic that had a *strong* executive—something we take for granted today, but at the time it was new. A strong executive smacks of monarchy, and it is against the genius of republican government, which says that power is safest when it is in the hands of many, as opposed to one or a few. The republican tradition had been dominated by this republican genius, and was very hostile to any sign of one-man rule—as happened with the demagogues of the ancient republics or the modern republics of Holland and Britain. The example of Oliver Cromwell in Great Britain was considered very disgraceful for republics. During the English Civil War in the 17th century, republican thinkers took the side of a republic as opposed to even the moderate monarchy of Great Britain. Writers such as James Harrington and Algernon Sidney were firmly opposed to a strong president.

And with *us*, the idea of a strong president came rather late in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. In that Convention there were two original plans, the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan, at the beginning. Neither proposed a strong executive. The Virginia Plan had an executive that was elected by the legislature, and would therefore be a creature of the legislature. The New Jersey Plan had an executive by committee so that no single person was responsible; the several members of the committee could blame one

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<sup>65</sup> View the panel discussion, and read other participants' remarks, at [www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/celebrating-george-washington](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/celebrating-george-washington).

another if something went wrong. And after the Constitution was framed, a strong executive was opposed by the Anti-Federalists in conformity with republican tradition.

Now the *idea* of a strong executive was also new. It was an invention of modern political science, traceable to Machiavelli. He used the word "executive" in two senses: first, execution as "carrying something out," or "following it out to its end." In that sense, "executive" is doing the will of someone else besides the executive. It is a subordinate function. But the second sense of execution, which is still the same in English as it was in Italian, is killing—capital punishment—an independent exercise of will by the executive. To execute a law it is not enough to say "please." The executive may meet reluctance, even resistance. The executive then has to overcome this resistance, and possibly even *execute* a resistor. The first meaning of "executive" results in a weak executive, and the second meaning yields a strong one. This is the ambivalence of executive power. It can justify strong and independent action, but it can also call for merely executing the will of somebody or something else—say the will of Congress, the will of the courts, the will of the people, the language of the law. Sometimes government can be stronger if it pretends to be weak: If it pretends to be carrying out the will of someone else besides itself, and not declaring itself to be the initiator or the author of the imposition of its actions.

Now *The Federalist*, in explaining and defending the Constitution, demands a strong executive who uses *energy*. Energy in the executive has two uses: In the first place, "to face an emergency." To have energy, the executive must be decisive, and he must use secrecy so that what he does is a surprise. Even today, when a congressional committee meets by itself in secret, it is called "executive session." Executive goes with secret. This is the short-term task of energy. But the executive has an opposite function in the long term to execute what Alexander Hamilton called "extensive and arduous enterprises." To plan ahead, to carry out a consistent policy over a long time was always thought to be very difficult for republics. Republics were thought to be indecisive in counsel and flighty in policy, easily discouraged and rarely steadfast and consistent. But with energy in the executive consistency is possible. An example would be the bipartisan foreign policy in the United States, lasting from Presidents Truman to Reagan, of containment of the Soviet Union—in the end, a success. This word "energy" is a word out of physics that was brought into political science at this time; we find it in one of its very first uses in *The Federalist Papers*. And the word is in the Farewell Address of George Washington. It was a new term to describe the central virtue of the American presidency.

This "energy" was derived from another word, "prerogative," which is to be found in the *Second Treatise* of John Locke, the great philosopher of liberalism—understanding liberalism in a generic sense that includes both liberals and conservatives today, as a philosophy of rights. But a philosophy of rights needs *prerogative*, according to Locke. He defines prerogative as "doing public good without a rule"—beyond the law, even *against* the law. But when you have prerogative like this to go against the constitution, you set up a distinction between what is constitutional and what is for the public good. The American founders thought that that was not a wise distinction to put about. They thought that it would be better to have the prerogative, and therefore the public good, *within* the Constitution. It is better to have a power within the Constitution that can act

for the public good without a rule, beyond the law or even against the law, but remains constitutional. You can get the same advantage from Locke's prerogative by bringing the necessity of discretion inside the Constitution. Then, when the executive exercises discretion, he is not disobeying the Constitution.

Energy is needed not only to execute the laws, but also to act when laws are in the way or are not applicable. In this way, a strong president is also a check on the legislature—that is, the overbearing character of the legislature, which was a great fear of the Framers of the Constitution. They thought that republics were governments of the people, and in governments of the people, the power that was closest to the people—the legislature—would be always the most powerful and dangerous.

The American Constitution wisely installed a separation of powers that contains both the rule of law *and* discretion, and it allows these powers to contest for supremacy in every particular situation. Both are necessary: law and discretion. But one can never have one without the possibility of the other. You always need a law, and yet you always need to be able to get around the law. The separation of powers in the Constitution allows both viewpoints to compete for popular favor and success. Each branch has a point of view, a bias: the Presidency for discretion, the Congress and the Judiciary for the rule of law. No formula exists for a universal solution: “this much of one, that much of the other.” Sometimes one is right. Sometimes the other. The Supreme Court precedents are divided: *Korematsu v. United States* in favor of the president and *Youngstown v. Sawyer* in favor of Congress and against the president.<sup>66</sup> The Office of the President can expand and contract. It can be strong, and it can be weak.

We will not always have George Washington. This is my favorite statement in *The Federalist*: “Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm.”<sup>67</sup> They are now, the statement implies, but they won't always be. Then the question arises: Is it better to follow George Washington, as do most of our presidents, showing the modest wisdom of showing one is not wise? Or is it better to imitate Abraham Lincoln, whom we also celebrate for greatness that rivals Washington's?

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<sup>66</sup> In *Korematsu v. United States* (1944), the Supreme Court ruled that Executive Order 9066, which sent many Japanese Americans to internment camps in the US during World War II, was constitutional. In *Youngstown v. Sawyer* (1952), President Harry Truman had seized private steel companies in order to produce steel needed for the Korean War. The Supreme Court ruled that this act was unconstitutional.

<sup>67</sup> Read Federalist 10 at [www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/federalist-10](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/federalist-10).

# Hero, Standing

ALLEN C. GUELZO

*“No man is a hero to his valet; not however because the man is not a hero, but because the valet—is a valet.” This remark of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel invites us to ask whether, in our democratic age, most of us are not becoming like valets—given to merely humanizing or debunking our great men and women. (The tendency is already visible in the selection from Henry Adams’ novel, *Democracy*, above.) This question is the point of departure for this speech, given at the dedication of a statue of Abraham Lincoln at Hillsdale College on May 8, 2009, by Civil War historian, Allen C. Guelzo (b. 1953), professor at Gettysburg College and author of several books about Lincoln and a new history of the Civil War, *Fateful Lightning* (2012). Although Guelzo’s speech is about Lincoln and the commemorative statue,<sup>68</sup> his discussion of the heroic raises questions that we can apply also to Washington—to whom Lincoln is so often compared and linked—and to our ways of picturing of him in art.*

*What, according to Guelzo, is our current attitude toward heroes? How do you explain it? Do you share it? What does Guelzo mean by cultural “confidence,” and why is it important? What role do our heroes play in preserving that confidence? What are the three qualities for which Guelzo judges Lincoln to be heroic? Do you find his case compelling? Could he have made the same argument for George Washington? How should our sculptures and paintings render our heroes? Which structure on our National Mall does a better job of commemorating our heroes—the Lincoln Memorial or the Washington Monument?*

Heroes have become invisible. Their virtues have become unexplainable in the language we now use to explain human actions . . . . Great deeds somehow keep on being done, but we have lost a capacity to see them as great. Biographies grow to ever-greater and greater lengths, while the subjects of them shrink into the shadows of the pedestrian, the ordinary, and the relentlessly disclosed secret. And no history textbook can today pass muster unless it highlights the insignificant, reduces absolutes to local accident, and eliminates grand narratives in favor of a collection of tales, full of sound and fury, whose chief goal is to elicit pity, sympathy or guilt.

The hero is the story, not just of a good deed, but a great deed—a great deed which climbs the unclimbable, endures the unendurable, holds fast to the lost. But who can be a hero when climbing is so routine that Mt. Everest has become littered with discarded bottles and cans? The dark side of our bottomless wealth and comfort is a cynicism which disarms any motivation for sacrifice, and a suspicion that, in a world of comforts, heroes can only be play-actors. Something other than the heroic must be motivating the heroes, we seem to reason, because there is so little need for heroism. . . .

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<sup>68</sup> View the statue at <http://abesblogcabin.org/a-visit-to-the-lincoln-statue-at-hillsdale-college-part-two>.

The price we pay for this, in our schools and in our public discourse as well as in our statutory, is a steep one. Political systems, whether constitutional regimes or political parties, rest on a bedrock of culture—of certain shared assumptions, rituals, and unexamined attitudes—which can sometimes seem to have the stolid immovability of granite, and which at others can seem to have the fragility of snow crusts. The difference is made by confidence, which itself is composed in equal parts of practical results and constant reminders. So a constitutional regime appears to be a collection of laws and statutes; but those laws and statutes depend first on a reverence for words, for reason, and for orderliness. And that reverence must grow both from the confidence that words, reasons, order, laws and statutes really do protect and assist them, and from the constant dinning into the ears of its citizens that same confidence. On the other hand, in a culture of repudiation, where venality, corruption and incompetence produce chaos or violence, and knowledge is reduced to a species of power, confidence in words evaporates, and so do constitutions; but when examples of civic good are corroded and dissolved by victimhood and grievance, confidence evaporates just as quickly. And all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put it back together again, because there are no more kings among men. . . .

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So what is there of the hero in the statue we dedicate here today? If we mean by 'hero' merely a sword-swinging swashbuckler on a spree, we will find little of that here (and in fact, it's noticeable that in genuinely heroic statues of real soldiers, like the St. Gaudens of William Sherman in Central Park or the Henry Merwin Shrady statue of Ulysses Grant at the U.S. Capitol,<sup>69</sup> no swords are ever swung). But this is because heroism is not about skull-cracking. It is, first of all, about profound moral conviction. The face of this Lincoln is set, not in excitement or antagonism, but in conviction. "I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsakes me," he wrote to Secretary of State William Seward in the summer of 1862, when things appeared bleak for the cause of the Union. Especially, Lincoln was single-minded in his commitment to emancipation. "While I remain in my present position," Lincoln said in 1863, "I shall not attempt to retract or modify the emancipation proclamation; nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation." And if, he added a year later, "the people should, by whatever mode or means, make it an Executive duty to re-enslave such persons, another, and not I, must be their instrument to perform it." As he himself said, "I am a slow walker, but I never walk back."

But heroism cannot be only a matter of conviction, since conviction and mere stubbornness are easy to confuse. The hero must also be the possessor of ability, and be conscious of that ability without any self-flattering hubris. People routinely underestimated Lincoln. After his election, one indignant newspaper editor demanded, "Who will write this ignorant man's state papers?" That editor needn't have worried. "Any man who took Lincoln for a simpleminded man," said his old friend and legal

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<sup>69</sup> View the statue of William Sherman at [www.nycgovparks.org/parks/M062/monuments/1442](http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/M062/monuments/1442) and the statue of Ulysses Grant at [www.aoc.gov/capitol-grounds/ulysses-s-grant-memorial](http://www.aoc.gov/capitol-grounds/ulysses-s-grant-memorial).

associate, Leonard Swett, “would very soon wake [up] with his back in a ditch.” Swett especially remembered the deceptive shrewdness with which Lincoln conducted matters: “He kept a kind of account book of how things were progressing for three, or four months, and whenever I would get nervous and think things were going wrong, he would get out his estimates and show how everything on the great scale of action—the resolutions of Legislatures, the instructions of delegates, and things of that character—was going exactly as he expected.” No wonder that two years into the Civil War, Lincoln’s secretary, John Hay, could marvel that “the old man sits here and wields like a backwoods Jupiter the bolts of war and the machinery of government with a hand equally steady and equally firm. . . . There is no man in the country, so wise, so gentle and so firm. I believe the hand of God placed him where he is.”

Still, conviction and ability can often wilt in the face of antagonism, and Lincoln suffered enough antagonism to make the word fail on the lips. This statue shows a Lincoln of conviction and ability, but also of perseverance. Not angry defiance—for that, the hands would not be clasped behind him, but closed as fists in front of him, and the face would be contorted with rage. Instead, Lincoln’s face is set, composed, unblinking in the face of reality. The hands are joined, almost as a symbol of the Union he is determined to preserve—but notice that they are kept behind. Were they crossed before him, it would mean an end of forward motion. No, the man must lead the Union. He must endure a hurricane of abuse, and reconcile himself even to the prospect of failure, without whimper or casting blame; but he must always be prepared to move forward. Early in his career as an Illinois legislator, Lincoln said, “The probability that we may fall in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just; it shall not deter me.”

Francis Carpenter, who would go on to paint one of the greatest historical canvasses in American history, the First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation,<sup>70</sup> understood how the old masters of the old world “had delighted in representations of the birth from the ocean of Venus, the goddess of love,” drifting in sweetly to shore on the half-shell. But the new republic in the new world had witnessed a far greater birth—what Carpenter called “the immaculate conception of Constitutional Liberty.” Ninety years after being conceived in liberty, the republic had experienced a new birth of freedom: “The long prayed for year of jubilee had come; the bonds of the oppressed were loosed; the prison doors were opened.” Surely, Carpenter believed, a voice might proclaim from heaven: “Behold . . . how a Man may be exalted to a dignity and glory almost divine, and give freedom to a race. Surely Art should unite with Eloquence and Poetry to celebrate such a theme.” Today, it has, and this statue is the mark. For a moment, the heroic has reasserted itself—not the reeking heroic of kings and emperors, but the heroic republican citizen, in broadcloth rather than in uniform . . . armed with conviction, perseverance and ability rather than a sword . . . standing, and always facing forward to the light.

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<sup>70</sup> View Carpenter’s painting at [www.senate.gov/artandhistory/art/artifact/Painting\\_33\\_00005.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/art/artifact/Painting_33_00005.htm).

# Washington Monument by Night

CARL SANDBURG

*In this final selection of the anthology, we continue to explore how we remember and celebrate our national heroes. Like Allen Guelzo, Carl Sandburg (1878–1967), America’s beloved Midwestern poet, was especially drawn to his fellow Illinoisan, Abraham Lincoln, of whom he wrote a four-volume Pulitzer Prize–winning biography. But in this poem from 1922, “Washington Monument by Night,” Sandburg conjures George Washington from his own experience before the Washington Monument, and raises subtly but poignantly the question of national memory and forgetfulness.*

*Consider each verse in turn. What images does Sandburg convey, both about the monument and about the man for whom it stands? In what ways is the obelisk<sup>71</sup> better than a statue of Washington (like Jean-Antoine Houdon’s in the Capitol at Richmond<sup>72</sup>) at conveying his qualities and memorializing his special place among us? In what ways is it worse? What is the point of the 8th verse? Of the 9th verse? How do you feel at the end of the poem? Will it affect how you think about the Washington Monument? About George Washington?*

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The stone goes straight.  
A lean swimmer dives into night sky,  
Into half-moon mist.

Read the rest of Sandburg’s poem at  
<http://poetry.about.com/od/poemsbytitlew/1/blsandburgwashington.htm>.

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<sup>71</sup> View a photo of the Washington Monument at [www.nps.gov/wamo/historyculture/images/Aerial\\_One.jpg](http://www.nps.gov/wamo/historyculture/images/Aerial_One.jpg).

<sup>72</sup> View a photo of Jean-Antoine Houdon’s (1741–1828) statue of George Washington at the Richmond capitol building: [www.virginiamemory.com/docs/hires/WashingtonSculpture.pdf](http://www.virginiamemory.com/docs/hires/WashingtonSculpture.pdf).

# Appendix:

## The Wisdom of George Washington

DIANA SCHAUB

*Diana Schaub (b. 1959), a professor of political science at Loyola University Maryland and coeditor (with Amy and Leon Kass) of What So Proudly We Hail: The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song, delivered these remarks at a 2012 panel discussion celebrating Washington's Birthday, "First Among Equals: George Washington and the American Presidency."*<sup>73</sup>

The world's most generous prize money is attached not to the Nobel Prize but to the Mo Ibrahim Prize, awarded for good governance in Africa, as determined by a very simple test: a democratically elected leader who actually leaves office at the end of his term. The winner receives five million dollars plus 200,000 dollars a year for life. The 53 African nations yielded one claimant in 2011,<sup>74</sup> but not a single one for the two years previous. The precedent set by the retirement of George Washington has not been easy to establish elsewhere, prize money or not.

Thus, Washington is justly honored for his republican refusal of perpetual power—a refusal he performed not once but twice, first when he resigned supreme military authority in 1783 and then again when he relinquished presidential authority in 1797. Although Washington went *willingly*, it can't be said that he went *quietly*. Not, of course, that he made any sort of fuss and bother—that was not his style—but he did on both occasions take the opportunity to speak to his fellow citizens about the perils ahead. This impulse to extend his guiding presence over the generations indicates, I think, how difficult it actually was for the most competent man on the stage to exit of his own accord.

In Washington's first valedictory, the "Circular to the States," the General had noted that there were some who might object to his even offering political counsel for the future, viewing it as an act of arrogant presumption, "stepping out of the proper line of . . . duty." Washington responded by saying, "silence in me would be a crime." Why a crime?—because although the war had been won, it was yet to be determined, according to Washington, "whether the Revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse." In view of what he called "the present Crisis," Washington was convinced it was not only permissible but incumbent on him to set forth his thoughts on government, which he proceeded to do by describing four "Pillars" that were needed to support "the glorious Fabrick of our Independency and National Character."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> View the panel discussion, and read other participants' remarks, at [www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/celebrating-george-washington](http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/celebrating-george-washington).

<sup>74</sup> Pedro Verona Pires of Cape Verde.

<sup>75</sup> The four pillars were Union, Justice, Defense, and Patriotism (national attachment on the part of the people).

Like the Circular, the Farewell Address was never delivered as a speech; it was, from the first, a written document, intended to be pondered, not applauded. Its audience and mode of distribution, however, were strikingly different from the Circular's. The Circular had been sent to the respective governors of the states who were addressed with the salutation "Sir."<sup>76</sup> The "Citizens of America" were mentioned, but always in the third person as "they." By contrast, the Farewell was published via the popular medium of the newspapers, and bore the salutation "Friends, and Fellow-Citizens"—the only instance of this intimate form of address in all of Washington's writings. Whereas the formal voice of the Circular had been actuated by duty—remember, "silence would be a crime"—the warmer voice of the Farewell is prompted by love. As Washington himself puts it, his counsels are those of "an old and affectionate friend."

So what did the nation's "parting friend" offer as his last legacy for our "solemn contemplation" and "frequent review"? The 50 paragraphs of the Address are carefully structured. The primary divisions are an opening section of six paragraphs which constitutes the resignation proper, a central section of 36 paragraphs which delineates Washington's maxims and warnings, and a concluding section of eight paragraphs which measures Washington's own administration against his expressed principles and solicits pardon for any shortcomings.

The language of the opening section, with its ostentatious modesty, is now alien to us. Our self-trumpeting politicians would never dream of drawing attention, as Washington does, to his "very fallible judgment" and "incompetent abilities." For himself, Washington claims only "good intentions." Of course, maybe it's easier to appear humble when one's actions have spoken so irrefutably. The great man in the infant republic effaces himself, and deflects the credit onto his fellow citizens. "If benefits have resulted to our country from these services," Washington insists, "let it always be remembered to your praise," since "the constancy of your support was the essential prop of the efforts." The converse of Washington's humility is his gratitude. He closes the opening section with a prayer—a carefully itemized prayer—hoping that the nation will be blessed with the favor of Heaven; perpetual Union; fidelity to the Constitution; the wise Administration of government; and a completion of national Happiness that will inspire the worldwide spread of liberty.

Having given his notice, Washington declares "Here, perhaps, I ought to stop." The attention of the reader is riveted both by the style of this statement (short, punchy sentences are rare in George Washington's writing) and its implication. What could move the ever-proper George Washington to go beyond the bounds of propriety? If he "ought to stop," why doesn't he? Two things—"solicitude" and "apprehension"—urge him forward to present counsels that he regards as "all important." Interestingly, he begins this central section by declaring that the love of liberty is secure in American hearts. Unlike Tocqueville, who some decades later did worry that Americans might sacrifice their liberty, Washington's fears took a different direction. He takes liberty as a given and

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<sup>76</sup> The confederated nature of the audience prevented Washington from even enlarging upon the crucial fourth Pillar. He is forced to leave it to local leaders to conquer "local prejudices." No wonder his advice was neglected.

proceeds to show its relation to three goods that are endangered: the Union, the Constitution, and the virtuous conduct of Government.<sup>77</sup>

The Union comes first. It is “a main Pillar” of independence. As such, Washington says that our “common country . . . has a right to concentrate [our] affections. The name of AMERICAN . . . must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations.”<sup>78</sup> Washington may be retiring to Mount Vernon but he does so as an American not a Virginian.

For Washington, patriotism is a matter of “sympathy,” but not only sympathy. He supplements the cordial attachment of North and South, East and West, with what he calls “the most commanding motives,” namely those of immediate commercial interest which link us indissolubly as “*one Nation*.” This appeal to Union, compounded of both sense and sensibility, culminates in Washington’s first warning against sectionalism and the “designing men” who would capitalize on geographic differences to divide and alienate affections rather than bridge them. One wonders what Washington would make of our current partisan geography of heartland Red States and bicoastal Blue States.

Washington admits that political fraternity on the large scale that the United States is attempting is an experiment, but as such, “’Tis well worth a fair and full experiment.” We are accordingly authorized to “distrust the patriotism” of the parochial naysayers. Though Washington doesn’t coin the word “un-American,” he is very much fostering public suspicion of certain political positions—positions which because they could undermine the very “continuance of the Union” must be made disreputable. As Lincoln would later say, having learned it from Washington,

In this and like communities, public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.

In the Farewell Address, Washington is engaged in this ultimate task: shaping a fundamental and enduring public sentiment that will support—and just as importantly, restrict—the efforts of future American statesmen.

From Union it is but a short step to the Constitution, for the Constitution furthers “an intimate Union.” Washington’s main point in this section is that “true Liberty” entails duties upon citizens. He delivers a lesson in democratic theory: “The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their Constitutions of Government. But the Constitution which at any time exists, ’till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole People, is sacredly obligatory upon all.” The warning here is not only against disobedience to law (of the sort displayed during the Whiskey Rebellion which

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<sup>77</sup> Discussed respectively in paragraphs 9-15, 16-18, and 19-41 in Washington’s full Address.

<sup>78</sup> The only two words in the Address to appear in all capital letters are “UNION” and “AMERICAN.” It becomes clear why the dateline of the Farewell Address specified the location simply as “United States” rather than the usual Philadelphia or Mount Vernon.

Washington had decisively suppressed during his second term in office) but more fundamentally against faction, which Washington defines as “all combinations and Associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, controul, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the Constituted authorities.” James Madison may have argued in *Federalist 10* that the solution to the mischiefs caused by faction is to multiply the number of factions and pit them against one another, but Washington seems to have serious reservations about the wisdom of interest group politics, seeing it as an invitation to “cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men . . . to subvert the Power of the People.”

Washington repeats his emphatic warning against “the Spirit of Party” three times, first in the section on Union, again in the section on the Constitution (where he warns especially against the “spirit of innovation” with regard to constitutional principles), and then most comprehensively at the beginning of the section on good government. Washington admits that partisanship is both natural and inevitable; it is, he says, “a fire not to be quenched.” His object is “by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it.” The disgust that Americans often express at extreme partisanship and even their longing for “bipartisanship” or “post-partisanship” was encouraged by Washington. A “wise People” behaves like a shovelful of dirt or a spritz of water, tamping down the partisan flames. Of course, ideologues are endlessly inventive and have discovered that they can deploy the accusation of partisanship against their opponents as a means to further their own partisan agenda. Thus, American politics becomes a less-than-candid competition to appear above politics.

Having made explicit his theme of public opinion, Washington declares that “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports.” Calling these the “great Pillars of human happiness,” Washington makes the case for political as well as pious attention to them. Interestingly, he concludes that the way to foster religion and morality is through education. The first positive command or prescription of the Address states: “Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge.” Washington anticipates no conflict between religion, morality, and enlightenment.

The next rule of conduct is to “cherish public credit”—there follows sound advice on debt and taxation. Although “the execution of these maxims” belongs to the elected representatives, Washington points out that “it is necessary that public opinion should cooperate.” Who abandoned their fiscal responsibilities first, I don’t know, but we are so far from what Washington describes that this paragraph makes for painful reading, particularly his warning against “ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burthen which we ourselves ought to bear.”

Finally, there is a lengthy treatment of foreign policy that begins with the injunction to “observe good faith and justice towards all Nations” and includes Washington’s well-known advice to steer clear of “permanent Alliances,” or as Jefferson (more famously) phrased it, “entangling alliances.” Before we dismiss this advice as obsolete—suited to a young and vulnerable America rather than a superpower America—it should be said that

Washington was not recommending isolationism. His message was a timeless one about the conditions for national freedom of action and the danger of allowing passions, whether hostile or friendly toward other nations, to dictate policy. Domestically, we ought to cultivate bonds of affection, but internationally Washington argued it was a mistake to act on the basis of sympathy or gratitude, or to expect other nations to do so. The more sober formula Washington offers is that we act as "our interest guided by our justice shall Counsel."

Washington closes the Farewell Address by anticipating a retreat beyond even his retreat to Mount Vernon, namely his journey toward the "Mansions of rest." The line is said to have brought tears to the eyes of his readers. Four decades later, a young Abraham Lincoln delivered a remarkable speech that revisited Washington's theme of "the perpetuation of our political institutions"—arguing, just as Washington had, that perpetuation depends on a firm foundation in public sentiment, and appealing to the nation's fixed admiration of Washington as a compass point to keep us true to Washington's principles. The Lyceum Address closed with a poetic flourish by imagining a sort of second coming of Washington. Lincoln's hopes for that day of judgment can still serve as our own: "that we improved to the last; that we remained free to the last; that we revered his name to the last; that, during his long sleep, we permitted no hostile foot to pass over or desecrate his resting place; shall be that which to learn the last trump shall awaken our WASHINGTON."

## About the Cover



**Rembrandt Peale**  
*George Washington*  
c. 1858. Oil on canvas.

Rembrandt Peale (1778–1860), son of famous artist and museum owner Charles Willson Peale, was born on February 22, 1788 in Bucksville, Pennsylvania. Developing an interest in art at a young age, he completed his first painting, a self-portrait, at the age of 13.

As a young artist, Peale studied the work of contemporary painters such as Gilbert Stuart and Robert Edge Pine, as well as paintings by European artists. Because of his father's connections in the art world, Peale had the opportunity to work in most of the major cities along the eastern coast of the United States, including Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Baltimore, Washington, and Charleston.

In 1795, when Peale was 17 years old, his father arranged for him to paint a portrait of President George Washington, then in the final years of his second term as president. Washington, known for his aversion to sitting for portraits, agreed to sit for three sessions of three hours each at Peale's father's museum in Philadelphia. Nervous about painting the president by himself, Peale talked his father into sketching a portrait of Washington at the same time. At the second session, he was even joined by his uncle and two of his brothers, causing Gilbert Stuart to joke with Martha Washington in the next room that "the general's in a perilous situation . . . there are five painters at him, and you who know how much he has suffered when only attended by one, can judge of the horrors of his situation."<sup>79</sup> Although this 1795 portrait was the only one that he painted from a posing Washington, Peale drew from the original painting for years to come, producing roughly 80 portraits of Washington during the course of his career.

While in London from 1802–03, Peale studied at the Royal Academy and with the American expatriate painter Benjamin West. For much of 1808–10 he lived in France, painting portraits for his father's collection, and from 1828–30 he lived in Italy, copying

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<sup>79</sup> Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 746.

master paintings for collectors in the United States. As a result of his time in Europe, Peale began to incorporate elements of French neoclassicism into his work, which can be seen in some of his later portraits of Washington. (See, for example, Peale's *Patriae Pater*, painted in 1824, that shows Washington as the "Father of Our Country," surrounded by a painted stone window decorated with oak leaves—a symbol of virtue and endurance—and a faux engraving of the Roman god Jupiter.<sup>80</sup>)

Other famous paintings by Peale include his portraits of Thomas Jefferson (1800, 1805) and John C. Calhoun (1834), as well as his paintings *The Roman Daughter* (1811) and *Washington Before Yorktown* (1823).<sup>81</sup>

This portrait of George Washington was completed in the late 1850s, when Peale was nearly 80 years old. In full form, it shows Washington framed by a painted stone oval (or "porthole," as it came to be called) in the style of the European *trompe-l'oeil*, an art technique in which the painter depicts part of the painting as three-dimensional. The framing, like that in *Patriae Pater*, is intended to invoke a feeling of antiquity. It also serves to separate viewers from the portrait's subject: Washington, long having passed into "everlasting remembrance" (as Thomas Jefferson put it), remains firmly behind the frame, looking into the beyond. It is Washington—the man, the idea, the general, and the father of our nation—remembered.

What do each of these elements contribute to the overall impression: the framing, the pose, the light, the color, the dress, the profile, the gaze, the brow, the nose, the chin, and the expression? How well does this portrait capture the man you think you know and have read about in this book?

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<sup>80</sup> View this painting at [www.senate.gov/artandhistory/art/common/image/Painting\\_31\\_00001.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/art/common/image/Painting_31_00001.htm).

<sup>81</sup> View these paintings at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas\\_Jefferson\\_by\\_Rembrandt\\_Peale,\\_1800.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Jefferson_by_Rembrandt_Peale,_1800.jpg), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Reproduction-of-the-1805-Rembrandt-Peale-painting-of-Thomas-Jefferson-New-York-Historical-Society\\_1.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Reproduction-of-the-1805-Rembrandt-Peale-painting-of-Thomas-Jefferson-New-York-Historical-Society_1.jpg), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:John\\_C.\\_Calhoun.jpeg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:John_C._Calhoun.jpeg), <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=19323>, and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Washington\\_Before\\_Yorktown\\_Rembrandt\\_Peale\\_1823.jpeg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Washington_Before_Yorktown_Rembrandt_Peale_1823.jpeg), respectively.

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