AMERICA'S FOUNDERS

GEORGE WASHINGTON

"The Man of the Age"

JOHN P. KAMINSKI

THIRD EDITION

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Center for the Study of the American Constitution

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Center for the Study of the American Constitution
University of Wisconsin–Madison
432 East Campus Mall
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csac.history.wisc.edu

THIRD EDITION

The subtitle of this chapbook, "The Man of the Age"
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Philadelphia, December 21, 1799, in Harold C. Syrett, ed.,
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1961–1987), XXIV, 112.

Cover image: *George Washington* (porthole type),
Rembrandt Peale, c. 1853, oil on canvas,
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution;
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The America's Founders series is dedicated to the several hundred Mentor Teachers who are the heart and soul of the Center for Civic Education's program "We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution."

This chapbook is dedicated to

Tim Moore
Heritage Christian High School
West Allis, Wisconsin
(Since 2011 Tim Moore has been Deputy Director of Outreach Programs at the Center for the Study of the American Constitution)

and

Beth Ratway
Social Studies Consultant
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

PREFACE

The gestation period for this first in a series of chapbooks on America's Founders has been exactly half a century. I read my first book on the Founding generation while in fourth grade at Frederick Funston Elementary School in Chicago in 1954. From that time I was fascinated by the grand events of that generation as well as the innumerable individual dramas that played out in the Revolutionary theater. It was that deep interest in the Revolutionary Era that convinced me to attend graduate school at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and become a student of Merrill Jensen, a great historian of the American Revolution.

For the last fifty years I have been editing *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights*—for ten years as associate editor under Professor Jensen and then, since his death in January 1980, as director of the project. During these many years, I have immersed myself in the correspondence and political writings of the most important generation in American history. Half of my daily life I live in the twenty-first century, but the other half is spent back in the eighteenth.

For the last twenty years I have devoted much of my spare time to a new study. As a longtime historical documentary editor, I understood the treasures in American history that were waiting to be discovered in the thousands of documentary volumes published over the last two centuries. Especially important to me were the modern editions of so many of America's Founders sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Yale University Professor Edmund S. Morgan once wrote that the publication of these documentary editions was the single most important contribution to historical scholarship in the twentieth century.

Agreeing whole-heartedly with Professor Morgan, I determined to mine the precious ore that was awaiting discovery; to dig up the nuggets from these many volumes that capture the character, mannerisms, physical description, and daily routine of America's Founders. Hundreds of volumes

have been examined on a page-by-page basis. Tentatively I called my project "The Founders on the Founders." It is, however, much broader than the title suggests. In the 10,000-page database, patriots, loyalists, and foreigners describe over 450 individuals. Women as well as men are described, and women provide some of the best descriptions of their contemporaries. Some people have but one or two descriptions, while George Washington and John Adams each have over 400 entries. When an individual has at least fifty entries, a mosaic develops in which friends, enemies, family, acquaintances, and sometimes even the individuals themselves reveal the complexities and subtleties that are usually obscured by the fog of time and veneration.

Knowing about my database, Ken Frazier, director of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries asked if I would write a series of chapbook biographies on some of America's Founders. These chapbooks are modeled on a series of poetry chapbooks published over the last decade by Parallel Press, an imprint of the UW–Madison Libraries. But these biographies contain far more intimate descriptions of the subjects than traditional biographies because I could draw on my rich database of contemporaneous word portraits. That is how this series, America's Founders, got started.

In some ways, I feel very much like David Humphreys, former aide-de-camp to George Washington and the General's longtime friend, who, after Washington's death, wrote an amazing condolence letter to Martha Washington. Humphreys, who had once resided with the Washingtons at Mount Vernon for over a year and a half, told the grieving widow that when his

> own grief shall become a little moderated, I propose to indulge my melancholy meditations in endeavouring to delineate such features of the deceased father of his country, and such events of his interesting life, as have left the most indelible impressions on my mind. I shall thus procure the double advantage, first for myself, of holding a kind of spiritual intercourse with him; and, next, of exhibiting for others an admirable model for imitation. Could I flatter myself with the expectation of being able to express (in any adequate proportion) what I know and what

> I feel on a subject which will employ the pens of innumerable writers, I might then hope to do not less justice to his public and private virtues than others. For, conscious I am that few have had opportunities of knowing him better and that none could appreciate more justly his morals and his merits.*

This chapbook is dedicated to Tim Moore** of Heritage Christian High School in West Allis and Beth Ratway, formerly of Wauwatosa East High School, but now the social studies consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Both schools are located in southeastern Wisconsin. Tim and Beth attended the first "We the People" summer institute held at Indiana University in 1995, which had a profound impact on their teaching. The content, curriculum, and competitive components of the "We the People" program changed them from being very good teachers to being excellent teachers and made their classrooms exciting arenas for the exploration of the history of our country. Their classes made numerous trips to the national finals of the Center for Civic Education's "We the People" contest. Not only do they share their knowledge and enthusiasm with their students, but they regularly serve as mentor teachers who train and inspire hundreds of other teachers. They are an inspiration to me.

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* David Humphreys to Martha Washington, Madrid, Spain, February 22, 1800, Joseph E. Fields, comp., *"Worthy Partner": The Papers of Martha Washington* (Westport, Conn., 1994), 354–56.

** In 2011 we hired Tim Moore as deputy director of outreach programs at the Center for the Study of the American Constitution at the University of Wisconson–Madison.

EARLY LIFE

George Washington was born into a middle gentry family in tidewater Virginia in 1732. His father died when George was only eleven years old. George looked up to his half-brother Lawrence, fourteen years his senior, as a father figure, and as an adolescent George lived with Lawrence at the family estate recently renamed Mount Vernon. The marriage of Lawrence into the wealthy Fairfax family opened opportunities for young George Washington. He regularly visited neighboring Belvoir, the handsome brick Potomac mansion occupied by William Fairfax, Lawrence's father-in-law. It was at Mount Vernon and Belvoir that Washington learned how to carry himself—how to walk, how to eat, how to converse, how to dance. In essence, it was during these formative years that Washington learned to become a Virginia gentleman.

Sometime before he turned sixteen, Washington decided to strive for greatness. His ambition was to become a wealthy tidewater planter with all the accoutrements, power, and privileges of elite Virginia society. Deprived of the "gentleman's education" that his two half-brothers received in England, Washington made the most of his limited education, first supplied by his father and then by hired tutors. Reading, writing, and basic mathematics came first and were then applied in learning the skill of surveying land. He became obsessed with self-improvement: he copied, learned, and practiced a "110 Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation" taken from an English translation of the maxims of a fifteenth-century French Jesuit.[1]

1. See Richard Brookhiser, ed., *Rules of Civility: The 110 Precepts that Guided Our First President in War and Peace* (New York, 1997). The first six rules were: (1) Every action done in company ought to be done 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 or drum with your

Fifty years later, at the age of sixty-four, Washington advised his step grandson, perhaps in a way reminiscent of his own father's advice. "You are now extending into that age of life when good or bad habits are formed. When the mind will be turned to things useful and praiseworthy, or to dissipation and vice. Fix on whichever it may, it will stick by you; for you know it has been said, and truly, 'that as the twig is bent, so it will grow.' "[2] Washington grew into an impressive young man. While other Virginia boys stopped growing at about five foot six inches, Washington towered over them at six foot three. He had strong shoulders, powerful arms, a slender waist, and an easy grace. Others readily perceived in him an extraordinary sense of self-assuredness.

Washington's character and bearing impressed Lord Fairfax, who used his influence to have the seventeen-year-old appointed surveyor of Culpeper County on the Virginia frontier. Although, at first glance, this appointment might not seem too important, it proved fortuitous, because in colonial Virginia surveyors were recognized as gentlemen and "were numbered among the colony's practical-minded elite."[3] With wealth measured by the acres of good land owned, surveyors were uniquely positioned to assist the wealthy in locating and purchasing choice lands. Surveyors also assisted the many settlers laying claim to more modest tracts of land. An ambitious, hard-working surveyor became locally prominent, made important connections with wealthy investors, and earned sizeable fees. Surveyors often acquired large land holdings themselves and in partnership with oth-

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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.

2. GW to George Washington Parke Custis, Philadelphia, November 28, 1796, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799* (39 vols., Washington, D.C., 1931–1944), XXXV, 295.

3. Sarah S. Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* (Richmond, 1979), 156.

ers. Within a year, Washington saved enough money to purchase 1,500 acres on Bullskin Creek in the Shenandoah Valley—the beginning of his vast property holdings.

At the age of nineteen, Washington took his only trip outside of what would become the United States. He accompanied his older brother Lawrence on a voyage to Barbados, where it was hoped that the climate would help Lawrence recover from tuberculosis. Lawrence did not recover and George was stricken with a mild case of small pox. Although marked by a few pox for the rest of his life, the natural contraction of the disease made him immune to the deadly small pox during the Revolutionary War. Perhaps, also the disease might have caused Washington to become sterile.

THE FIRST WAR

In 1753, as tension with the French became critical, Virginia Deputy Governor Robert Dinwiddie appointed Washington as an emissary to warn the encroaching French to leave Virginia territory and return to Canada. Washington, who the year before had been commissioned a major in the militia by Dinwiddie, was well qualified for the dangerous assignment. His experience as a surveyor fashioned Washington into a skilled frontiersman with an intimate knowledge of Indians. Traveling for a month during November and December in Indian territory until he reached the French Fort Le Beouf, not far from Lake Erie, Washington delivered his governor's ultimatum. The French responded defiantly. After surviving an Indian ambush and nearly drowning in the icy waters of the Allegheny River, Washington returned to Virginia and became a hero after the publication of his journal. Promoting him to lieutenant colonel and second in command of the Virginia militia, Dinwiddie ordered Washington to build a fort at the Forks of the Ohio River (Pittsburgh). As Washington marched through the frontier, he learned that the French had already constructed Fort Duquesne at the Forks and that a small French force was marching southward. Washington ambushed the French troops, killed ten men, including the commander, and took

twenty-two prisoners. The French denounced the attack on what they called a peaceful diplomatic mission. Soon the conflict escalated into a world war—the fourth colonial war of the eighteenth century between Britain and its colonies on one side and France and Spain and their colonies on the other. Washington stayed on the frontier, and although forced to surrender in July 1754 to a superior force at the ill-designed Fort Necessity, Washington returned to Virginia a hero and retired from active military duty.

In 1755 Washington joined British General Edward Braddock's army as an unpaid volunteer. Washington hoped that his services might be rewarded with a commission in the British army. He learned a great deal from Braddock about how to command an army, but unfortunately Braddock did not heed Washington's advice on wilderness warfare. Shortly after Braddock's army crossed the Monongahela River, the French and Indians ambushed them, and, in a battle lasting almost five hours, wounded more than 400 redcoats and killed another 500 (including Braddock). Washington was one of only a handful of officers who escaped unscathed. Two of his horses were killed beneath him, and bullets pierced his coat four times and shot off his hat. He rallied the survivors and led them on a forced retreat. Washington again returned to Virginia a hero. He wrote his younger brother about his combat experience saying that he heard the bullets whistle and found "something charming in the sound."[4]

Named commander-in-chief of the Virginia militia, Washington served another three years until the British regular army relieved the militia on the frontier. Although saddened by the death he saw in war, Washington felt that when the cause is just, "who is there that does not rather Envy, than regret a Death that gives birth to Honour & Glorious memory."[5] Washington retired from active duty, and although recognized throughout the colonies as a hero,

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4. GW to John Augustine Washington, May 31, 1754, Donald Jackson et al., eds, *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* (10 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1976–1995), I, 118–19.

5. GW to Sarah Cary Fairfax, Camp at Rays Town, September 25, 1758, ibid., VI, 42.

he was disappointed when the British denied him a commission in the regular army. Upon his resignation, his fellow militia officers bid farewell to their twenty-six-year-old former commander.

> In our earliest infancy, you took us under your tuition, trained us in the practice of that discipline which alone can constitute good troops. . . . Your steady adherence to impartial justice, your quick discernment and invariable regard to merit—wisely intended to inculcate those genuine sentiments of true honor and passion for glory, from which the greatest military achievements have been derived—first heightened our natural emulation, and our desire to excel.

The officers continued to lament for their country (i.e., colony) because of the loss of Washington. No one else could provide "the military character of Virginia."[6]

When he retired from the militia, Washington was described by George Mercer, a fellow officer.

> Straight as an Indian, measuring 6 feet 2 inches in his stockings and weighing 175 pounds. . . . His frame is padded with well-developed muscles, indicating great strength. His bones and joints are large, as are his hands and feet. He is wide shouldered but has not a deep or round chest; is neat waisted, but is broad across the hips and has rather long legs and arms. His head is wellshaped, though not large, but is gracefully poised on a superb neck. A large and straight rather than a prominent nose; blue grey penetrating eyes which are widely separated and overhung by a heavy brow. His face is long rather than broad, with high round cheek bones, and terminates in a good firm chin. He has a clear though rather colorless pale skin which burns with the sun. A pleasing and benevolent though a commanding countenance, dark brown hair [actually it was more reddish] which he wears in a cue. His mouth is large and generally firmly closed, but which from time to time discloses some defective teeth. His features

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6. Quoted in James Thomas Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensable Man* (New York, 1969), 17.

> are regular and placid with all the muscles of his face under perfect control, though flexible and expressive of deep feeling when moved by emotions. In conversation, he looks you full in the face, is deliberate, deferential, and engaging. His demeanor at all times composed and dignified. His movements and gestures are graceful, his walk majestic, and he is a splendid horseman.[7]

THE FIRST RETIREMENT

Washington's exploits in the French and Indian War won him fame throughout the colonies. Other than Benjamin Franklin, Washington was the most well-known American. Mount Vernon had started to attract many visitors. Charles Willson Peale, already a well-respected artist, traveled to Virginia to paint Colonel Washington's portrait. Peale described the leisure activities of some of the young visitors to Mount Vernon as they pitched the bar to see who was the strongest among them. Suddenly the colonel appeared and asked to be shown the pegs that marked the farthest throws. "Smiling, and without putting off his coat," Washington held out his hand. As soon as the heavy lead weight felt the grasp of his hand, according to Peale, "it lost the power of gravitation, and whizzed through the air, striking the ground far, very far, beyond our utmost limits." The young men stood astonished as Washington walked away, saying "When you beat my pitch, young gentlemen, I'll try again."[8]

In 1770 when Washington toured his lands in the Ohio Country, a party of Indians led by an old chief rode to see him. An interpreter told Washington that the chief had been at Braddock's defeat in 1755. He and other Indians had repeatedly fired at Washington unsuccessfully. After two hours the Indians sensed that the Great Spirit would not allow the young officer to be killed in battle so they fired elsewhere.

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7. W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* (10 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1983–1995), VI, 192–93.

8. Charles Willson Peale: Recollection of December 28, 1773, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington, By His Adopted Son, George Washington Parke Custis* (New York, 1860), 519.

When the chief heard that Washington was nearby, he wanted to pay homage to "the Great Knife," the name Indians had given Washington,[9] the brave warrior who had been so divinely protected.[10]

In January 1759 Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis, the widow of Daniel Parke Custis, a wealthy planter. It was a pivotal event in Washington's life. Although born into a similar social class as Washington, Martha Dandridge had married into wealth and high society. She brought to Washington thousands of acres of land, a couple hundred slaves, and access to elite Virginia society. She also brought two small children—John Parke Custis (Jackie) and Martha Parke Custis (Patsy). The Washingtons never had children themselves, but their forty-one-year marriage seems to have been happy. After twenty-five years of marriage, Washington wrote that he "always considered Marriage as the most interesting event of one's life. The foundation of happiness or misery."[11] He felt that "more permanent and genuine happiness is to be found in the sequestered walks of connubial life than in the giddy rounds of promiscuous pleasure."[12] Washington described Martha as "A quiet wife, a quiet soul." Martha, who regularly was plagued with nagging illnesses (called the "billious cholick" by Washington), said that she enjoyed "the pleasant duties of an old fashioned Virginia house-keeper, steady as a clock, busy as a bee, and as cheerful as a cricket."[13] Throughout their lives together,

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9. Robert Stewart to GW, Camp Pittsburgh, September 28, 1759, *GW Papers, Colonial Series,* VI, 361.

10. For the Indian prophecy, see Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., *George Washington: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara, Calif., 2002), 157–58.

11. GW to Burwell Bassett, Mount Vernon, May 23, 1785, W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series* (6 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1992–1997), III, 10.

12. GW to Charles Armand-Tuffin, Mount Vernon, August 10, 1786, ibid., IV, 203.

13. GW to William Gordon, Mount Vernon, April 10, 1787, ibid., V, 136; Martha Washington to Fanny Bassett Washington, Mount Vernon, February 25, 1788, and to Lucy Knox, post May 1797, Joseph E. Fields, comp., "*Worthy Partner": The Papers of Martha Washington* (Westport, Conn., 1994), 206, 304.

Martha served as the perfect hostess to the innumerable guests that visited Mount Vernon. In all the accounts of these visits, no person ever spoke ill of her and everyone commented on her graciousness. A young Polish nobleman visiting described Mrs. Washington as "one of the most estimable persons that one could know, good, sweet, and extremely polite. She loves to talk and talks very well about times past. . . . I was not as a stranger but a member of the family in this estimable house. They took care of me, of my linen, of my clothes, etc."[14]

After retiring from the militia, Washington threw himself into the role of a Virginia planter. He inherited Mount Vernon when his brother's widow died and added to the estate when he married Martha. Repeated purchases of land increased Washington's holdings and he twice enlarged the mansion house. Of his 8,000 acres, less than half was under cultivation. Washington by 1765 had abandoned the cultivation of tobacco when it became obvious that it was not only extremely labor intensive and hard on the land, but that it placed planters at the economic mercy of the Scottish factors who dominated the British tobacco trade. He would only raise enough tobacco for local consumption. Instead, Washington concentrated on grains and vegetables that were consumable at home and marketable regionally as well as in the Caribbean. Indian corn, wheat, and peas were the primary crops. For the rest of his life, Washington was an experimental farmer, always searching for a better crop or a more productive method of farming. Over the years, he planted sixty different crops. He was happiest farming. After the Revolution, he wrote that "Agriculture has ever been amongst the most favorite amusements of my life."[15] "The

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14. For Julian Ursyn Niemcewisz's account of his visit to Mount Vernon, see *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels Through America in 1797–1799, 1805, with Some Further Account of Life in New Jersey*, translated and edited by Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, N.J., 1965), excerpted in Jean Lee's *Experiencing Mount Vernon: Eyewitness Accounts, 1784–1865* (Charlottesville, 2006), 69–88.

15. GW to Arthur Young, Mount Vernon, August 6, 1786, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, IV, 196.

life of a Husbandman of all others," he wrote, "is the most delectable. It is honorable—It is amusing—and, with Judicious management, it is profitable. To see plants rise from the earth and flourish by the superior skill, and bounty of the labourer fills a contemplative mind with ideas which are more easy to be conceived than expressed."[16] Even more than that, farming was also patriotic. "I know of no pursuit in which more zeal and important service can be rendered to any country than by improving its agriculture."[17] After several days' conversing with Washington, Robert Hunter, a young London merchant, wrote in 1785 that "his greatest pride now is to be thought the first farmer in America. He is quite a Cincinnatus, and often works with his men himself: strips off his coat and labors like a common man."[18]

In addition to cultivating the land, Mount Vernon sustained an enormous fishery along the shore of the estate's entire length of the Potomac River. A wide variety of fish (shad, herring, bass, carp, perch, sturgeon, crawfish, and catfish) and river turtles provided an important supplemental cash crop, a valuable source of protein for Washington's slaves, and diversity to the table for family and visitors, while the fish heads and entrails provided a cheap, effective fertilizer for the fields. While attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in August 1787, Washington explored the market potential for barrels of herring.[19] Mount Vernon also had a thriving whiskey distillery that produced at least fifty gallons daily. The mash was used to feed the hogs and cider was distilled in large quantities. Under Mar-

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16. GW to Alexander Spotswood, Mount Vernon, February 13, 1788, ibid., VI, 111.

17. GW to John Sinclair, Philadelphia, July 20, 1794, W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series* (Charlottesville, Va., 1987–), XVI, 394.

18. *Quebec to Carolina in 1785–1786: Being the Travel Diary and Observations of Robert Hunter, Jr., a Young Merchant of London*, edited by Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling (San Marino, Calif., 1943), 191–98, excerpted in Lee, 31.

19. GW to Clement Biddle, Philadelphia, August 22, 1787, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, V, 300–301.

tha Washington's direction, large quantities of mint and rose water were produced and manufactured into soap. A water mill refined the wheat into flour. Washington also bred livestock—horses, mules, cattle, sheep, hogs, and chickens. The manure from these animals replenished the soil.

Washington strove to make Mount Vernon self-sufficient. The estate was divided into five farms, each with its own overseer (often a slave himself), who managed the plantation's 300 slaves, indentured servants, and hired laborers. In addition to working in the fields and digging irrigation ditches, slaves practiced a variety of trades—blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, shoemakers, brewers, brick makers, masons, weavers, bakers, dairymen, seamstresses, cooks, and gardeners, in addition to farmhands and house servants. When not busy with plantation work, Washington's slaves did work for neighbors both on and off the estate. The carpenters, for example, framed buildings in Alexandria and in the new federal capital that was being built during the last ten years of Washington's life. When Washington attended the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, he first saw Venetian blinds. He obtained the dimensions of one of the windows in the mansion house and purchased one pair of custom-made blinds. The estate's carpenters then used that set of blinds as the prototype for the others that they made.[20] In the management of the estate, Washington kept elaborate books that his secretary told a friend "were as regular as any merchant whatever."[21]

Washington regularly contributed to charitable causes. His ledgers are filled with specific, one-time donations as well as annual donations made to specific organizations, such as the Alexandria Academy that received $100. When he left to command the army in 1775, he left word with his cousin left in charge of Mount Vernon that "the Hospitality of the House, with respect to the Poor, be kept up. Let no

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20. GW to George Augustine Washington, Philadelphia, July 15, 1787, ibid., 260.

21. Paul Leicester Ford, *The True George Washington* (Philadelphia, 1896), 127.

one go hungry away. If any of this kind of people should be in want of corn, supply their necessities, provided it does not encourage them in Idleness; and I have no objection to your giving my money in charity, to the amount of forty or fifty pounds a year, when you think it well bestowed. What I mean by having no objection is, that it is my desire that it should be done."[22] He advised his nephew to "Let your heart feel for the afflictions and distresses of everyone, and let your hand give in proportion to your purse, remembering . . . that it is not everyone who asketh that deserveth charity." He admonished his grandson to "Never let an indigent person ask, without receiving something, if you have the means."[23] When Washington returned to Philadelphia after the terrible yellow fever epidemic of 1793 had subsided, he wrote to a city clergyman asking where charitable relief was most needed. "To obtain information, and to render the little I can afford, without ostentation or mention of my name, are the sole objects of these inqueries."[24]

With full days either on the plantation or in the army, Washington had little time for amusements. Early in life he became an expert horseman and horseback riding was always both pleasurable and a necessary part of life for him. Washington greatly enjoyed fox hunting, either by himself when a fox would appear while he was making the everyday rounds of the property or on planned occasions when a large group would ride to the hounds. Washington also enjoyed horse racing—as a spectator placing bets and as a breeder who raised race horses. Outdoors Washington also enjoyed fishing and duck hunting and he actively bred dogs to be skilled in fox and duck hunting.

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22. GW to Lund Washington, November 26, 1775, W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series* (26 vols. to date, Charlottesville, Va., 1985–), II, 431–33.

23. GW to Bushrod Washington, Newburgh, N.Y., January 15, 1783, quoted in Stephen E. Lucas, ed., *The Quotable George Washington: The Wisdom of an American Patriot* (Madison, Wis., 1999), 14; and GW to George Washington Parke Custis, Philadelphia, November 15, 1796, Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXXV, 283.

24. Ford, 161–62.

Indoors Washington enjoyed playing cards and billiards. He acquired a substantial library and read extensively in agriculture, English history, and military matters. Often he received complimentary books and pamphlets from authors on a host of subjects—particularly on politics and economics—that he read with interest. He subscribed to almost a dozen newspapers and several magazines, including the monthly Philadelphia *American Museum*, founded in January 1787. Washington enjoyed dancing which helped to alleviate the monotony of winter encampments and provided a social gathering where townsmen and women could meet him. When in large towns, he frequently attended plays, concerts, and museums. He was fascinated by natural wonders and visited factories, waterworks, and internal improvements.

After the Revolution, Washington ardently supported the development of canals as a means to tie the new western settlements with the East both economically and politically. With Washington's prestige and James Madison's legislative skill, they obtained state charters for the Potomac River Company and the James River Company. Both companies sought to extend the western and northern navigation of their rivers by building canals around non-navigable falls. Only about twenty miles of highways would connect each river with tributaries flowing westward to the Ohio River. The 700-mile distance between Detroit and Alexandria was considerably shorter than the distance between the West and New Orleans, New York, Quebec, or Montreal. With the Spanish in control of New Orleans and both banks of the southernmost 150 miles of the Mississippi River and with the British in control of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River, Washington's canal system was the safest way to transport goods and the best way to keep western settlers in the American Union. "The Western settlers," Washington feared, "stand as it were upon a pivot—the touch of a feather, would turn them any way." "The consequences to the Union [of opening Virginia's rivers] . . . are immense—& more so in a political, than a Commercial point. . . . For unless we can connect the New [western] States, which are rising to our view . . . with those on the

Atlantic by interest . . . they will be quite a distinct People; and ultimately may be very troublesome neighbours to us."[25] Washington became the president of the Potomac River Company, and both companies worked hard to accomplish his dream. Much to his dismay, Washington was given stock in the company. Not wanting to offend the company or to appear mercenary, Washington donated the stock to a school. After almost forty years, however, both companies lost their charters to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, which abandoned river improvements in favor of one still-water canal paralleling the Potomac River. This effort also failed as railroads became the prime carrier of goods east and west.[26]

THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

When the imperial crisis first developed between Britain and its American colonies, Washington could best be described as a reluctant rebel. For most of his life Washington aspired to become a country gentleman. Now with that goal realized, Parliament's policies and the violent American reaction placed him in an awkward position. Despite his reluctance to oppose British law, Washington never hesitated to support the constitutional rights of his country. In 1769 he condemned the policies of "our lordly Masters in Great Britain," who would "be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom." He knew that something had to be done to protect that freedom and "maintain the liberty which we have derived from our Ancestors; but the manner of doing it to answer the purpose effectually is the point in question." However reluctant he was to use violence, Washington believed "That no man shou'd scruple, or hesitate a moment to use arms in defence of so valuable a

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25. GW to Benjamin Harrison, Mount Vernon, October 10, 1784 and GW to James Warren, Mount Vernon, October 7, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series,* II, 89–90, III, 300.

26. See Stuart Leiberger, *Founding Friendship: George Washington, James Madison, and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville, Va., 1999), 35–48 for the cooperation between Washington and Madison in establishing a system of canals.

blessing, on which all the good and evil of life depends." But arms, he felt, "should be the last resource." Petitioning the king and Parliament had already failed. Economic boycotts should be the next tactic.[27] When in 1774 the British overreacted to the dumping of privately owned tea into Boston harbor, Washington vowed in the House of Burgesses to raise and lead 1,000 men at his own expense to relieve Massachusetts from the oppression of British power. He saw "as clear as the sun in its meridian brightness," that Parliament was attempting to enslave Americans by wresting the taxing power from colonial assemblies.[28] The ministry was "pursuing a regular Plan at the expence of Law & justice, to overthrow our Constitutional Rights & liberties . . . as Englishmen, we could not be deprived of this essential, & valuable part of our Constitution." By opposing British policy, Americans were merely "claiming a Right which by the Law of Nature & our Constitution we are . . . indubitably entitled to."[29] For his part, Washington did "not undertake to say where the Line between Great Britain and the Colonies should be drawn, but I am clearly of opinion that one ought to be drawn; & our Rights clearly ascertained." He wished "that the dispute had been left to Posterity to determine, but the Crisis is arrived when we must assert our Rights, or Submit to every Imposition that can be heap'd upon us; till custom and use, will make us as tame, & abject Slaves, as the Blacks we Rule over with such arbitrary Sway."[30] According to Washington, it was not the wish of Americans to become independent of Great Britain, but he was sure "that none of them will ever submit to the loss of those valuable rights & priviledges which are essential to the happiness of every free State, and without which, Life, Liberty & property are rendered totally insecure." It was "the

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27. GW to George Mason, Mount Vernon, April 5, 1769, *GW Papers, Colonial Series*, VIII, 178.

28. GW to Bryan Fairfax, Mount Vernon, July 4, 1774, ibid., X, 109.

29. GW to Bryan Fairfax, Mount Vernon, July 20, 1774, ibid., 129–30.

30. GW to Bryan Fairfax, Mount Vernon, August 24, 1774, ibid., 155.

ardent wish of the warmest advocates for liberty, that peace & tranquility, upon Constitutional grounds, may be restored, & the horrors of civil discord prevented." But if the British failed to alter their policies, "more blood will be spilt on this occasion . . . than history has ever yet furnished instances of in the annals of North America."[31]

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

In 1774 Washington served in the First Continental Congress and supported the Continental Association that provided for an economic boycott of Britain in the hopes of getting British merchants and manufacturers to exert pressure on Parliament to change its policies. Elected to the Second Continental Congress, he arrived in Philadelphia in May 1775 wearing the uniform of a Virginia militia colonel—the only delegate attired in a military uniform. He impressed the delegates with his modesty and with his manner of speaking in a "cool but determined Style & Accent."[32] Washington seemed to be the natural choice to command a Continental military force. He had but one challenger—President of Congress John Hancock of Massachusetts. To assure his own selection, Hancock arranged for fellow Massachusetts delegates John and Samuel Adams to nominate the commander. In his nominating speech John Adams called for a man of independent wealth, who could not be bribed by the British and who would willingly go home after the hostilities ended rather than usurp power as was done by Oliver Cromwell after the English Civil War in the 1640s. Hancock, the heir of a huge estate, was one of the wealthiest men in the colonies. Adams suggested that the commander-in-chief should be a man of excellent accomplishments. Hancock felt that his position as president of Congress proved his worth. And finally, Adams called for

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31. GW to Robert McKenzie, Philadelphia, October 9, 1774, ibid., 172.

32. Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, Philadelphia, September 10, 1774, Paul H. Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789* (26 vols., Washington, D.C., 1986–2000), I, 61–62.

the commander-in-chief to be a man of impeccable character. Fixing his eyes upon Washington, Adams then said, we need a man from Virginia. We need George Washington. Stunned, Hancock nearly fell off his chair. Samuel Adams took the floor and seconded Washington's nomination. Washington immediately left the hall, and the delegates unanimously elected him commander-in-chief. Knowing the difficulties ahead, Washington accepted the appointment with humility and refused to accept a salary. He would only accept payment for his expenses. Shortly after his appointment, Washington met with Virginia Congressman Patrick Henry, and with tears in his eyes told him that "From the day I enter upon the command of the American armies, I date my fall, and the ruin of my reputation.[33] To his brother Jack, Washington wrote,

> I am Imbarked on a wide Ocean, boundless in its prospect & from whence, perhaps, no safe harbour 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 honour I neither sought after, nor desired, as I am thoroughly convinced; that it requires greater Abilities, and much more experience, than I am Master of, to conduct a business so extensive in its nature, and arduous in the execution, but the partiallity of the Congress, joined to a political motive, really left me without a Choice. . . . That I may discharge the Trust to the Satisfaction of my Imployers, is my first wish—that I shall aim to do it, there remains as little doubt of—how far I may succeed is another point.[34]

Washington wrote to his wife telling her of his appointment which "destiny . . . has thrown upon me." He explained that "it was utterly out of my power to refuse this appointment without exposing my Character to such censures as would have reflected dishonour upon myself, and given pain to my

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33. George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, N.J., 1948), 113.

34. GW to John Augustine Washington, Philadelphia, June 20, 1775, *GW Papers, Revolutionary War Series*, I, 19.

friends." Surely, he wrote, she would not have wanted him to decline the appointment and if he had, it would "have lessen'd me considerably in my own esteem." Uncertain of the future, "common prudence" dictated that he have his will drafted and he sent it to her.[35]

Wherever Washington went he inspired confidence. John Adams wrote his wife Abigail that "Congress have made Choice of the modest and virtuous, the amiable, generous and brave George Washington Esqr. to be the General of the American Army. . . . This Appointment will have a great Effect, in cementing and securing the Union of these Colonies. . . . The Liberties of America depend upon him, in a great Degree."[36] Connecticut delegate Eliphalet Dyer saw that Washington's appointment put Southern delegates to Congress at ease by removing their fear that a successful "Enterprising eastern New England General . . . might with his Victorious Army give law to the Southern & Western Gentry. . . . He is Clever, & if anything too modest. He seems discrete & Virtuous, no harum Starum ranting Swearing fellow, but Sober, steady, & Calm."[37] Even John Hancock had to admit that Washington "is a fine man."[38] A young officer delivered a letter to Washington "and was deeply impressed with an awe I cannot describe in contemplating that great man, his august person, his majestic mien, his dignified and commanding deportment."[39] Abigail Adams wrote her husband about her impressions of the General. "You had prepared me to entertain a favorable opinion of him, but I thought the one half was not told me. Dignity

35. GW to Martha Washington, Philadelphia, June 18, 1775, ibid., 3–4.

36. John Adams to Abigail Adams, Philadelphia, June 17, 1775, Smith, *Letters*, I, 497.

37. Eliphalet Dyer to Joseph Trumbull, Philadelphia, June 17, 1775, ibid., 499–500.

38. John Hancock to Elbridge Gerry, Philadelphia, June 18, 1775, ibid., 507.

39. Elkanah Watson, Memoirs 1775, Winslow C. Watson, ed., *Men and Times of The Revolution; or Memoirs of Elkanah Watson* (New York, 1856), 243–44.

with ease, and complacency, the Gentleman and Soldier look agreeably blended in him. Modesty marks every line and feature of his face."[40] Philadelphian Benjamin Rush suggested that Washington "seems to be one of those illustrious heroes whom providence raises up once in three or four hundred years to save a nation from ruin. . . . he has so much martial dignity in his deportment that you would distinguish him to be a general and a soldier from among ten thousand people. There is not a king in Europe that would not look like a valet de chambre by his side."[41]

On his way to take command of the New England army then laying siege to the British army in Boston, Washington stopped in New York City where he was feted at a dinner by the provincial congress. The New Yorkers asked Washington if he and his fellow officers would promise to surrender their commissions at the end of the hostilities. Somewhat taken aback, Washington thoughtfully responded that when he and his fellow officers put on their uniforms, they never ceased to be citizens. They were citizens first and soldiers second. They would assuredly surrender their commissions at the end of the hostilities and "sincerely rejoice with you in that happy hour when the establishment of American Liberty, upon the most firm and solid foundations, shall enable us to return to our Private Stations in the bosom of a free, peaceful and happy Country."[42]

Washington's initial actions as commander-in-chief were quite successful. He appeared outside of Boston and looked every part the general. Virginia Congressman Richard Henry Lee praised Washington for "the discipline you have introduced into the Camp, while John Hancock told the general "that under your Directions, an undisciplined Band of Hus-

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40. Abigail Adams to John Adams, Braintree, July 16, 1775, L. H. Butterfield et al., eds., *The Adams Papers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962–), *Adams Family Correspondence*, I, 246.

41. Benjamin Rush to Thomas Ruston, Philadelphia, October 29, 1775, L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (2 vols., Princeton, N.J., 1951), I, 92.

42. GW's Address to the New York Provincial Congress, New York, June 26, 1775, *GW Papers, Revolutionary War Series*, I, 41.

bandmen, in the Course of a few Months became Soldiers."[43] The emplacement of captured cannon from Fort Ticonderoga on Dorchester Heights forced the British army to evacuate Boston, never to return.

In April 1776 Washington moved his army south to New York to defend against an expected British attack. With too many strategic locations to defend, Washington unwisely spread thin his 19,000-man army composed of inexperienced Continentals and untrained militia. He had no artillery, no cavalry, and no naval support. In late June the British started arriving with an army of 30,000, thirty major naval vessels armed with 1,200 cannon, and 10,000 sailors. The British easily defeated the American forces in every engagement, forcing Washington to abandon New York City and then retreat across the Hudson River into New Jersey, and finally across the Delaware into Pennsylvania. Miraculously Washington always managed to escape keeping an army intact and the struggle alive. But by December 1776 he had only 2,300 men left, many of whom were militiamen whose time of service was up at the end of the year. On December 20, he wrote President Hancock that "ten days more will put an end to the existence of our Army." At the same time, the enemy was "gathering strength from the disaffected. This strength, like a Snowball by rolling, will increase, unless some means can be devised to check effectually, the progress of the Enemy's Arms."[44] It was one of the lowest points of the Revolution, especially for the commander-in-chief. Second-in-command General Charles Lee and his supporters indiscreetly conspired to replace Washington. Disgruntled congressmen refused to supply the army adequately with men, food and clothing, and materiel, yet they complained about Washington's ignominious retreat across New Jersey. Congressman John Adams sug-

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43. Richard Henry Lee to Washington, Philadelphia, September 26, 1775, and John Hancock to Washington, Philadelphia, April 2, 1776, ibid., II, 52; IV, 16.

44. GW to John Hancock, Camp above Trenton Falls, December 20, 1776, ibid., VII, 382.

gested that had he been a commander, even if outnumbered, he would attack and run, attack and run, provoking and winning these on-going skirmishes. "Defeat," in his opinion, "appears to be preferable to total Inaction."[45] Discouraged, Washington wrote that it appeared as if "the game is pretty near up."[46] But then, in perhaps the most important two-week period of the entire war, American fortunes reversed. The commander-in-chief, faced with the prospect of losing his entire army during a long winter encampment, hatched a bold and extremely dangerous plan to attack several isolated New Jersey settlements occupied by both British redcoats and German mercenaries. In November, Washington had ordered Thomas Paine to leave the army and write something that would inspire the army and the American people. Pennsylvania General Thomas Mifflin was ordered to go on a whirlwind recruitment tour that would raise Washington's forces up to 6,000. Paine responded with the first number of his American Crisis series, which was read to Washington's troops on the banks of the Delaware on December 23, 1776. "These are the times that try men's souls," wrote Paine in some of the greatest rhetoric of the Revolution. "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."[47]

On December 24, Pennsylvania Congressman Dr. Benjamin Rush spent over an hour in private with the General. "Washington appeared much depressed, and lamented the ragged and dissolving state of his army in affecting terms." Rush assured Washington that Congress supported him. While they were talking, Rush noticed that Washington was doodling on several small pieces of paper. "One of them by

45. John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Philadelphia, November 25, 1775, and Braintree, January 8, 1776, *Papers of John Adams*, III, 319, 399.

46. GW to Samuel Washington, Camp near the Falls of Trenton, December 18, 1776, *GW Papers, Revolutionary War Series*, VII, 370.

47. *The American Crisis* I, December 19, 1776, Eric Foner, ed., *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings* (New York, 1995), 91.

accident fell upon the floor near my feet. I was struck with the inscription upon it. It was 'Victory or Death.'"[48]

On December 25, beginning at 11:00 p.m., Washington with 2,400 men crossed the ice-choked Delaware and then marched nine long miles to Trenton through a storm of wind, rain, hail, and snow. Surprising the 1,200 Hessians at about 8:00 a.m., the Americans won a decisive victory. Only a handful of Americans were wounded and but four died from freezing. The Hessians lost 106 killed and wounded, and more than 900 captured. The American troops used the phrase "Victory or Death" as their countersign.[49] Washington retreated back across the Delaware, but a few days later again crossed the river and won another victory at Princeton. Other American victories occurred at Bordentown and Burlington before Washington's rejuvenated army went into winter encampment at Morristown. These victories were really quite inconsequential militarily; for morale, they were monumental. They allowed the American cause to continue. They brought in new recruits and a new confidence in the commander-in-chief. Abigail Adams wrote that she believed "that our late misfortunes have called out the hidden Excellencies of our Commander in chief—'affliction is the good man's shining time.' The critical state of our affairs has shown him to great advantage."[50] Thomas Paine wrote of Washington that "There is a natural firmness in some minds which cannot be unlocked by trifles, but which, when unlocked, discovers a cabinet of fortitude."[51] Congressman William Hooper of North Carolina marveled at "how often America has been rescued from ruin by the mere strength of [Washington's] genius, conduct & courage encountering every obstacle that want of money, men, arms, Ammunition could throw in his way; an impartial World will say with

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48. *Autobiography of Rush*, 124.

49. Ibid., 125.

50. Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, January 1777, *Family Correspondence*, II, 151.

51. *The American Crisis* I, December 19, 1776, Foner, *Paine: Writings*, 94.

you that he is the Greatest Man on Earth. Misfortunes are the Element in which he shines."[52]

But there were pessimists. John Adams told Congress that he was "distressed to see some members disposed to idolise an image which their own hands have molten. I speak here of the superstitious veneration that is sometimes paid to General Washington. Altho' I honour him for his good qualities, yet in this house I feel myself his Superior. In private life I shall always acknowledge that he is mine. It becomes us to attend early to the restraining our army."[53] Benjamin Rush predicted that Washington would not "Close the present war with G. Britain," because revolutions usually do not end with those they begin with, because his talents were better suited to unite the people against Britain "than to give them Afterwards a national complexion," because "his talents are unequal" to the task, and because "he is idolized by the people of America."[54] These fears seemed justified when Congress conferred dictatorial powers on Washington. Congressman Charles Carroll of Maryland hoped that Washington would use these new powers wisely because "unless he does, our affairs will never go well." Carroll's concern was that Washington would not use these new powers because "he is so humane & delicate."[55]

When General Horatio Gates accepted the surrender of British General John Burgoyne at Saratoga in October 1777, and Washington failed to defeat the British at Brandywine and Germantown, the conspiracies and cabals revived. Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant savaged the commander. "We are so attached to this Man that I fear we shall rather sink with than throw him off our Shoulders. And sink we must under his Management."[56] None of these cabals amounted to much,

52. William Hooper to Robert Morris, Baltimore, February 1, 1777, Smith, *Letters*, VI, 191.

53. Benjamin Rush: Notes of Debates in Congress, February 19, 1777, ibid., 324–25.

54. Ibid., April 8, 1777, 558.

55. Charles Carroll of Carrollton to Charles Carroll, Sr., Reading, Pa., September 23, 1777, ibid., VIII, 11.

56. Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant to James Lovell, Lancaster, Pa., November 20, 1777, ibid., 296.

however, because Washington's supporters in Congress were always dominant and because he always maintained the loyalty of his soldiers. President of Congress Henry Laurens, a South Carolina planter, wrote the Marquis de Lafayette not to worry. The commander "is out of the reach of his Enemies." The cabals against him amounted "to little more than tittle tattle."[57] To others, Laurens acknowledged that there was unjustified criticism of Washington, but that the General understood how important it was to the country for him to continue in command. "This great & virtuous Man has not acted the half patriot, by a hasty resignation . . . he will not take a Step which may greatly injure thirteen United States. . . . No internal Enemy can hurt him without his own consent."[58]

Washington was not a brilliant military strategist, nor did he generally take risks when the likelihood of success was uncertain. He told President of Congress Hancock, "We should on all occasions avoid a general action or put anything to the risk unless compelled by a necessity, into which we ought never to be drawn."[59] He, unlike his subordinate generals, could not afford the luxury of being captured. His capture would probably end the Revolution.

Washington continually had to be diplomatic with both Congress and his own generals as well as with the enemy. In 1776 Washington refused to accept letters from British naval commander Admiral Sir Richard Howe and from British commander-in-chief General Sir William Howe. The letters, addressed to "George Washington, Esq.," were sent to Washington's camp where the commander-in-chief's pennant was flying, clearly indicating that the general was in residence. When General Howe's aide arrived and personally presented another letter to Washington again without

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57. Henry Laurens to the Marquis de Lafayette, York, Pa., January 12, 1778, ibid., 571.

58. Henry Laurens to Isaac Motte, York, Pa., January 26, 1778, ibid., 654.

59. GW to John Hancock, New York, September 8, 1776, *GW Papers, Revolutionary War Series*, VI, 249.

his military rank indicated, Washington once again refused to accept the letter and told the aide that he would never accept a "letter directed to him as a private Person when it related to his publick Station."[60] Finally, General Howe understood and addressed his next letter to "General George Washington, Esq.," and it was accepted. Until this time, British forces had considered the Americans as rebels, and captured American soldiers were treated accordingly. Washington wanted to make it clear that the war was no longer a colonial rebellion. The former colonies were an independent nation. Captured American soldiers should be treated as captured British soldiers were treated—as prisoners of war.

Washington's understanding of psychology was again displayed on the eve of the Battle of Germantown. General Howe had recently captured Philadelphia, and the two armies prepared to fight what was expected to be the climactic battle of the war. Reinforcements flooded in to both armies. At this critical juncture on the morning of October 6, 1777, Washington wrote a card to General Howe informing him that the Americans had in their possession a dog with a collar inscribed General William Howe. The card and the dog were delivered to Howe. Later that day, Washington wrote a letter to Howe asking the British commander to control his troops in the ensuing battle. In previous engagements, British and Hessian soldiers had raped, killed, pillaged, and burned. Washington asked that the civilian population of Philadelphia be spared. By showing Howe humanity in returning the general's dog, Washington was now asking Howe in return to show humanity toward Philadelphia's civilians.[61]

On occasion Washington upset his officers and men by endangering himself. Samuel Shaw wrote that "Our army love our General very much, but yet they have one thing

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60. Memorandum of an Interview with Lieutenant Colonel James Paterson, New York, July 20, 1776, ibid., V, 399.

61. GW to General William Howe, October 6, 1777, ibid., XI, 409–10.

against him, which is the little care he takes of himself in any action. His personal bravery, and the desire he has of animating his troops by example, make him fearless of any danger. This, while it makes him appear great, occasions us much uneasiness. But Heaven, who has hitherto been his shield, I hope will still continue to guard so valuable a life."[62]

Probably the most dramatic case of Washington's disregard for his own personal safety occurred during the Battle of Monmouth in central New Jersey in July 1778. General Charles Lee was assigned command of the American forces that were sent to attack General Howe's troops as they evacuated Philadelphia and marched toward New York City. Soon the engagement became a rout as the Americans, including Lee, ran from the counter-attacking British. Washington rode down amid the confusion, ordered the insubordinate Lee to the rear, and restored order among the troops. The day ended with a standoff as the British slipped away at night. Alexander Hamilton, Washington's aide-de-camp, described the scene to New Jersey Congressman Elias Boudinot.

> As we approached the supposed place of action we heard some flying rumors of what had happened in consequence of which the General rode forward and found the troops retiring in the greatest disorder and the enemy pressing upon their rear. I never saw the general to so much advantage. His coolness and firmness were admirable. He instantly took measures for checking the enemy's form and make a proper disposition. He then rode back and had the troops formed on a very advantageous piece of ground. . . . The sequel is, we beat the enemy and killed and wounded at least a thousand of their best troops. America owes a great deal to General Washington for this day's work; a general rout, dismay and disgrace would have attended the whole army in any other hands but his. By his own good sense and fortitude he turned the fate of the day. Other officers have great merit in performing

62. Samuel Shaw to Francis Shaw, Morristown N.J., January 7, 1777, Josiah Quincy, ed., *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw* (Boston, 1847), 29–30.

> their parts well; but he directed the whole with the skill of a Master workman. He did not hug himself at a distance and leave an Arnold to win laurels for him [an indirect, although not too subtle, reference to Horatio Gates, who stood back while Benedict Arnold led the American attack at Saratoga]; but by his own presence, he brought order out of confusion, animated his troops and led them to success.[63]

Boudinot responded that "The General I always revered & loved ever since I knew him, but in this Instance he has rose superior to himself. Every Lip dwells on his Praise."[64] A year later, Lafayette, back briefly in France, asked Washington's forgiveness for what he was about to say. "I can't help reminding you that a commander in chief should never too much expose himself, that in case General Washington was killed, Nay was seriously wounded, there is no officer in the army who might fill that place." If such a calamity occurred, not only would a battle be lost, but the entire army and "the American cause itself would perhaps be entirely Ruined."[65]

Often Washington had to make hard, heart-wrenching decisions as commander-in-chief. Such was the case in April 1778 when Colonel Matthias Ogden of the 1st New Jersey Regiment asked Washington for permission to rescue between twenty and thirty American officers held captive by the British on Long Island. Ogden had gotten information that the officers were being held one or two each in private homes. Only Loyalist militia were left to guard against an escape. Ogden's plan seemed certain of success in freeing at least some of the prisoners.

After painstaking consideration, Washington rejected Ogden's proposal. A gentleman's agreement among the

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63. Alexander Hamilton to Elias Boudinot, New Brunswick, N.J., July 5, 1778, Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (27 vols., New York, 1961–1987), I, 511.

64. Elias Boudinot to Alexander Hamilton, Philadelphia, July 8, 1778, Smith, *Letters*, X, 238.

65. Lafayette to Washington, St. Jean d'Angely, near Rochefort Harbor, France, June 12, 1779, Stanley J. Idzerda, ed., *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution* (5 vols., Ithaca, N.Y., 1977–1983), II, 277.

British commanding officer, Washington, and the captured American officers allowed the prisoners lenient treatment and mild accommodations on Long Island. Freeing twenty or thirty would put six times as many captured officers (and all future prisoners as well) under "a stricter & much more limited confinement than they now experience." Even if the rescue attempt were successful, too much would be lost that would endanger the lives of many more prisoners. Washington reluctantly ordered Ogden not to proceed.[66]

Only once it was rumored that large portions of the army had become disaffected from Washington. In the beginning of 1783, with the war all but over as the peace negotiators in Paris were finishing the peace treaty, the officers and the army encamped at Newburgh, N.Y., were upset with Congress' failure to pay them and deliver on pension promises to the officers made in the depths of the war in 1780. The soldiers and officers knew that Washington would not support any "unlawful proceeding" against Congress.[67] Mutiny was in the air. Washington might have to be replaced with a commanding officer willing to stand against Congress.

Washington sensed the danger. "The predicament in which I stand as Citizen & Soldier, is as critical and delicate as can well be conceived. It has been the subject of many contemplative hours. The sufferings of a complaining army on one hand, and the inability of Congress and tardiness of the States on the other, are the forebodings of evil; & may be productive of events which are more to be deprecated than prevented."[68] To forestall "the blackest designs" of those who wanted to blackmail Congress, Washington took extraordinary action. He ordered the officers to assemble and then, contrary to custom, he personally attended and

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66. Matthias Ogden to GW, Elizabethtown, N.J., April 9, 1778 and GW to Matthias Ogden, Valley Forge, April 13, 1778, *GW Papers, Revolutionary War Series*, XIV, 440–41, 498–99.

67. James Madison: Notes of Debates in Congress, February 20, 1783, Smith, *Letters*, XIX, 719.

68. GW to Alexander Hamilton, Newburgh, N.Y., March 4, 1783, Syrett, *Hamilton*, III, 278.

formally addressed the 500 officers. Washington asked them to be patient—to use "cool, deliberative thinking, and that composure of Mind which is so necessary to give dignity and stability to measures." He asked them to trust him to intervene for them with Congress. The nation, he said, owed them a debt—not an ordinary debt, but a debt of honor that the officers had paid with their blood. He would go to Congress and plead their case. He was confident Congress, which "entertain[ed] exalted sentiments of the Services of the Army . . . will do it compleat justice." He hoped the officers would not "cast a shade over that glory which has been so justly acquired; and tarnish the reputation of an Army which is celebrated thro' all Europe, for its fortitude and Patriotism." He begged the officers to oppose those "wickedly attempts to open the flood Gates of Civil discord, and deluge our rising Empire in Blood." He ended his formal address by saying that by preserving "the dignity of your Conduct, [it would] 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.'"[69]

After his formal address, which had not yet convinced the hostile officers to put their trust in him, Washington asked to read a letter he had just received from a reassuring member of Congress. As he started to read the letter, he stumbled. Washington was not a good public speaker. He paused, and then pulled from his coat pocket a pair of spectacles. No one had previously seen him wear glasses in public. He asked the officers' forbearance: "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country."[70] According to one observer, "There was something so natural, so unaffected, in this appeal, as rendered it superior to

69. Washington's address is printed in Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXVI, 223–27. It also appears as an appendix to Peter S. Onuf's edition of Mason Locke Weems's *The Life of Washington* (Armonk, N.Y., 1996), 183–87.

70. Quoted in Flexner, *The Indispensable Man*, 174.

the most studied oratory; it forced its way to the heart, and you might see sensibility moisten every eye."[71] The reporter of these events, Samuel Shaw, praised the patriotism of both the army and its leader.

> I rejoice, [he wrote,] in the opportunities I have had of seeing this great man in a variety of situations—calm and intrepid where the battle raged, patient and persevering under the pressure of misfortune, moderate and possessing himself in the full career of victory. Great as these qualifications deservedly render him, he never appeared to me more truly so, than at the assembly we have been speaking of. On other occasions he has been supported by the exertions of an army and the countenance of his friends; but in this he stood single and alone. There was no saying where the passions of an army, which were not a little inflamed, might lead; but it was generally allowed that longer forbearance was dangerous, and moderation had ceased to be a virtue. Under these circumstances he appeared, not at the head of his troops, but as it were in opposition to them; and for a dreadful moment the interests of the army and its General seemed to be in competition! He spoke—every doubt was dispelled, and the tide of patriotism rolled again in its wonted course. Illustrious man! what he says of the army may with equal justice be applied to his own character. "Had this day been wanting, the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining."[72]

Shortly after the conspiracy at Newburgh was stifled, Washington received word of the peace. He shed tears and said that "it was the happiest hour of his life."[73]

Washington became immortal in the eyes of his countrymen in June 1783 when in a circular letter to the states he announced his resignation. As soon as the peace treaty was accepted, he planned to retire to Mount Vernon, never

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71. Samuel Shaw to the Rev. Eliot, April 1783, Quincy, *Shaw*, 104.

72. Ibid., 104–5.

73. Chevalier de la Luzerne to Comte de Vergennes, March 29, 1783, George Bancroft, ed., *History of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States of America* (2 vols., New York, 1882–1883), I, 301.

again to serve in public office. But before retiring, he offered his countrymen one last piece of advice. Washington suggested that America was at a crossroads. The winning of independence alone would not guarantee greatness.

> There is [he said,] an opinion still left to the United States of America, whether they will be respectable and prosperous, or contemptible and miserable as a nation. This is the time of their political probation; this is the moment, when the eyes of the whole world are turned upon them, this is the moment to establish or ruin their national character forever; this is the favorable moment to give such a tone to the federal government, as will enable it to answer the ends of its institution; or this may be the ill-fated moment for relaxing the powers of the union, annihilating the cement of the confederation, and exposing us to become the sport of European politics, which may play one State against another, to prevent their growing importance, and to serve their own interested purposes. For, according to the system of policy the States shall adopt at this moment, they will stand or fall; and, by their conformation or lapse, it is yet to be decided, whether the revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse; not to the present age alone, for with our fate will the destiny of unborn millions be involved.[74]

Four things, Washington said, must be done to make America great. First, the Union must be maintained and the powers of Congress strengthened. Second, public justice had to be preserved by which he meant that Congress must properly compensate public creditors—domestic and foreign—the army and its officers, and the widows and orphans of those who died in the war. Third, a proper peacetime military establishment must be created. The war had shown the ineffectiveness of the militia system. A standing army of

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74. GW Circular Letter to the State Executives, June 1783, Fitzpatrick, *Writings,* XXVI, 483–96. The address is also printed in John P. Kaminski and Jill Adair McCaughan, eds., *A Great and Good Man: George Washington in the Eyes of His Contemporaries* (Madison, Wis., 1989), 4–16; and in Don Higginbotham, *George Washington: Uniting a Nation* (Lanham, Md., 2002), 115–27.

sorts had to be established. Finally, Washington stressed that after twenty years of fighting against British despotism, Americans should "cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government." Americans should also reject the spirit of sectionalism that had developed and "entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another." This advice should "be considered as the legacy of one who has ardently wished, on all occasions, to be useful to his country." Only by pursuing these policies could we "hope to be a happy Nation."[75]

The war continued for another five months. The treaty of peace was ratified in September 1783 and a month later Congress discharged those soldiers who had enlisted for the duration of war and allowed officers on furlough to retire. On November 2, 1783, Washington sent his farewell address to the armies of the United States. In his address Washington wanted to recall the past, explore the soldiers' future prospects, advise them on their future pursuits, and conclude with the obligations he felt to them for the "spirited and able assistance" he had received from them.

Washington felt that all Americans had to be astonished, grateful, and inspired at what had been accomplished. Faced with tremendous "disadvantageous circumstances," the army with "the singular interposition of Providence" had wrought what "was little short of a standing miracle." He remembered how "raw" recruits with no military experience taken from separate regions of the continent which had traditionally "despise[d] and quarrel[ed] with each other, "instantly became but one patriotic band of Brothers."

The future prospects for America with its independence and sovereignty obtained "exceeds the power of description." Brave and indomitable soldiers would now become farmers, merchants, and fishermen, and above all else, would never be excluded "from the rights of Citizens and the fruits of their labour." Washington also predicted that no state would refuse to pay its federal requisitions (i.e., taxes) thereby threatening "a national bankruptcy and a dissolution of the

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75. Ibid.

union." Congress would receive the state payments with which it could pay the nation's debt to its army. The commander-in-chief knew that his soldiers would be patient in awaiting their just compensation—that they would be "not less virtuous and useful as Citizens, than they have been persevering and victorious as Soldiers." America's soldiers would possess "the private virtues of œconomy, prudence, and industry" as civilians just as while soldiers they possessed "the more splendid qualities of valour, perseverance, and enterprise . . . in the Field." Washington had confidence that his soldiers would be able "to change the military character into that of the Citizen" because of "their good sense and prudence." As "the Curtain of separation" was about to be drawn between him and his men, Washington could only pray that "their grateful country" would provide "ample justice" here on earth while "the God of Armies" would reward them with "the choicest of heaven's favours."[76]

The British finally evacuated New York City on November 25, 1783. General Washington and New York Governor George Clinton rode into the city after nearly seven years of British occupation. Residents, returning refugees, and the army celebrated. When it came time for Washington to depart, he called his officers together at Fraunces Tavern to say farewell. He raised a glass of wine to toast them. With a heart filled with love and gratitude, he hoped that their latter years would be as happy and prosperous as their former ones were honorable and glorious. He could not go to each officer individually, but he asked them to come and take him by the hand. With that comment, General Henry Knox, Washington's commander of artillery, who was standing next to him, turned to Washington, embraced him and kissed him on the cheek. The other officers followed the example and they all wept knowing, in all likelihood, that they would never see their "father general" again.[77]

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76. Fitzpatrick, Writings, XXVII, 222–27. Also printed in Onuf, 187–91.

77. Stanley Weintraub, *General Washington's Christmas Farewell: A Mount Vernon Homecoming, 1783* (New York, 2003), 85.

Washington left New York with but one last official act to perform. He stopped on the way home to surrender his commission to Congress then meeting in Annapolis, Maryland. On Monday, December 22, Congress honored Washington with a dinner. Between 200 and 300 attended. After the obligatory thirteen toasts, Washington made a final additional toast. "Competent powers to Congress for general purposes." That evening the governor of Maryland hosted a ball at the statehouse. "The General danced every set, that all the ladies might have the pleasure of dancing with him, or as it has since been handsomely expressed, get a touch of him."[78]

The formal ceremony surrendering Washington's commission was held on Tuesday morning, December 23. Congressman James McHenry, a former aide-de-camp to Washington, described the scene to his fiancée.

> Today my love the General at a public audience made a deposit of his commission and in a very pathetic [that is, 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 faultered 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

78. James Tilton to Gunning Bedford, Jr., Annapolis, December 25, 1783, Smith, *Letters*, XXI, 232.

> employments of public life." So saying he drew out from his bosom his commission and delivered it up to the president of Congress. . . . This, [McHenry continued,] 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.[79]

The next day, Washington was home to spend the first Christmas at Mount Vernon in eight years. A month later, Washington asked Congress to return the commission "to have it deposited amongst my own Papers. It may serve my Grand Children some fifty or a hundred years hence for a theme to ruminate upon." On January 29, 1784, North Carolina delegate Hugh Williamson moved "that his late Commission be returned to General Washington in a neat gold box to be preserved among the archives of his family."[80]

A PRIVATE CITIZEN

Washington was delighted to be back home as "a private citizen on the banks of the Potomac . . . free from the bustle of a camp & the busy scenes of public life." He was now free to pursue the "tranquil enjoyments" unattainable by the soldier pursuing his own fame or the statesman advancing the welfare of his country. Not only was he retired from all public employments, but he was retiring within himself. He was "Envious of none." His aim was but to repair the dam-

79. James McHenry to Margaret Caldwell, Annapolis, December 23, 1783, ibid., XXI, 221–22. GW's address surrendering his commission is printed in Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXVII, 284–85; Onuf, 191–92.

80. GW to Charles Thomson, Mount Vernon, January 22, 1784, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, I, 71, 72n–73n.

age suffered by his plantation during his long absence. He was content to "move gently down the stream of life, until I sleep with my Fathers."[81]

Despite Washington's withdrawal from public life, the public did not withdraw from him. He remained the most popular person in the country, and a stream of visitors daily paraded to Mount Vernon. During the more than five years he spent at home between his retirement from the army and his inauguration as president, there were only a few days when Martha and her husband did not entertain guests. Washington compared Mount Vernon "to a well resorted tavern, as scarcely any strangers who are going from north to south, or from south to north do not spend a day or two at it."[82] Sometimes guests stopped for only a few hours or a day, but more typically they stayed for several days at a time. Not only guests had to be accommodated, but their servants (slaves) and their horses needed to be housed and fed. David Humphreys, a former aide-de-camp, stayed for a year and a half! Washington enjoyed the company of his friends—"their visits," he wrote, "can never be unseasonable."[83] Hospitality was ever present. In writing a friend who had recently returned to England, Washington told him that "should your Son who is lately arrived from England be promted by business or inclination to travel into this State it would give me much pleasure to shew him every civility in my power—the same to any branch of your family—or any of your friends."[84] One condition, however, that Washington always insisted upon was that his guests allow him to do his work on the plantation.

81. GW to Lafayette, Mount Vernon, February 1, 1784, ibid., 87–88. Three years later, Washington wrote Henry Knox that "gliding down the stream of life in tranquil retirement is so much the wish of my Soul that nothing on this side Elysium can be placed in competition with it." Ibid., V, 52–53.

82. GW to Mary Ball Washington, Mount Vernon, February 15, 1787, ibid., V, 35.

83. GW to Lee Massey, Mount Vernon, July 10, 1784, ibid., I, 494.

84. GW to Samuel Vaughan, Mount Vernon, November 12, 1787, ibid., V, 433.

Washington's daily schedule remained fairly constant while at home, devoting mornings to business and afternoons to guests. He rose at sunrise. Late in life he advised his step grandson to "Rise early, that by habit it may become familiar, agreeable, healthy, and profitable. It may for a while be irksome to do this, but that will wear off and the practice will produce a rich harvest forever thereafter."[85] He dressed and went out briefly checking with various "hirelings," whom he expected also to rise with the sun. After two hours, he was back home at around seven for breakfast. Late in life his breakfast consisted of "tea and caks made from maize; because of his teeth he makes slices spread with butter and honey."[86] At this time he would answer some of his voluminous correspondence and read some of the dozen newspapers and magazines he subscribed to. He would then "mount my horse and ride round my farms."[87] Between two and three in the afternoon he would return to the house and briefly chat with his visitors and family, which included his two young step grandchildren. He then excused himself, changed for dinner, powdered his hair, which he tied neatly in a long queue, and returned to his company. After dinner they enjoyed Madeira and talked about the events of the Revolution, the latest state, national or international news, or new developments in canal building or farming techniques. Again the general would go off to his study to read newspapers and answer correspondence. At 7:00 P.M. he would rejoin his guests for tea and conversation until 9:00 when he would retire to his bedroom where again he would read and write until the candle burned low.

In the summer of 1784, Washington greatly enjoyed a visit from the Marquis de Lafayette, who, during the war, had become almost an adopted son of Washington's. The

85. GW to George Washington Parke Custis, Mount Vernon, January 7, 1798, W. W. Abbot et al., eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Retirement Series* (4 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1998–1999), II, 5.

86. Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Lee, 82.

87. GW to James McHenry, Mount Vernon, May 29, 1797, *GW Papers, Retirement Series*, I, 160.

Frenchman described the sublime simplicity of Washington—"he is as completely involved with all the details of his lands and house as if he had always lived here."[88] Washington was saddened when his dear friend left, expecting that they would never see each other again. He remembered his own youthful days that "had long since fled to return no more." He realized that he "was now descending the hill, I had been 52 years climbing." Knowing that his family was not blessed with long life, he soon expected "to be entombed in the dreary mansions of my father's." These brief somber periods always vanished pushed aside by his busy schedule. He vowed not to repine. But he thought: "I have had my day."[89]

Visitors to Mount Vernon often came not knowing what to expect. They always left sensing that they had been in the presence of greatness, but, at the same time, found that this great man was a kind, thoughtful person. Their experience would never be forgotten—they would record it in their diaries and tell their grandchildren.

Elkanah Watson of New York was typical. Armed with several letters of recommendation from friends of Washington, Watson described his feelings as he neared Mount Vernon.

> No pilgrim ever approached Mecca with deeper enthusiasm. . . . I trembled with awe as I came into the presence of this great man. . . . He soon put me at ease, by unbending, in a free and affable conversation. . . . I observed a peculiarity in his smile, which seemed to illuminate his eye; his whole countenance beamed with intelligence, while it commanded confidence and respect. . . . I remained alone in the enjoyment of the society of Washington, for two of the richest days of my life.

Watson remembered that he and Washington sat alone at the table uninterrupted for an hour. Unfortunately, Watson

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88. Lafayette to Adrienne de Noailles de Lafayette, Mount Vernon, August 20, 1784, Idzerda, *Lafayette*, V, 237.

89. GW to Lafayette, Mount Vernon, December 8, 1784, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, II, 175.

was sick with a cold and coughed excessively. Washington offered various remedies but Watson declined. When he retired for the night, Watson's cough worsened. After a while, a knock on the door caused Watson to pull back his bed curtains. To his "utter astonishment, I beheld Washington himself, standing at my bedside, with a bowl of hot tea in his hand." Watson was stunned. Such an act of kindness might be expected "with an ordinary man, . . . but as a trait of the benevolence and private virtue of Washington, deserves to be recorded."[90]

Robert Hunter, a young Scotsman, visited Mount Vernon in November 1785. When introduced to the general he described him as

> about six foot high, perfectly straight and well made, rather inclined to be lusty. His eyes are full and blue and seem to express an air of gravity. His nose inclines to the aquiline; his mouth small; his teeth are yet good; and his cheeks indicate perfect health. His forehead is a noble one, and he wears his hair turned back, without curls (quite in the officer's style) and tied in a long queue behind. Altogether, he makes a most noble, respectable appearance, and I really think him the first man in the world.[91]

A Rhode Islander described meeting the Washington family "without any ceremonious parade. The general converses with great deliberation, & with ease, except in pronouncing some few words, in which he has a hesitancy of speech."[92]

Painters often visited Mount Vernon hoping to capture Washington on canvas. Frequently painters would have one life sitting with Washington and then copy that original painting in numerous others. In introducing Robert Edge Pine, a famous English painter who had been sympathetic to the American cause during the Revolution, Francis Hopkinson wrote Washington that Pine wanted to paint scenes from the war "wherein you bore so conspicuous a Part, [that they] cannot be faithfully represented if you are omitted. I

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90. Watson: *Memoirs*, January 23–25, 1785, pp. 243–44.
91. Robert Hunter, Lee, 27.
92. Olney Winsor to Hope Winsor, March 31, 1788, Lee, 54.

know you have already suffer'd much Persecution under the Painter's Pencil—& verily believe that you would rather fight a Battle, on a just Occasion, than sit for a Picture, because there is Life and Vigour in Fortitude, & Patience is but a dull Virtue. I would not insinuate that you have not much Patience, but am very sure that you have a great deal of Good Nature."[93] Initially Washington was impatient in sitting for portraits, but in time he resigned himself to the inconvenience. He wrote "I am so hackneyed to the touches of the painter's pencil, that I am now altogether at their beck, and sit like patience on a Monument whilst they are delineating the lines of my face. It is a proof among many others, of what habit & custom can effect. At first I was as impatient at the request, and as restive under the operation, as a Colt is of the Saddle—The next time, I submitted very reluctantly, but with less ouncing. Now, no dray moves more readily to the Thill [i.e., the two shafts between which a horse is hitched to a wagon], than I do to the painters Chair."[94] Washington was less at ease with sculptors who did life masks. American artist Joseph Wright, commissioned by Congress to sculpt an equestrian statue of Washington, and the great French sculptor Jean Antoine Houdon, hired by the Virginia legislature to prepare a full-length statue of Washington, came to Mount Vernon in the summer of 1783 and in October 1785, respectively. For the face mask, Houdon had Washington lie on his back and then covered his head and shoulders with plaster. Straws placed in each nostril allowed Washington to breath. A combination of pain and claustrophobia accompanied the difficult removal of the set plaster.

After the Revolution, Washington increased his real estate holdings by purchasing western lands far from Mount Vernon. In the summer of 1783 Washington and New York Governor George Clinton purchased 6,071 acres near present-

93. Francis Hopkinson to GW, Philadelphia, April 19, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, II, 508.

94. GW to Francis Hopkinson, Mount Vernon, May 16, 1785, ibid., 561–62.

day Utica, New York. Clinton put up the cash for the transaction and managed the holdings. He explained to his partner what kind of investment worked best. The land should be well-watered, sprinkled with timber and orchards, near a good road, and not far from towns that could provide necessary goods and markets for farm produce. Half the land should be sold quickly at a modest profit. Settlers would improve the land causing an escalation of surrounding land values. By 1796, when Washington was thinking about retiring from the presidency, Clinton reported that they still retained 1,446 acres valued at over five dollars per acre. Clinton recommended holding onto the land because "The soil is good and in proportion to the rapid settlement of that Part of the Country the value of those Lands continue to increase." The partnership had served both men well. With a quarter of their land still available, the investment had already turned a handsome profit. The two old surveyors had done well as a team.[95]

Washington developed his own marketing strategy for renting or selling his western lands that aimed at long-term profits rather than quick financial returns. First he identified an agent who would be given the power of attorney over the land. The agent would then place as many tenants on the land as seemed practical. Land holdings were not initially surveyed but would be determined by natural boundaries such as rivers and rock formations. As an incentive to settle the land, tenants would be exempt from rent for three years provided they made "certain reasonable improvements," such as building "comfortable houses," cultivating certain acreage, establishing acreage of meadowland, and planting a minimum number of fruit trees. With the fourth year of occupancy, tenants would pay one-third of what they raised to the agent, who would sell the produce, keep a commission, and pay the balance to the landlord. The landlord reserved all mineral rights. The agent would then set a term limit on the rented property not to exceed

95. John P. Kaminski, *George Clinton: Yeoman Politician of the New Republic* (Madison, Wis., 1993), 51.

ten years if Washington could have his preference. This timeframe could be extended at the agent's discretion, but not for life.[96]

THE MASTER AND HIS SLAVES

Throughout his life Washington owned slaves; they were a natural and integral part of his well ordered life. Usually he referred to his slaves by some euphemistic term—his family, his servants, or my people. One of the 110 rules of civility that Washington lived by provided that "Artificers & persons of low degree ought" to be treated by "those of high degree . . . with affability and courtesy, without arrogancy."[97] Consequently Washington treated his slaves with a degree of humanity not always found among owners of large numbers of slaves. He encouraged marriages and family life among slaves, he made some slaves overseers, and he prepared young slaves for their eventual freedom. In an undated memorandum probably written late in his life Washington stated one of his goals: "To make the Adults among them as easy & as comfortable in their circumstances as their actual state of ignorance & improvidence would admit; & to lay a foundation to prepare the rising generation for a destiny different from that in which they were born; afforded some satisfaction to my mind, & could not I hoped be displeasing to the justice of the Creator."[98] In 1793, while serving as President, Washington responded to a question about his slaves, declaring "that I do not like to even think, much less talk of it." His idea was that if he were not "principled agt selling negros, as you would do cattle in the market, I would not, in twelve months from this date, be possessed of one, as a slave. I shall be happily mistaken, if they are not found to be a very trou-

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96. GW to Thomas Lewis, Mount Vernon, December 25, 1787, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, V, 506–7.

97. Brookhiser, *Rules of Civility*, 50.

98. Quoted in John P. Kaminski, ed., *A Necessary Evil?: Slavery and the Debate Over the Constitution* (Madison, Wis., 1995), 277.

blesome species of property."[99] While resident in Philadelphia, Washington regularly rotated his slaves home to Mount Vernon so as not to be subject to a Pennsylvania law that allowed slaves resident for longer than six months to sue for their freedom.

Washington inherited ten slaves from his father. When, at the age of twenty-two, Washington acquired Mount Vernon, he obtained another eighteen slaves. In 1754 he bought two males and a female. Two years later, he bought from the governor a slave woman and her child. In 1758 he purchased another male and the following year (the year of his wedding), he purchased eleven more males and a woman and her child. In 1762 he purchased nine males and in 1764 he purchased three men, two women, and a child. Four years later he purchased two mulatto men and two boys. In 1772 he made what he hoped would be his last purchase of five more males. When George and Martha Washington married in 1759, she brought with her and her two children the full estate of her late husband. Washington would control almost 200 additional slaves that were part of Martha's dowager and her children's inheritance.[100]

By 1791 Washington owned nearly 300 slaves—twice as many as he thought he needed. Although the surplus slaves strained the plantation's resources, he could not bring himself to sell them "because I am principled against this kind of traffic in the human species." To hire them out was also unacceptable because families would be split, to which Washington had "an aversion." He felt that "it would be for my interest to set them free, rather than give them victuals and cloaths."[101]

Occasionally throughout the years, Washington, perhaps less often than other large slave owners, confronted the problem of runaways. Starting in 1760, he advertised for his first runaway. In 1786 he wrote that he "abominate[d]" run-

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99. GW to Alexander Spotswood, Philadelphia, November 23, 1794, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, XVII, 207.

100. Ford, 139.

101. Ford, 140.

aways.[102] A decade later he asked a friend about a runaway girl in New England, justifying his actions by saying that "however well disposed I might be to a gradual abolition, or even to an entire emancipation of that description of People (if the latter was in itself practicable at this moment) it would neither be politic or just to reward unfaithfulness with a premature preference, and thereby discontent before hand the minds of all her fellow-servants who by their steady attachments, are far more deserving than herself of favor."[103] He thought it likely that runaways would continue, and that if returned to their rightful masters, runaways should not "be retained . . . as they are sure to contaminate and discontent others."[104]

When Washington discovered that a runaway from a former guest (William Drayton of Charleston, South Carolina) was staying at Mount Vernon, he arranged to have the runaway returned. Washington sent the runaway "under the care of a trusty Overseer" to Baltimore "under the impression of assisting in bringing" some mules back to Mount Vernon. "The real design," however, was to place the runaway on a ship to Charleston. While awaiting the departure of the vessel, the overseer attempted to put the runaway in jail, but when the jailer hesitated because of the lack of an order from a judge, the runaway escaped on his way to Philadelphia. Washington wrote Drayton of the events and complained that it was difficult to capture and return runaways "where there are numbers that had rather facilitate the escape of slaves, than apprehend them." The runaway traveled to Philadelphia from where he was returned to Charleston.[105]

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102. GW to John Francis Mercer, Mount Vernon, November 6, 1786, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, IV, 336.

103. GW to Joseph Whipple, Philadelphia, November 28, 1796, Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXXV, 297.

104. Ford, 140–41.

105. GW to James McHenry, Mount Vernon, November 11, 1786; GW to William Drayton, Mount Vernon, November 20, 1786; and Edward Moyston to GW, Philadelphia, April 4, 1787, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, IV, 358, 389–90, V, 123.

In 1786 Washington was told about a new divisiveness between the North and the South. When Southerners visited Philadelphia attended by a personal slave or two, Quakers attempted to liberate them. The slaves would be encouraged to run away and the wealthy Quakers would bring one "vexatious lawsuit" after another against the slave owner. Asked to intervene, Washington wrote his friend Robert Morris, the wealthy Philadelphia merchant who had been superintendent of finance during the war, seeking Morris's assistance in getting the Quakers to desist or else "none of those whose misfortune it is to have slaves as attendants, will visit the City if they can possibly avoid it." Washington hoped that his intervention in this matter would not be mistaken

> that it is my wish to hold the unhappy people, who are the subject of this letter, in slavery. I can only say that there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it; but there is only one proper and effectual mode by which it can be accomplished, and that is by Legislative authority; and this, as far as my suffrage will go, shall never be wanting. But when slaves who are happy and contented with their present masters, are tampered with and seduced to leave them; when masters are taken unawares by these practices; when a conduct of this sort begets discontent on one side and resentment on the other, and when it happens to fall on a man, whose purse will not measure with that of the Society [of Quakers], and he loses his property for want of means to defend it; it is oppression in the latter case, and not humanity in any; because it introduces more evils than it can cure.[106]

Washington always instructed his overseers to treat his slaves humanely and to care for them when sick. Clauses were inserted in each overseer's contract "to take all necessary and proper care of the Negroes committed to his management using them with proper humanity and descretion."

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106. GW to Robert Morris, Mount Vernon, April 12, 1786, *A Necessary Evil*, 276.

When sick, slaves should be provided "timely applications and remedies." When sufficiently ill, a doctor would be called from Alexandria. But Washington was always aware that some slaves took advantage of alleged illnesses. "I never wish my people to work when they are really sick, or unfit for it; on the contrary, that all necessary care should be taken of them when they are so; but if you do not examine into their complaints, they will lay by when no more ails them, than all those who stick to their business, and are not complaining from the fatigue and drowsiness which they feel as the effect of night walking and other practices which unfit them for the duties of the day."[107]

By the time of the American Revolution, Washington realized the inconsistency of the American struggle for liberty against British oppression and the institution of slavery. He decided, "unless some particular circumstances should compel me to it," never "to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted, by the legislature by which slavery in this Country may be abolished by slow, sure, & imperceptable degrees."[108]

On occasion Washington pressed some of his debtors to pay him so that he could avoid selling land or slaves to make payments to his own creditors and workers. When John Francis Mercer was unable to pay cash for the debt that his father's estate owed, Washington reluctantly agreed to take payment in slaves, but only a certain kind of slave. "The Negroes I want are males. Three or four young fellows for Ditchers; and the like number of well grown lads for artificers." All of the slaves should be healthy, none should be "addicted to running away," and none should be women or children, who "would not suit my purposes on any terms.[109] When the slaves Mercer identified objected to being separated from their wives and families, Washington rejected

107. Ford, 142, 144.

108. GW to John Francis Mercer, Mount Vernon, September 9, 1786, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, IV, 243.

109. Ibid., and GW to Mercer, Mount Vernon, November 6 and December 5, 1786, ibid., 336, 442.

the arrangement, and agreed "to await the money in any manner you shall please to offer it."[110]

After the Revolution, advocates of emancipation regularly sought Washington's endorsement for their proposals. Washington, however, realized his important position in the country and the impact that any public statement that he would make against slavery could severely divide the Union. In February 1783 the Marquis de Lafayette asked Washington to join him in purchasing a plantation in the west of Virginia and freeing slaves to settle thereupon as tenants to show that freedmen could succeed. Such an act would also make a public statement that Washington endorsed the abolition of slavery thereby encouraging other Southern slave owners to follow his example. Washington responded to Lafayette saying "I shall be happy to join you in so laudable a work; but will defer going into a detail of the business, till I have the pleasure of seeing you" next year.[111]

A year later, historian William Gordon took the occasion of Lafayette's visit to Mount Vernon to write Washington. "You wished to get rid of all your Negroes, & the Marquis wisht that an end might be put to the slavery of all of them. I should rejoice beyond measure could your joint counsels & influence produce it, & thereby give the finishing stroke & the last polish to your political characters."[112] Nothing seems to have been settled on the matter during Lafayette's two visits to Mount Vernon in 1784. In late 1785, however, Lafayette proceeded on his own by purchasing a plantation on Cayenne, an island in the French West Indies, and freeing the slaves "in order to make that experiment which you know is my hobby horse."[113]

In 1785 Methodist ministers asked Washington to sign their petition to the Virginia legislature seeking emancipa-

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110. GW to Mercer, Mount Vernon, November 24, 1786, ibid., 394.

111. GW to Lafayette, Newburgh, N.Y., April 5, 1783, *A Necessary Evil*, 24–25.

112. William Gordon to GW, Jamaica Plain, Mass., August 30, 1784, *GW Papers*, *Confederation Series*, II, 64.

113. Lafayette to GW, July 14, 1785 and February 6, 1786, *A Necessary Evil*, 25.

tion. Washington told the ministers that he held similar sentiments and that he had told the state leaders his attitude about slavery. The General, however, awkwardly refused to sign the petition, but promised to send his sentiments to the legislature if it considered the petitions.[114] The next year Washington wrote Lafayette congratulating him on his West Indian experiment. "Would to God a like spirit would diffuse itself generally into the minds of the people of this country, but I despair of seeing it." He informed Lafayette that the Methodist petitions had failed in the legislature—"they could scarcely obtain a reading." Perhaps, Washington lamented, it would be wrong to emancipate all of the slaves immediately because it would "be productive of much inconvenience and mischief." A gradual emancipation offered by legislative authority seemed more likely to succeed.[115]

Washington once told a visiting Englishman "that nothing but the rooting out of slavery can perpetuate the existence of our union by consolidating it in a common bond of principle." If, however, slavery divided America, Washington revealed to Edmund Randolph, "he had made up his mind to move and be of the northern."[116]

In December 1793, Washington wrote Arthur Young, an English agricultural reformer, that he wanted to bring "good farmers" to Mount Vernon as tenants. Washington would retain only the mansion house farm itself; the other four Mount Vernon farms would be leased to the English farmers. "Many of the Negroes, male and female, might be hired by the year as labourers" to work the land.[117] In this way, Washington could "liberate a certain species of property which I possess, very repugnantly to my own feelings."[118] In essence, rather than freeing his slaves and hiring them directly himself, Washington searched for a buffer that would insulate him from the criticism of his fellow Virginians.

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114. See "The Attempt to Abolish Slavery in Virginia," ibid., 33–36.

115. GW to Lafayette, Mount Vernon, May 10, 1786, ibid., 26.

116. Ibid., 242.

117. GW to Arthur Young, Philadelphia, December 12, 1793, Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXXIII, 174–83.

118. GW to Tobias Lear, Philadelphia, May 6, 1794, ibid., 358.

As President of the United States, Washington occasionally felt that freeing his slaves might serve as an example for other Southerners to free their slaves, but he also felt that such a public act by him might drive the North and the South further apart. With Washington as an example, the North might redouble its abolition efforts, while a beleaguered South might become increasingly more defensive. Rather than risk such divisiveness, Washington again avoided any public stance on slavery. Only in his will would he make a statement freeing his slaves.

Believing that Martha would outlive him, and knowing that his slaves and her dowager slaves had intermarried and had had children together, Washington realized the heartbreak that would occur if he freed only his slaves in his will. Therefore, Washington freed only one slave in his will. William Lee, who had faithfully served as Washington's valet throughout the war and after, was allowed his freedom. Lee had broken a kneecap in 1785 in an accident while assisting Washington while surveying his lands that made it difficult for Lee to walk especially when coupled with a severe case of rheumatism. Consequently, Lee could stay on the plantation as long as he wished. He was given an annual pension of $30 in addition to his regular clothing and food allowance. All of the other slaves would be freed upon Martha's death. Those who were old and suffered infirmities were ordered to be provided for by Washington's heirs. The young without parents would be made wards of the court until they were twenty-five, during which time they would be taught to read and write and "some useful occupation."

After Washington's death, it didn't take long before the slaves realized that their freedom was dependent upon Martha's death. Martha soon realized that the slaves were aware of this. She, therefore, freed all of the slaves in 1801, a year before her death.

RELIGION

George Washington was like many of his Virginia contemporaries when it came to religion. Outwardly he was a member in good standing of the Anglican Church which after

the Revolution became known as the Episcopalian Church. He was baptized and married in the church and served as godfather to several children. For over twenty years (1763–1784) he was on the Truro Parish vestry on which he played an active role until 1774. Despite this activity, Washington usually attended Sunday services only once a month, choosing instead the other Sundays to ride, hunt, read, write correspondence, update his plantation records, and entertain guests. While attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia for four months in 1787, Washington attended church only twice—once for the ordination of a Catholic priest. While president, however, Washington more regularly attended Sunday services at St. Paul's Chapel or Trinity Church in New York City and St. Peter's in Philadelphia. During this time, he did not participate in the sacrament of communion. Years later the Reverend James Abercrombie remembered that Washington and others of the congregation left the chapel after the sermon on communion Sunday, leaving Mrs. Washington, who always took communion. One Sunday, Abercrombie's sermon criticized those (especially those public figures) who set a bad example by eschewing communion. Sympathetic to Abercrombie's position, yet unwilling to give the impression that he was now taking communion because of his elevated status as president, Washington made it a point not to attend church on communion Sunday. Washington probably did not take communion because his head and heart were not in tune with the doctrine of that sacrament, and he did not wish to be hypocritical.

Washington, like many others at the time, felt that "Religion and morality are the essential pillars of Civil society."[119] Washington believed that there are certain "eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained." Any people who deviate from these rules could never expect "the propitious smiles of Heaven."[120] In his Farewell Ad-

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119. GW to the Clergy of Different Denominations, Philadelphia, March 3, 1797, Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXXV, 416.

120. GW's First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, II, 175.

dress announcing his retirement from the presidency, Washington wrote that

> 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 & citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect & to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private & 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 & experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.[121]

Washington believed that God smiled upon America and played a crucial role in its development. Heaven had blessed America with a bountiful land, with varied climates, and advantageously located navigable rivers. Never before was a people given "a fairer opportunity for political happiness." It would be left for the people of America to determine whether or not they "should" be completely free and happy.[122] When Americans faced uncertainties during the mid-1780s, Washington continued to have faith in God.

> It is indeed a pleasure from the walks of private life to view in retrospect, all the meanderings of our past labors—the difficulties through which we have waded—and the fortunate Haven to which the ship has been brought!

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121. Washington's Farewell Address, first printed in the newspapers and reprinted in a variety of pamphlets, was universally recognized as his legacy to his country. GW's Farewell Address, September 19, 1796, Higginbotham, 148.

122. George Washington Circular Letter to the State Executives, June 1783, Higginbotham, 116.

> Is it possible after this that it should founder? Will not the all wise, & all powerfull director of human events, preserve it? I think he will, he may however for wise purposes not discoverable by finite minds, suffer our indiscretions & folly to place our national character low in the political Scale—and this, unless more wisdom & less prejudice take the lead in our governments, will most assuredly be the case.[123]

Later events would justify Washington's faith. With God's help, Americans had won their independence and drafted and ratified a new federal Constitution. "No People," Washington said in his first inaugural address,

> 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.[124]

Washington staunchly advocated religious freedom. He wrote his neighbor George Mason that "no mans sentiments are more opposed to any kind of restraint upon religious principles than mine are."[125] Because "religious controversies are always productive of more acrimony and irreconcilable hatreds than those which spring from any other cause," Washington was grateful that Americans were "with slight shades of difference . . . the same Religion."[126] He believed

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123. GW to Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., Philadelphia, May 15, 1782, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, I, 385.

124. GW's First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789, Higginbotham, 132–33.

125. GW to George Mason, Mount Vernon, October 3, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, III, 292.

126. GW to Edward Newenham, Philadelphia, June 22, 1792, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, X, 493; GW's Farewell Address, September 19, 1796, Higginbotham, 141.

that "every man, conducting himself as a good citizen and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."[127] To the Society of New York Quakers, Washington professed that "The liberty enjoyed by the People of these States, of worshipping Almighty God agreable to their Consciences, is not only among the choicest of their Blessings, but also of their Rights."[128] To the members of the New Jerusalem Church of Baltimore, Washington wrote that "in this land of equal liberty, it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining and holding the highest offices that are known in the United States."[129]

To Washington, religious freedom and toleration did not mean a total separation of church and state. He encouraged his troops in both the French and Indian War and during the Revolution to attend worship services, and he supported the appointment of chaplains. He recognized congressional days of thanksgiving and even proclaimed them himself. And, unlike James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, Washington favored the use of tax revenue to support the ministers of each person's faith. "I am not amongst the number of those who are so much alarmed at the thoughts of making people pay towards the support of that which they profess, if of the denominations of Christians; or declare themselves Jews, Mahomitants or otherwise, & thereby obtain proper relief." Religion and morality were so important, that the state should make certain that ministers earned livable salaries. But given the tremendous public debate generated by the general assessment bill to levy taxes for the support of ministers in 1785, Washington wished that

127. GW to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia, New York, May 1789, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, II, 424.

128. New York, October 1789, ibid., IV, 266. For a similar statement, see GW's response to an address from the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, in August 1790, in the section on GW's presidential tours.

129. Philadelphia, January 27, 1793, ibid. XII, 53.

the bill had never been introduced "& as it has gone so far, that the Bill could die an easy death; because I think it will be productive of more quiet to the State, than by enacting it into a Law; which, in my opinion, wou'd be impolitic, admitting there is a decided majority for it, to the disgust of a respectable minority." If the bill died, the controversy "will soon subside." If the assessment bill passed, "it will rankle, & perhaps convulse the State."[130]

Washington, like many of the other Founders, shared some beliefs in deism but with some semblance of stoicism. Eighteenth-century deists believed in the classical virtues and in one great initiator who designed and started the universe that was subject to a panoply of unimpeachable "natural laws" propagated by the Supreme Architect of the Universe. Deists also believe in a life after death, but are uncertain what that afterlife entails. Thomas Jefferson, who along with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine might well be classified as deists, wrote that "when I was young I was fond of the speculations which seemed to promise some insight into that hidden country, but observing at length that they left me in the same ignorance in which they had found me, I have for very many years ceased to read or to think concerning them, and have reposed my head on that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent creator has made so soft for us, knowing how much we should be forced to use it."[131] On few occasions Washington alluded to not merely "the impervious shades of death," but to an afterlife in a world of spirits. Referring to his mother's death in a letter of condolences to his sister, Washington had "a hope that she is translated to a happier place."[132] Similarly, after hearing of former Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull's

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130. GW to George Mason, Mount Vernon, October 3, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, III, 293.

131. Jefferson to Isaac Story, Washington, December 5 1801, quoted in John P. Kaminski, comp. and ed., *The Quotable Jefferson* (Princeton, 2006), 366.

132. GW to William Fitzhugh, Mount Vernon, November 11, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, III, 352; GW to his sister Betty Washington Lewis, September 13, 1789, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, IV, 32.

death, he expressed "no doubt" that Trumbull would find "immeasurable happiness hereafter."[133]

Washington accepted these tenets, but also, contrary to deists, believed that God intervenes in the ongoing development of his universe—but only in conjunction with human beings. In essence, God takes sides—He supports the just and moral against the perverse and ignoble. Consequently, God interposed in favor of Americans in their righteous struggle for independence and their just pursuit of good government. "I rely much on the good sense of my Countrymen & trust that a superintending Providence will disappoint the hopes of our enemies."[134] This divine intervention applied to individuals as well as nations. Washington firmly believed that it was his destiny—his fate—to lead the American people and that on several occasions God had intervened to spare his life. After the disastrous defeat at the Battle of the Monongahela in 1755, in which Washington escaped unscathed while almost every other officer was killed, Washington wrote that he had been left in the land "of the livg by the miraculous care of Providence, that protected me beyond all human expectation."[135] After the Revolution, Washington wrote that he felt like "a wearied Traveller must do, who, after treading many a painful step, with a heavy burden on his Shoulders, is eased of the latter, having reached the Goal to which all the former were directed—& from his House top is looking back, & tracing with a grateful eye the Meanders by which he escaped the quicksands and Mires which lay in his way, and into which none but the All-powerful guide, & great disposer of human Events could have prevented his falling."[136]

Washington rarely used the word "God," choosing instead to use the terms "Heaven" or "Providence," which

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133. GW to Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., Mount Vernon, October 1, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, III, 289.

134. GW to the Marquis de Chastellux, Mount Vernon, August 18, 1786, ibid., IV, 220.

135. Grizzard, 270.

136. GW to Henry Knox, Mount Vernon, February 20, 1784, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, I, 138.

were often expressed in language in the plural tense using the non-gender specific pronoun "it." Frequently he reverted to Masonic or deist terminology, such as the Great Ruler of Events, the Governor of the Universe, the Supreme Architect of the Universe, the Sovereign Dispenser of life and health, the Grand Architect, the Director of Human Affairs, etc. He virtually never used the name Jesus Christ in writing, but did, in his June 1783 Circular to the states (his farewell address from the army), call upon Americans "to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion; without an humble imitation . . . we can never hope to be a happy nation."[137]

Washington pictured God as omnipotent and benign. Through his "Infinite Wisdom," God dispensed justice to all—the good and the wicked and everyone in between. Astonishment, adoration, and gratitude were due this divine Being, whose actions were often inscrutable. At the end of the harsh winter encampment at Valley Forge, Washington wrote that "The determinations of Providence are always wise—often inscrutable—and, tho' its decrees appear to bear hard upon us at times, is, nevertheless meant for gracious purposes."[138]

God's inscrutability was particularly apparent when it came to illness and death. Human beings should hope for the best as long as there was hope, but once death was either imminent or occurred, the good Christian would gracefully acquiesce. Alluding to the death of his favorite nephew, Washington wrote that "It is a loss I sincerely regret; but as it is the will of Heaven, whose decrees are always just & wise, I submit to it without a murmer."[139] To Henry Knox, Washington's former artillery commander and secretary of

137. *A Great and Good Man*, 16.

138. GW to Bryan Fairfax, Valley Forge, March 1, 1778, *GW Papers, Revolutionary War Series*, XIV, 9.

139. GW to Bryan Fairfax, Philadelphia, March 6, 1793, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, XII, 271.

war, Washington wrote that it "is not for man to scan the wisdom of Providence. The best he can do, is to submit to its decrees. Reason, religion and Philosophy, teaches us to do this, but 'tis time alone that can ameliorate the pangs of humanity, and soften its woes."[140] In mourning his aged mother, he wrote his sister that "Awful, and affecting as the death of a Parent is, there is consolation in knowing that Heaven has spared ours to an age, beyond which few attain, and favored her with the full enjoyment of her mental faculties, and as much bodily strength as usually falls to the lot of four score. Under these considerations . . . it is the duty of her relatives to yield due submission to the decrees of the Creator."[141] In pondering his own inevitable but unforeseeable death, Washington wrote to the Marquis de Lafayette that "I will move gently down the stream of life until I sleep with my fathers."[142] The trees that he had planted grew rapidly and reminded him of his own "declination, & their disposition to spread their mantles over me, before I go hence to return no more."[143] He hoped, that "when the summons comes, I shall endeavor to obey it with a good grace."[144]

WASHINGTON'S LIBRARY

As the "Father of His Country," George Washington is remembered for many things. Unlike Thomas Jefferson, however, Washington is not remembered for his library. In fact, because of the descriptions of him by a handful of his contemporaries, Washington is not associated with books and reading. Alexander Hamilton said that Washington read vir-

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140. GW to Henry Knox, Philadelphia, March 2, 1797, Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXXV, 409.

141. GW to Betty Washington Lewis, New York, September 13, 1789, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, IV, 32.

142. GW to Lafayette, Mount Vernon, February 1, 1782, Lucas, 21.

143. GW to the Marquis de Chastellux, Mount Vernon, June 2, 1784, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, I, 413.

144. GW to Burgess Ball, Mount Vernon, September 28, 1789, Lucas, 21.

tually nothing at all and that his aides did all of his writing. Fifteen years after Washington's death, Jefferson described him in remarkably glowing terms, considering that the two men had been estranged for the last half dozen years of Washington's life. Jefferson said of Washington that "he wrote readily, rather diffusely, in an easy & 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 journalising his agricultural proceedings, occupied most of his leisure hours within doors."[145]

Washington did little to alter that image when he occasionally wrote to friends that his time was almost totally consumed in "rural amusements" and in correspondence, "the drudgery of the pen."[146] Washington was far more likely to order and receive a case of wine from European merchants than a box of books. Later in life he advised his step-grandson that "Light reading (by this, I mean books of little importance) may amuse for the moment but leaves nothing solid behind."[147]

In reality, Washington was somewhat more bookish than most of his contemporaries would have us believe. Not a bibliophile like Jefferson or James Madison, not an avid reader like John Adams, Washington had an extensive personal library that could be divided into five segments: (1) an archives of personal and public papers, (2) public records, (3) atlases and maps, (4) newspapers and magazines, and (5) books and pamphlets.

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145. Jefferson to Walter Jones, Monticello, January 2, 1814, J. Jefferson Looney, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series* (15 vols. to date, Princeton, N.J., 2004–), VII, 102.

146. GW to George William Fairfax, Mount Vernon, February 27, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, III, 390.

147. GW to George Washington Parke Custis, Philadelphia, December 19, 1796, Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXXV, 341.

Like many of his contemporaries, Washington believed that he and his generation had a special destiny. Washington and many of his contemporaries studiously saved their correspondence and public papers as a testament to their effort to obtain independence and preserve liberty. Six wagon loads of Washington's papers arrived overland at Mount Vernon at the end of the Revolution. (Washington would not trust this valuable cargo to be shipped by sea.) Secretary of Congress Charles Thomson referred to Washington's papers "as invaluable documents from which future historians will derive light & knowledge. I consider it as a most fortunate circumstance that through all your dangers and difficulties you have happily preserved them entire."[148]

Many of Washington's letters were dictated by him to his secretaries who recorded them in letterbooks which remained in Washington's library. Washington then personally copied the letters (sometimes changing a word here and there) which he sent to the addressees. When Washington's papers arrived at Mount Vernon in 1784 some had been recently sorted and copied in letterbooks but others were still in disarray. In May 1786 Washington hired Tobias Lear, a 24-year-old New Hampshire native and recent Harvard graduate, to tutor Washington's two step grandchildren living at Mount Vernon, assist with correspondence, arrange the General's papers, and care for the library. The warm relationship between Washington and Lear lasted throughout Washington's life.

Several friends and acquaintances encouraged Washington to write either a history of the Revolution or his memoirs. He never gave a thought to doing either, and, in fact, did not want anyone to have access to his public papers before his death unless Congress would first open its papers

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148. Thomson to GW, Philadelphia, April 22, 1785, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, II, 517. Others were not so fortunate. New York Governor George Clinton moved all of his papers to Kingston for safe keeping only to have them destroyed when the British burned the town. Then in 1911, fifty boxes of Clinton's papers were destroyed in the great fire at the New York State Library in Albany.

for historical research. He told a friend "that any memoirs of my life, distinct & unconnected with the general history of the war, 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 & say what they please of me, than by an act of mine to have vanity or ostentation imputed to me. . . . I do not think vanity is a trait of my character."[149]

Washington had a mind that could not easily grasp what he read. To fully comprehend information, he had to write things down or copy them. Consequently, he kept minutely detailed plantation records that helped him (and subsequently us) understand the economies of an eighteenth-century planter who experimented with over sixty different crops to maintain the viability of Mount Vernon.

As a surveyor and a military commander, Washington had a keen interest in maps. At the time of his death, his library contained at least six atlases, 150 individual maps, and a book on navigational charts. Most interesting was a portfolio of thirty-five maps used by Washington in various Revolutionary war campaigns, as well as the most modern atlas published by Mathew Carey in Philadelphia in 1796.

Washington's library also contained a large collection of printed public documents. Included among these were Parliamentary records, debates, and laws, the laws of Virginia and other colonies and states, the journals of Virginia's colonial House of Burgesses and postwar House of Delegates, the journals and debates of the state conventions that adopted the Constitution of 1787, Indian treaties, Washington's and Adams's presidential addresses to Congress, the cabinet secretaries' reports, the laws of the United States under the new Constitution, the journals of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, and numerous miscellaneous pieces. He

149. GW to James Craik, Mount Vernon, March 25, 1784, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, I, 235. See also GW to William Gordon, Philadelphia, May 8, 1784; David Humphreys to GW, New York, July 15, 1784; and GW to John Witherspoon, Mount Vernon, March 8, 1785, ibid., 376–77, 527, III, 415.

also for a time retained the records of the Constitutional Convention that drafted the new Constitution of 1787. The delegates to that Convention nearly voted to destroy their records but decided better to entrust them with Washington who was instructed to turn them over to proper authorities if, in fact, the Constitution should be adopted. As president in March 1796, Washington turned over these records to the State Department, which had cognizance not only over foreign affairs but also interior matters.

Washington irregularly subscribed to or received complimentary copies of more than a dozen newspapers and magazines. Most of the newspapers were American weeklies with a few dailies sprinkled in, while the magazines were all monthly publications. The magazines—including the Philadelphia *American Museum*, the Philadelphia *Columbian Magazine*, the *New York Magazine*, and London's *Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Remembrancer*—were all compilations of literature, poetry, political and philosophical writings, history, historical documents, news from around the world, medical advice, commercial information, religious writings, items on food and drink, geography, grammar, accounts of humorous events, etc. The different titles were usually bound separately every six months making them easy to store and reference. Washington tried to set aside a certain portion of the day to read this periodical literature which kept him abreast with the affairs of the world, but, in writing to his commercial agent in Philadelphia in the mid-1780s he indicated that "my other avocations, will not afford me time to Read them oftentimes; & when I do attempt it, find them more troublesome, than Profitable."[150] Consequently, Washington canceled most of his newspaper subscriptions.

Washington's library contained about 900 books and over 100 pamphlets kept at Mount Vernon in the upstairs study, in the south room on the first floor, or on tables or in bookcases throughout the house. Washington usually signed his name on the upper right-hand corner of the title

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150. GW to Clement Biddle, Mount Vernon, May 18, 1786, ibid., IV, 54.

page and often placed his book plate in the back of the book. Relatively few of these items were purchased by Washington for either his own use or for the use of Martha or her children and grandchildren.

Most of the books and pamphlets were received as complimentary copies from the authors. A goodly number of these works were even dedicated to Washington as was Thomas Paine's first volume of *Rights of Man* (1790), even though Washington discouraged this practice. In one case, Nicholas Pike, the author of *A New and Complete System of Arithmetic*, asked Washington for permission to dedicate the work to him. Washington declined the honor, but in the interim the book was published with the dedication. Embarrassed, Pike apologetically wrote to Washington explaining how the book went to press before Washington's disclaimer had arrived. Washington graciously responded praising the author for such a valuable work and hoping that it would be financially profitable for Pike.

Washington read some of the volumes in his library avidly (particularly the pamphlets written during the public debate over the ratification of the U.S. Constitution from 1787 to 1789), while others were of little or no interest to him. Occasionally Washington loaned volumes to friends or sent them to political associates, sometimes asking them in turn to pass the book or pamphlet along to others. Often Washington's guests (such as Lafayette in 1784) spent time reading from the library while Washington attended to his daily routine plantation duties. When Washington returned home, the guests and he would discuss the readings as well as the events of the Revolution, agricultural matters, and the affairs of the day. Naturally Washington could not read any work published in a foreign language, although Lafayette wrote in sending Neckar's popular work on the finances of France that Washington could "find translators enough."[151]

Authors who sent Washington complimentary copies had a variety of motivations. All wanted to pay tribute to

151. Lafayette to GW, Paris, March 19, 1785, ibid., II, 450.

the great man. Most wanted Washington to be aware of their authorship, especially those who wrote under a pseudonym. These authors usually accompanied their publications with a short cover letter subtly indicating their authorship. Some hoped that Washington might assist in the sales of their volumes. William Gordon, for instance, persuaded a reluctant Washington to circulate subscription papers for his history of the Revolution. Uncertain whether to send Washington a complimentary copy of his history of New Hampshire, the Reverend Jeremy Belknap asked his friend and literary agent Ebenezer Hazard for advice. Hazard, postmaster general of the United States since 1782, was the compiler and editor of a two-volume collection of American state papers published in 1792 for which President Washington subscribed. Hazard wrote Belknap, "I think it will be quite polite to present General Washington with a copy of your History, and it will produce a letter from him in his own handwriting, which will be worth preserving. I have several, which I intend to hand down carefully to posterity as highly valuable." Belknap sent Washington a copy of his book accompanied by a letter praising Washington "with a degree of respect approaching to veneration." As usual, Washington responded with brevity. Belknap told Hazard that though Washington's response was "short and expresses but little, [it] means something very pertinent and interesting. I shall, as you guess, rank it among my valuables."[152]

The books that most interested Washington dealt with practical matters about how to run the plantation—agriculture, horticulture, gardening, and animal husbandry were common, including a series of about 100 tracts from the British Board of Agriculture. But other subjects were valued as well. Rudimentary medical and veterinary works were needed to care for the family, guests, slaves, and animals. Slave owners or overseers provided the first medical attention for those who were sick. Only with severe illnesses or accidents were physicians called to the plantation from Alexandria. A wide variety of military studies had also been

152. Quoted in ibid., 2–3, 3, 251.

gathered dealing with artillery, bayonet exercises, cavalry, the code of military standing, discipline, duties, engineering, fortifications, maneuvers, the militia, ordinance, projectiles, tactics, uniforms, and lists of British and Canadian officers who had served during the Revolution.

Washington's library also included literary works (Shakespeare, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*); poetry (Joseph Addison, Joel Barlow, Robert Burns, Samuel Butler, Philip Freneau, David Humphreys, Ossian, Alexander Pope, William Preston, James Thomson, and Mercy Otis Warren); classical writings (the *Travels of Cyrus*, the *Works of Horace*, Seneca's *Morals*, Sully's *Memoirs*, John Locke, Letters of Junius); histories (of England, France, Greece, Ireland, Prussia, Rome, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, Virginia, the church in New England, Shays's and the Whiskey rebellions, and William Bligh's account of the mutiny on the *Bounty*); histories of the Revolution (by Jonathan Boucher, William Heath, Richard Price, David Ramsay and William Gordon); diplomatic works (the Barbary States, Citizen Genet, and Frederick the Great), descriptions of and treaties with various Indian tribes, legal works (the law of nature, the law of nations, reports of judicial cases including *Chisholm* v. *Georgia*, James Wilson's lectures for his law course, and the landlord's law); dictionaries and reference works (Samuel Johnson's dictionary and books on grammar); religious works (several Bibles, a concordance, and many sermons printed as pamphlets); geographies (Jedidiah Morse's *American Geography* and *American Gazetteer* and a European gazetteer); travel accounts (by William Bartram, Brissot de Warville, Andrew Barnaby, Jonathan Carver, the Marquis de Chastellux, and John Drayton); works on politics (including the two-volume edition of *The Federalist* written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay under the pseudonym Publius) and political economy (works on paper currency, banks, and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*); science and natural history (works on population, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and Walter Minto's books on mathematics and the planets); and

a variety of works on social reform, including the movement for penitentiaries and anti-slavery pamphlets particularly by Quaker Anthony Benezet and Englishman Granville Sharp.

Washington left his public papers to his nephew Bushrod Washington, who had recently been appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court by President John Adams. The private papers, books, and pamphlets were also left to Bushrod but only after Martha Washington's death. Martha could save those that "are worth preserving." Wanting to preserve a degree of privacy after her husband's death, Martha destroyed all the letters in her possession between her and her husband.

Bushrod Washington occupied Mount Vernon after Martha's death in 1802 and died in 1829. Over these three decades, he added to the library. He gave much of the original library (658 volumes) to his nephew George C. Washington and a large part of his additions (486 volumes and most of the pamphlets) to another nephew, John A. Washington. All of the law books and state documents were to go to his grand nephew Bushrod Washington Herbert if he became trained in the law. By acts of Congress in 1834 and 1849, the federal government purchased Washington's public and private papers which were placed under the control of the State Department. In 1908 the papers were transferred to the Library of Congress where they remain today. George C. Washington sold his portion of Washington's library to Henry Stevens, a book seller, who announced in 1847 or 1848 that he was going to send the books to the British Museum. An outraged group of men from Boston and Cambridge took up a subscription of $5,000 and bought the volumes from Stevens for $3,800. The subscribers gave the books to the Boston Anthenæum, where they reside today.[153]

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153. Much of the detail about Washington's library is found in Appleton P. C. Griffin's *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenæum* (Boston, 1897). See also Kenin J. Hayes, *George Washington: A Life in Books*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

COMING OUT OF RETIREMENT: THE CONVENTION IN PHILADELPHIA

After his retirement, the country did not heed Washington's advice in his 1783 circular to the states. Congress seemed impotent, state politics became increasingly partisan and virulent, the wartime debt largely went unpaid, calls for separate confederacies were openly and increasingly discussed, and a nascent desire for the restoration of monarchy surfaced. A deep economic depression gripped the country and animosity between debtors and creditors escalated in every state. Violence flared in most states. Debtor farmers in western Massachusetts closed the civil courts to stop foreclosure proceedings, while in Virginia debtors in two counties burned courthouses, thereby destroying tax records and obliterating their obligations. Every attempt to strengthen Congress and to amend the Articles of Confederation had failed. Washington wrote that there were combustibles in every state ready to be ignited by a single spark.[154]

Although he advocated radical change in the Articles of Confederation, Washington cautioned against monarchy. "Admitting the utility—nay necessity of the form—yet that the period is not arrived for adopting the change without shaking the Peace of this Country to its foundation."[155] In this explosive situation, with the very principles of the Revolution at stake, Washington wholeheartedly supported calling a general convention of the states to address the crisis. Washington wrote to James Madison that the proposed convention should "adopt no temporising expedient, but probe the defects of the Constitution [i.e., the Articles of Confederation] to the bottom, and provide radical cures, whether they are agreed to or not. A conduct like this, will stamp wisdom and dignity on the proceedings, and be

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154. GW to Henry Knox, Mount Vernon, December 26, 1786, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, IV, 482.

155. GW to James Madison, Mount Vernon, March 31, 1787, ibid., V, 115.

looked to as a luminary, which sooner or later will shed its influence."[156]

In December 1786 the Virginia legislature elected Washington a delegate to the general convention, which was to meet in Philadelphia in May 1787. He declined the appointment, alluding to his 1783 public promise never to serve in public office again. He had other concerns also. Suffering from rheumatism, he was not feeling well, and his mother and sister were both seriously ill. Another major concern was the Society of the Cincinnati. This fraternal order of former military officers established in 1784 had elected Washington as its president. The Society scheduled its triennial convention for Philadelphia in the spring of 1787. Washington, who did not wish to be president of the Society, declined an invitation to attend its convention. Now to accept an appointment to the federal convention in the same city at the same time would seem to be an insult to his former fellow officers.

Many of Washington's friends, whose advice he sought and respected, pleaded with him to attend the Philadelphia convention. Virginia Governor Edmund Randolph told him that the country's gloomy prospects admitted "one ray of hope, that those, who began, carried on & consummated the revolution, can yet rescue America from the impending ruin."[157] James Madison told Washington "it was the opinion of every judicious friend whom I consulted that your name could not be spared from the Deputation to the Meeting."[158] Two weeks later Madison again pleaded with Washington that the "dark and menacing" clouds that threatened "our national existence or safety" superseded all of Washington's reasons for not returning to public life.[159] Writing more bluntly than anyone else would dare, Secretary for Foreign Affairs John Jay told Washington well before a convention was ever called that he must "favor your country

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156. Ibid., 116.

157. Randolph to GW, Richmond, December 6, 1786, ibid., IV, 445.

158. Madison to GW, Richmond, December 7, 1786, ibid., 448.

159. Madison to GW, Richmond, December 24, 1786, ibid., 474–75.

with your counsels on such an important & single occasion." Jay had told Washington that "altho' you have wisely retired from public Employment, and calmly view from the Temple of Fame, the various Exertions of the Sovereignty and Independence which Providence has enabled You to be so greatly & gloriously instrumental in securing to your country; yet I am persuaded you cannot view them with the Eye of an unconcerned Spectator."[160]

Unsure of what to do, Washington sought the advice of two of his most trusted friends—David Humphreys of Connecticut and Henry Knox of Massachusetts, then serving in New York City as the Confederation's secretary at war. Washington was especially worried that if he refused to attend the convention, it would be "considered as a dereliction to republicanism," or worse, he might be accused of wanting the convention to fail so that he could become king.[161] Humphreys, "disclosing the very sentiments of my soul without reservation," advised Washington not to attend the convention. It was doomed to fail, and, if it did, Washington's "character would be materially affected." When the convention failed, Humphreys wrote, Washington's "personal influence & character" would be "justly considered, the last stake which America has to play." Rhetorically, Humphreys asked Washington: "Should you not reserve yourself for the united call of a Continent entire?" The army, Humphreys implied, with Washington at its head, would use "compulsion" to make necessary changes.[162]

Knox agreed that Washington should not attend the convention if "only amendments and patch work" revision of the Articles of Confederation were expected. Washington's "reputation would in a degree suffer" from such halfway measures. But if Washington attended the convention, he would certainly be elected its president. And if the convention proposed "an energetic, and judicious system to be

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160. Jay to GW, New York, March 16, 1786, ibid., III, 601.

161. GW to Knox, Mount Vernon, March 8, 1787, ibid., V, 75.

162. Humphreys to GW, New Haven, January 20, 1787, ibid., IV, 526, 529.

proposed under Your signature," and if the new system of government would be adopted, you would have doubly earned "the glorious republican epithet—The Father of Your Country."[163] Washington could not refuse; he would attend the convention.

Washington was indeed elected president of the convention. But most of the time during the first six weeks of the convention he did not preside, since the delegates sat as a committee of the whole. Even so, he did not participate in the debates. His mere presence, however, cast an aura over the proceedings—within the convention, in Philadelphia, and throughout the country.

Early in the convention's proceedings, as Washington was about to convene the session, a delegate came forward and handed him a sheet of paper with the notes of the convention's debate that had been found on the floor. Washington said nothing about this breach of the convention's rule of secrecy until the day's session ended. Before adjourning the meeting, Washington stood and said:

> Gentlemen, I am sorry to find that some one Member of this Body, has been so neglectful of the secrets of the Convention as to drop in the State House a copy of their proceedings, which by accident was picked up and delivered to me this Morning.—I must entreat Gentlemen to be more careful, least our transactions get into the News Papers, and disturb the public repose by premature speculations.—I know not whose Paper it is, but there it is, (throwing it down on the Table)—let him who owns it take it.

According to William Pierce, a delegate from Georgia, Washington bowed, picked up his hat and left the room "with a dignity so severe that every Person seemed alarmed."

Several delegates, among them Pierce (who recorded and preserved this anecdote), anxiously fumbled through their papers to see if their notes were missing. Unable to find his notes, Pierce timidly approached the table to claim the lost

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163. Knox to GW, New York, March 19, 1787, ibid., V, 96.

paper. He was relieved, however, to find that the handwriting was not his. Greatly relieved, Pierce left the convention and found his missing notes in the pocket of another coat left in his boarding house. All of the delegates felt the power and intensity of Washington's earnestness, and no one ever claimed the paper.[164]

Washington's presence in the convention instilled confidence. The popular feeling was that this convention, with General Washington and Benjamin Franklin as members, would succeed in recommending desperately needed changes to the Articles of Confederation when all previous attempts had failed. The *Massachusetts Centinel*, April 14, 1787, reported that it was reasonable to expect that the convention led by Washington and Franklin "cannot but produce the most salutary measures." The names of these two patriots affixed to the convention's recommendations "will stamp a confidence in them, which the narrow-soul'd, antifederal politicians in the several States, who, by their influence, have hitherto damn'd us a nation, will not dare to attack, or endeavour to nullify."[165] The Petersburg *Virginia Gazette*, July 26, 1787, wrote that "The Grand Fœderal Convention it is hoped will act wisely, for on their determination alone, and our acquiescence, depends our future happiness and prosperity; and if there lives a man equal to so arduous a task, it is a Washington!"[166] Some people, however, saw that Washington's role in the convention had resulted in a dangerous situation. Thomas Jefferson, serving as America's minister to France, and "Federal Farmer," perhaps the most articulate writer opposed to the Constitution, suggested that the Constitution gave great powers to the president only because the convention expected that Washington would be the first to fill that office. Washington would never violate the public trust, but what would happen after Washington

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164. Richard Leffler, John P. Kaminski, and Samuel K. Fore, eds., *William Pierce on the Constitutional Convention and the Constitution . . .* (Dallas, Texas, 2012), 28.

165. Reprinted thirteen times from Vermont to New York.

166. Reprinted seven times from Massachusetts to South Carolina.

stepped down? What would happen under President Slushington?[167]

Washington kept busy during his four months in Philadelphia while the convention sat. He visited factories, inspected militia units, and attended concerts, museums, and plays. Washington spent most evenings with fellow delegates or friends except for two nights a week when he sequestered himself and wrote letters that would go out the following day in the stagecoach mail. When the convention recessed for ten days to allow the Committee of Detail to arrange the agreed upon resolutions in the form of a draft constitution, Washington abandoned his usual schedule and accepted an invitation from Pennsylvania delegate Gouverneur Morris to go fishing. Though an avid fisherman, Washington at first rejected Morris' invitation because of previous commitments. Although Morris enticed Washington with descriptions of a well-stocked trout stream on his brother-in-law's farm, Washington still declined. But when Morris told Washington that the farm and stream were near Valley Forge, he could not refuse. On the first day of their trip, Washington recorded that he and Morris fished with little success. The next day Morris went fishing alone, while Washington spent the entire day at the camp ruins recalling the awful hardships endured during that bitter winter a decade earlier.[168]

On his way back to the farmhouse, Washington saw several farmers in a field. Dismounting his white stallion, he jumped over a fence and introduced himself, asking what they were doing. The astonished farmers told Washington they were planting buckwheat. He asked for details about sowing, tending, and harvesting the crop. That night, Washington wrote to his nephew George Augustus Washington,

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167. John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* (32 vols. to date, Madison, Wis., 1976–), XVII, 330; Hugh Ledlie to John Lamb, Hartford, January 15, 1788, ibid., XX, 610. Hereafter cited as DHRC.

168. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Diaries of George Washington* (6 vols., Charlottesville, Va., 1976–1979), V, 179.

who was overseeing Mount Vernon in the general's absence, relating all he had learned about buckwheat and instructing him to plant this new crop. That same evening, the farmers must have excitedly told their incredulous wives and friends of their encounter with the great man.

RATIFYING THE NEW CONSTITUTION

The convention approved the Constitution on September 17, 1787. Washington signed as president of the convention and as a Virginia delegate. He also signed a letter prepared by the convention to explain the convention's actions:

> In all our deliberations we kept steadily in our view, that which appears to us the greatest interest of every true American, the consolidation of our Union, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety, perhaps our national existence. This important consideration, seriously and deeply impressed on our minds, led each State in the Convention to be less rigid on points of inferior magnitude, than might have been otherwise expected; and thus the Constitution, which we now present, is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable.

The Constitution would not satisfy every state completely. But the delegates believed that it would "promote the lasting welfare of that country so dear to us all, and secure her freedom and happiness."[169] Although Washington, as much as possible, refrained from public participation in the debate over ratifying the Constitution, this letter under Washington's signature was printed repeatedly along with the new Constitution throughout the country in newspapers, broadsides, pamphlets, magazines, and almanacs. It was also frequently quoted in Federalist essays defending the Constitution. The letter strongly supported a powerful argument made by those who supported the Constitution: "If

169. DHRC, XIII, 211–12.

Washington supports the Constitution, who are you to oppose it?" It was a difficult question to answer.

THE PRESIDENCY: ACCEPTING THE OFFICE

Everyone presumed Washington would be elected the first president under the Constitution. But, would he accept the position? He preferred retirement. Everyone could readily agree with a young Frenchman visiting America: "This is a very happy man and one who deserves to be. Everyone mentions him for president . . . if he is not it, there is no new Constitution."[170] His friends and advisers told him he must accept his country's call. Alexander Hamilton said that by attending the Constitutional Convention he had made a commitment to the new plan of government and that he was, in essence, "pledged" to assume the presidency.[171] General Anthony Wayne wrote to Lafayette on July 4, 1788, that the Constitution had been ratified and that "our Illustrious friend Genl. Washington" would be elected president. Wayne ended his letter, "I wish he had a son."[172] In April 1789, with Washington still uncommitted, Wayne wrote the General that he must accept the presidency. The task would be arduous, but he was capable. "The unbounded confidence placed in you, by every class of Citizens (which no other man cou'd expect or hope for) will contribute to render it less difficult—in fact—it is a Crisis that requires a Washington!"[173]

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170. Victor Marie duPont to Pierre Samuel duPont, November 28, 1788, Victor duPont Papers, Group 3, Box 1, Folder 1788, Eleutherian Mills Historical Library.

171. Hamilton to GW, New York, September 1788, Syrett, *Hamilton*, V, 220–21.

172. Wayne to Lafayette, Savannah, July 4, 1776, DHRC, XVIII, 221. Wayne was not the only American who hoped a monarchy might one day be established. Perhaps Wayne was hinting to Lafayette that he should come to America and become Washington's adopted son and be next in line to become president or elective king. As a citizen of Virginia, Maryland, and Connecticut, Lafayette would have been eligible to be president.

173. Wayne to GW, Richmond, Ga., April 6, 1789, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, II, 37.

Perhaps the most convincing argument came from Gouverneur Morris early in the debate over ratifying the Constitution. Morris was certain that Washington's attendance at the Philadelphia convention had "been of infinite Service" in gaining supporters. But,

> 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. . . .
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> Thus much for the public Opinion on these Subjects, which must not be neglected in a Country where Opinion is every Thing. . . . You are best fitted to fill that Office. Your cool steady Temper is indispensibly 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.

Morris understood Washington's reluctance to serve. He knew that Washington's service would be more important to the country than pleasant for himself. But Morris assured Washington that his continued public service would provide "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."[174]

Washington knew that becoming president would be the popular thing for him to do. But he did not seek popularity. "Though I prize, as I ought, the good opinion of my fellow Citizens; yet if I know myself, I would not seek or retain popularity at the expence of one social duty or moral virtue." He would follow his conscience "as it respected my God, my Country and myself. . . . And certain I am, whensoever I shall be convinced the good of my Country requires my reputation to be put in risque, regard for my own fame will not come in competition with an object of so much magnitude."[175] Although Martha Washington objected to her husband becoming President—"it was much too late for him to go into publick life again"—she realized that "it was not to be avoided."[176] When the time came, Washington decided that duty required him to accept the presidency.

THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Washington asked his old friend David Humphreys, on a protracted visit to Mount Vernon, to draft his inaugural address. Several friends advised Washington not to deliver the two-and-a-half-hour speech. Washington painstakingly copied the speech and agreed that it was too magisterial as

174. Morris to GW, Philadelphia, October 30, 1787, DHRC, XIII, 513–14.

175. GW to Henry Lee, Mount Vernon, September 22, 1788, *GW Papers, Confederation Series*, VI, 530–31.

176. Martha Washington to John Dandridge, Mount Vernon, April 20, 1789, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 213.

well as far too long for the occasion.[177] He asked James Madison to write another draft, outlining to him the things that should be included.

Washington, clad in a dark brown suit of Connecticut broadcloth with metal wing-spread eagle buttons, white silk stockings, and a magnificent ceremonial sword, took the oath of office about 1:00 P.M. on April 30, 1789, on the balcony of Federal Hall (the Old City Hall) located where Wall Street meets Broad and Nassau in New York City. New York's Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, the highest ranking judicial officer in the state, administered the oath, after which Livingston proclaimed, "Long Live George Washington, President of the United States." As the crowd shouted "God bless our Washington! Long live our beloved president," Washington, Vice President John Adams, and the other attending dignitaries reentered the building and proceeded to the Senate chamber where Washington delivered his four-page address in about twelve minutes to a joint session of Congress.[178]

Massachusetts Congressman Fisher Ames sat close to Washington at the ceremony. "Time," Ames wrote, "has made havoc upon his face." The speech itself was dramatic. "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 . . . produced emotions of the most affecting kind upon the members. I . . . sat entranced. It seemed to me an allegory in which virtue was personified."[179]

Washington performed his "first official Act" as president with great anxiety. Although he preferred to spend "the asylum of my declining years" in retirement at Mount Vernon, he could not reject this latest call to duty. He understood "the magnitude and difficulty of the trust in which the voice of my Country called me." He was uncertain

177. Sometimes it took the double reinforcement of reading and writing a document for Washington to comprehend it fully.

178. *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, II, 156–57.

179. Ames to George Richards Minot, New York, May 3, 1789, Seth Ames, ed., *Works of Fisher Ames* (2 vols., Boston, 1854), I, 34.

whether he had the ability to succeed in leading the country's "civil administration" under the new Constitution. "It would be peculiarly improper [at this time] to omit . . . 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." Only through the benediction of "the Great Author of every public and private good" would Americans retain their "liberties and happiness."

Washington acknowledged that Americans had just passed through their second revolution—a peaceful one, changing "the system of their United Government, [through] the tranquil deliberation, and voluntary consent of so many distinct communities." This revolution "cannot be compared with the means by which most Governments have been established."

One duty of the executive department of the new government was to make proposals for Congress to consider. Instead, however, Washington acknowledged "the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism" of the members of the first Congress. He was confident that "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." America's "national policy, will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality. . . . the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right." "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."

Washington advocated that Congress propose amendments to the new Constitution not to change the structure of the government, but in the form of a bill of rights to ameliorate the fear expressed by Antifederalists during the ratification struggle. "A reverence for the characteristic rights of freemen, and a regard for the public harmony, will sufficiently influence" Congress's deliberations on this matter.

Following the address, the company walked about 700 yards to St. Paul's Episcopal Chapel for services conducted

by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Provost, the newly-elected chaplain of the Senate. After the services, the President was escorted to his residence where he dined with a small group of friends and advisers. The inaugural events ended that evening with a brilliant display of fireworks.

Committees of each house of Congress responded favorably to the speech. The House committee, chaired by James Madison, said that the House would pay particular attention to Washington's request for a bill of rights. The Senate rejoiced with all Americans "that, in Obedience to the Call of our common Country, you have returned once more to public life." They told Washington that "in you all Interests unite; and we have no doubt that your past Services, great as they have been, will be equalled by your future Exertions; and that your Prudence and Sagacity as a statesman will tend to avert the Dangers to which we were exposed, to give stability to the present Government, and Dignity and Splendor to that country, which your Skill and Valor as a Soldier, so eminently contributed to raise to independence and Empire."[180] The Senate promised to work with the President "in every Measure, which may strengthen the Union, conduce to the Happiness, or secure and perpetuate the Liberties of this great confederated Republic."[181] Washington thanked each house for the warm remarks and wrote that he would "readily engage" with them "in the arduous, but pleasing, task, of attempting to make a Nation happy."[182]

PRESIDING OVER THE EXPERIMENT

Washington hoped to serve only two years as president, but his advisers pleaded with him to finish his four-year term. With war raging in Europe, no one else, they told him, could lead the country through such perilous times. He

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180. May 16, 1789, *GW Papers*, *Presidential Series*, II, 310.

181. Ibid., 311.

182. GW to the U.S. Senate, New York, May 18, 1789, ibid., 324. Washington asked James Madison to draft his response to each house.

agreed to finish the term, and asked James Madison to draft a farewell address. As the term neared completion, his advisers again argued that the country could not afford to lose him—no successor could unite the different sections of the country. He must stay on for another term. He alone, "as the Atlas of the New Government," could preserve the Union.[183] Archibald Stuart of Virginia captured the sense of the country. "I never knew the Minds of men so much disposed to acquiesce in public Measures as at present. Their Language is all is well. While G. Washington lives he will crush both men & Measures that would abridge either our happiness or Liberty. In short we are all in the same State of Security with Passengers on board a Vessel navigated by an Able captain & skillful Mariners."[184] Abigail Adams, the vice president's wife, felt that no one else "could rule over this great peopl[e] & consolidate them into one mighty Empire." She described Washington as having "so happy a faculty of appearing to accommodate & yet carrying his point, that if he was not really one of the best intentioned Men in the world he might be a very dangerous one. he is polite with dignity, affable without familiarity, distant without Haughtyness, Grave without Austerity, Modest, Wise & Good these are traits in his Character which peculiarly fit him for the exalted station he holds—and God Grant that he may Hold it with the same applause & universal Satisfaction for many many years."[185]

On several occasions during his presidency Washington was gravely ill. The fear of his death gripped everyone. Early in the administration, Madison told Edmund Randolph that Washington's "death at the present moment would have brought on another crisis in our affairs."[186] Again, a

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183. William Ellery to Benjamin Huntington, Newport, July 21, 1789, Thomas C. Bright Autograph Collection, Jervis Library, Rome, N.Y.

184. Stuart to James Madison, Staunton, Va., July 31, 1789, Charles F. Hobson and Robert A. Rutland, eds., *The Papers of James Madison* (Charlottesville, Va., 1979), XII, 320.

185. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, New York, January 5, 1790, *Adams Family Correspondence*, IX, 1–2.

186. James Madison to Edmund Randolph, New York, June 24, 1789, *Madison Papers*, XII, 258.

year later the president was ill. Georgia Congressman Abraham Baldwin said that he had never seen Washington "more emaciated. . . . It is so important to us to keep him alive as long as he can live, that we must let him cruise as he pleases, if he will only live and let us know it."[187] Postmaster General Samuel Osgood told Secretary of War Henry Knox that everyone was upset over the president's illness. "He must not, he shall not die, at least not for 10 years. God knows where our troubles would end. . . . He alone has the confidence of the People. In Him they believe and through him they remain United."[188] Abigail Adams astutely understood the importance of Washington's life. "It appears to me that the union of the states, and consequently the permanency of the Government depend under Providence upon his Life. at this early day when neither our Finances are arranged nor our Government Sufficiently cemented to promise duration, His death would I fear have had most disastrous Consequences. I feard a thousand things which I pray, I never may be called to experience."[189] Vice President John Adams agreed that Washington's "life is of vast importance to us."[190] The Marquis de Lafayette wrote Washington that "Your preservation is the life of Your friends, the Sallvation of Your Country—it is for You a Relligious duty, Not to Neglect Any thing that May Concern Your Health."[191]

Washington survived his illnesses and even agreed to serve a second term, but he required a promise from his closest advisers. If he should die in office, these friends were to inform posterity that he did not seek this continuation. He was not a Cromwell. He had wanted to retire to the peace and serenity of his beloved Mount Vernon. But, even

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187. Baldwin to Joel Barlow, New York, May 8, 1790, Yale University Library.

188. May 22, 1790.

189. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, New York, May 30, 1790, *Adams Family Correspondence*, IX, 62.

190. Adams to Thomas Brand-Hollis, New York, June 1, 1790, John Disney, ed., *Memoirs of Thomas Brand-Hollis* (London, 1808), 36.

191. Lafayette to GW, Paris, August 23, 1790, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, VI, 315–16.

more, he wanted to give the young republic a chance to survive in a hostile world. Only with this purpose in mind did Washington agree to a second term as president.

APPOINTMENTS TO THE SUPREME COURT

Washington considered the judiciary "as the Key-stone of our political fabric." The "due administration of justice," he wrote to several friends and advisers, "is the firmest pillar," "the corner stone," and "the strongest cement of good government." He felt that the very stability of government and the happiness of the people depended upon "the first arrangement of the judicial department." Judgeships should only "be filled by men who have been tried and proved."[192] His appointments would give "a tone to the system in its out-set, by placing the administration of the laws with the best and wisest of our Citizens."[193] Consequently, Washington wrote that the "selection of the fittest characters to expound the laws, and dispense justice, has been an invariable object of my anxious concern."[194]

Washington diligently consulted his closest advisers as well as politically respected friends in every state in making his judicial appointments. Because he thought that government suffered embarrassment when nominees publicly rejected an office, he candidly sounded-out candidates for jobs through prominent third parties. Only when Washington felt confident that an individual would accept the position, would he seriously consider the candidacy. He was "unwilling" to make appointments until he could "have an assurance—or at least a strong presumption, that the person appointed will accept; for it is to me an unpleasant thing,

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192. GW to Jay, New York, 5 October 1789, to Edmund Randolph, New York, September 28, 1789, to John Rutledge, New York, September 29, 1789, to James McHenry, New York, November 30, 1789, *GW Papers, Presidential Series*, IV, 107, 115, 137, 343.

193. GW to Edmund Pendleton, New York, 28 September 1789, ibid. 105.

194. GW to Edmund Randolph, New York, 28 September, to John Rutledge, New York, September 29, 1789, ibid., 107, 115.

to have Commissions of such high importance returned, and it will in fact, have a tendency to bring the Government into discredit." Washington left it with his most trusted colleagues to use their "prudence and discretion" in "gaining this knowledge. It is a delicate matter, and will not bear any thing like a direct application, if there is the least cause to apprehend a refusal."[195] He was acutely aware that some people would be disappointed in his appointments and strongly desired "to silence the clamours, or more properly, *soften* the disappointment of smaller characters."[196] He prescribed it as a rule to maintain his "freedom of choice in all nominations" that no prior arrangements or promises would be offered "until the nomination is made."[197] In a confidential letter to James Madison, President Washington expressed his uneasiness about their fellow Virginian Arthur Lee's application for an appointment to the Supreme Court. "What can I do with A—— L— he has applied to be nominated one of the Associate Judges—but I cannot bring my mind to adopt the request—The opinion entertained of him by those with whom I am most conversant is unpropitious and yet few men have received more marks of public favor & confidence than he has. These contradictions are embarrassing."[198]

Washington made more appointments to the supreme court than any other president. He used several criteria in making his selections. Previous legal and judicial experience was crucial. The men appointed had to possess character and broad public esteem. Candidates had to be financially sound to preclude even an impression of economic improprieties. They had to be healthy because supreme court justices were required to take on the arduous task of riding the

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195. GW to James McHenry, New York, November 30, 1789, ibid., 342–43.

196. GW to James Madison, New York, c. 23 September 1789, ibid., 67.

197. GW to Robert Morris, New York, December 14, 1789, ibid., 400.

198. GW to Madison, c. 8 September 1789, ibid., 4.

circuit over a sizeable expanse of territory. All of these traits meant that the candidates should be old enough to have demonstrated their ability but not too old to be frail. Judges should have served honorably during the war and should have supported the Constitution during the recent ratification debate. Washington sought a geographic balance in his appointments. And finally, those who applied directly to Washington for a position usually failed; they needed a prominent go-between who could solicit a position for them.

The chief justice was Washington's most important judicial appointment. He sought a statesman with strong legal and executive skills. A number of prominent men announced their candidacy—New York Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, who had administered the oath of office to President Washington; Pennsylvanian James Wilson, who had played a leading role in both drafting and adopting the Constitution; and John Rutledge, the former governor of South Carolina and chairman of the important committee of detail in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. James Madison reported that in a private meeting the president offered John Jay (1789–1795), the forty-three-year-old former secretary for foreign affairs under the Confederation, any position that he wanted in the cabinet but hoped that he would consider the chief justiceship. Jay consented, as he had done in 1777 when he became New York's first chief justice. In forwarding Jay's commission, Washington told him that in making the appointment "I not only acted in conformity to my best judgment; but, I trust, I did a grateful thing to the good citizens of these united States." Washington had complete faith that Jay would use his "talents, knowledge and integrity" to preside over the judiciary.[199]

On the day that Washington signed the Judiciary Act of 1789, he submitted Jay's name and the names of five other men as associate justices of the supreme court to the Senate for confirmation. The order of nomination became the order of seniority. The first associate justice was fifty-year-old John Rutledge (1789–1791) of South Carolina. Next nomi-

199. GW to Jay, New York, 5 October 1789, ibid., 137.

nated was William Cushing (1789–1810), the oldest nominee at fifty-seven. Cushing had been chief justice of Massachusetts since 1777, in which capacity he wrote an opinion that emancipated all of the slaves in Massachusetts based upon the state's Declaration of Rights provision that all men are created equal. Forty-three-year-old Robert Hansen Harrison of Maryland was confirmed but ill health caused him to resign before actually serving on the court. James Wilson (1789–1798), forty-seven, and fifty-seven-year old John Blair (1789–96) of Virginia completed the court. Harrison was replaced by thirty-nine-year-old James Iredell (1790–1799) of North Carolina. When Rutledge, disgruntled by not being appointed chief justice, resigned to become chief justice of South Carolina, he was replaced with fifty-eight-year-old Marylander Thomas Johnson (1791–1793), who was replaced by William Paterson (1793–1806), the forty-seven-year-old governor of New Jersey.

In looking for an envoy to negotiate with the British and help avoid war, Washington selected John Jay, the country's most experienced diplomat. Jay left for Britain in 1794 only to return as governor of New York. To fill the vacancy left by Jay, Washington nominated John Rutledge (1795–1796), who assumed the position while the Senate remained in recess. Unbeknownst to Washington, Rutledge had become depressed, alcoholic, suicidal, and financially strapped after the death of his wife. He also publicly criticized the Jay Treaty before receiving Washington's nomination. When the Senate reconvened, it refused to confirm Rutledge.

Washington asked Associate Justice Cushing, now sixty-four, if he would accept the chief justiceship. Cushing accepted, but changed his mind due to poor health when he received the commission. Finally, Washington nominated Senator Oliver Ellsworth (1796–1800) of Connecticut, who at fifty-one had many years of service as a state judge and who in the U.S. Senate had been the primary author of the Judiciary Act of 1789. Prior to the appointment of Ellsworth, Washington had replaced the retired John Blair with Samuel Chase (1796–1811) of Maryland. Chase, fifty-one, had been an ardent Antifederalist during the ratification debate, but he was now an avid Federalist.

INTERPRETING THE CONSTITUTION

Washington believed that the presidential veto should only be used to reject acts of Congress that were unconstitutional. On several occasions, specifically with the bill to create the Bank of the United States, Washington consulted with his cabinet requesting written opinions of the constitutionality of various measures. As the European war intensified, Washington sought to keep the United States neutral. In 1793 he drafted a Proclamation of Neutrality which prohibited Americans from aiding any of the belligerents. Washington and others worried about the constitutionality of the proclamation as it impinged upon Congress' power to declare war and redefined the Franco-American Treaty of 1778. To assist in understanding the constitutionality of the proclamation, Washington asked Chief Justice Jay for an advisory opinion from the court. Jay refused, stating that the principle of separation of powers made the three branches of the federal government checks upon each other and that, as a court of last resort, the supreme court should not be advising the executive branch. Historians have generally interpreted Jay's actions as arguing for the independence and separation of the judiciary from the other two branches of government. Law professor Stewart Jay, however, has argued that Jay and the court merely found it convenient not to offer the advice that might have perturbed Congress, while the court was seeking to get Congress to eliminate the onerous circuit riding for supreme court justices. Professor Jay argues that there is absolutely no constitutional barrier to an advisory opinion of the court, and, in fact, Chief Justice Jay previous to the proclamation and Chief Justice Ellsworth later provided advisory opinions to Washington's administration.

THE CASES

Several cases stand out during Washington's administration. In 1792 a circuit court for the first time ruled that a state law was unconstitutional in *Champion & Dickerson v. Carey et al.* In the same year five of the supreme court justices

sitting on three circuit courts considered the constitutionality of the Invalid Pension Act (1792) that required the circuit courts to hear the claims from invalid veterans of the War for Independence. With no specific case before them, the judges all expressed their concerns about the act in letters to President Washington. The judges questioned whether they could be assigned non-judicial functions and whether Congress and the secretary of war should have the power to overrule them. The case was brought before the supreme court which agreed to take it under advisement during its next session—a gentlemanly way of telling Congress that the law was unconstitutional. In the interim, Congress changed the provision of the act. *Hayburn's Case* is thus thought to be a tacit instance of judicial review a decade before *Marbury v. Madison*.

In *Chisholm v. Georgia* (February 1793) the supreme court ruled four to one with Justice Iredell in the minority that the wording of Article III, section 2 of the Constitution allowed a state to be sued by citizens of another state. Federalists had denied this violation of state sovereignty during the ratification debate, suggesting that the provision merely allowed states to sue citizens of other states. The court's decision was so controversial that Congress in 1795 proposed what became the Eleventh Amendment (1798) to the Constitution. In 1796 the court unanimously ruled in *Ware v. Hylton* that state laws could not violate the provisions of federal treaties. As an attorney for the defendant in his only case argued before the supreme court, John Marshall defended the right of Virginia to confiscate British property and debt and for a Virginia debtor to pay off that debt to the state. The supreme court ruled against Marshall, stating that the Treaty of Paris (1783) prohibited any state from placing obstacles that would deny the right of British creditors to collect their prewar debts. The next day the court for the first time ruled in *Hylton v. United States* that a law of Congress was constitutional.

The supreme court remained in its infancy during Washington's administration. The appointments to the court were prominent, and a mounting docket added a dim luster to the court's role in solidifying the authority of the Constitution.

DINNERS AND LEVEES

President Washington attempted to run the presidential mansion as efficiently as he ran Mount Vernon. Expenses, however far out-distanced his annual salary of $25,000. He paid his steward and fourteen servants their wages, supplied all food and drink, and maintained his own stable. The servants and steward alone cost $600 per month. He held weekly dinners, a levee once a week, and special events like an annual 4th of July party open to the public. Martha Washington held a weekly levee as well at which Washington regularly attended.

Washington held his dinners for "as many as my table will hold" on Thursdays at 4:00 P.M. Guests gathered in the drawing room about twenty minutes early at which time the President spoke with each person. He allowed a five-minute grace period before dinner was served. Those attending late were told, "we are too punctual for you. I have a cook who never asks whether the company has come, but whether the hour has come."[200]

The president's table was handsomely spread with a variety of roast beef, veal, turkey, duck, fowl, and ham; puddings, jellies, oranges, apples, nuts, almonds, figs, and raisins; and a variety of wines and punch. Four or five liveried servants waited on the guests. Often Mrs. Washington attended and sat across from her husband in the middle of the table. The president's two secretaries (Tobias Lear and David Humphreys) sat at the ends of the table.

Some guests reported much hilarity; others, like the somewhat neurotic William Maclay of Pennsylvania had mixed reactions. During his two-year term as a U.S. senator, Maclay sometimes thoroughly enjoyed the dinner but at other times "considered it as a part of my duty as a Senator to submit to it, and am glad it is over" even though he felt that the dinner "was the best of the kind I ever was at." After some dinners, Maclay described Washington as "a

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200. Ford, 171.

cold formal Man."[201] At other times the president was described as being "Melancholy" without a "chearing ray of Convivial Sunshine brook[ing] thro' the cloudy Gloom of settled seriousness. At every interval of eating or drinking he played on the Table with a fork or knife like a drumstick."[202] At his last presidential dinner, Maclay wrote that his host "seemed more in good humor than ever I saw him. Tho he was so deaf that I believe he heard little of the Conversation."[203]

Knowing of Maclay's hostility to Treasury Secretary Hamilton's economic plan, the president paid Maclay a great deal of personal attention. Maclay was proud that the president's attention could not change his stance on Hamilton's plan. When seemingly skipped over for another dinner, the neurotic senator criticized Washington.

> How Unworthy of a great Character, is such littleness? He is not aware however that he is paying me a Compliment that none of his Guests can claim. He places me above the influence of a dinner, even in his own Opinion. Perhaps he means it as a punishment, for my opposition of Court Measures. Either way I care not a fig for it. I certainly feel a pride arising, from a consciousness, that the greatest Man in the World, has not Credit enough with me to influence my conduct in the least.[204]

Somewhat shattering his own sense of importance, however, Maclay received another dinner invitation the very next week.

Maclay felt that the dining room "was disagreeably warm." He described the menu—"first was soup. Fish roasted & boiled meats Gammon Fowls &ca. This was the dinner. The middle of the Table was garnished in the usual

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201. Kenneth R. Bowling and Helen E. Veit, eds., *The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes on Senate Debates* (Vol. 9 of *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, Baltimore, 1988), 182.

202. Ibid., 212. This may have violated civility rule #4 (see note 1).

203. Ibid., 261.

204. Ibid., 253.

tasty way, with small Images flowers (artificial), &ca. The dessert was, first Apple pies, pudding, &ca.; then iced creams, Jellies, &ca.; then Water Melons, Musk Melons, apples, peaches, nuts." No toasts were offered until "the President filling a Glass of Wine, with great formality drank the health of every individual by name round the Table." After a while, Mrs. Washington withdrew taking the ladies with her. The men remained seated involved in small chit-chat, during which time the president "played with his Fork striking on the Edge of the Table with it." Soon Washington rose and went upstairs to drink coffee. "The Company followed."[205] Maclay described Washington's appearance. "In Stature about Six feet, with An Unexceptionable Make, but lax Appearance, his frame Would seem to Want filling Up. His Motions rather slow than lively, tho he showed no Signs of having Suffered either by Gout or Rheumatism. His complexion pale Nay Almost Cadaverous. His Voice hollow and indistinct Owing As I believe to Artificial teeth before in his Upper Jaw."

In describing one of the presidential dinners, Abigail Adams captured the sensitivity of Washington's character in two brief sentences. Traveling to join her husband in Philadelphia, Abigail had stopped in New York City to visit with her only daughter, Nabby, who had recently given birth to her second son. Abigail asked if she could take her grandson—four-year-old John Adams Smith—with her to Philadelphia so that he could spend some more time with his grandparents and to lighten Nabby's post-partum tasks. Nabby agreed. Several days later, Abigail wrote her daughter describing an unusually social Washington. Seated together at a dinner "with the ministers and ladies of the court" on February 17, 1791, Washington "asked very affectionately" about Nabby and her children, wished them well, and then "picked the sugar-plums from a cake, and requested me to take them for master John."[206]

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205. Ibid., 136–37, 365–66.

206. Abigail Adams to Abigail Adams Smith, Philadelphia, February 21, 1791, *Adams Family Correspondence* IX, 193.

Washington's biweekly levees were held on Tuesday and Friday afternoons at three o'clock. Soon, the Friday levee became a three-hour evening affair hosted by Martha Washington. The levees were more formal than the presidential dinners. William Sullivan described the hour-long Tuesday ritual.

> At three o'clock or at any time within a quarter of an hour afterward, the visitor was conducted to his dining room, from which all seats had been removed for the time. On entering, he saw Washington, who stood always in front of the fireplace, with his face towards the door of entrance. The visitor was conducted to him, and he required to have the name so distinctly pronounced that he could hear it. He had the very uncommon faculty of associating a man's name, and personal appearance, so durably in his memory, as to be able to call one by name, who made him a second visit. He received his visitor with a dignified bow, while his hands were so disposed of as to indicate, that the salutation was not to be accompanied with shaking hands. This ceremony never occurred in these visits, even with his most near friends, that no distinction might be made. As visitors came in, they formed a circle round the room. At a quarter past three, the door was closed, and the circle was formed for that day. He then began on the right, and spoke to each visitor, calling him by name, and exchanging a few words with him. When he completed his circuit, he resumed his first position, and the visitors approached him in succession, bowed and retired. By four o'clock the ceremony was over.[207]

The president dressed elegantly for his levees. One visitor described him as wearing purple satin. Another recorded Washington as

> clad in black velvet; his hair in full dress, powdered and gathered behind in a large silk bag; yellow gloves on his hands; holding a cocked hat with a cockade in it, and the edges adorned with a black feather about an inch deep. He wore knee and shoe buckles; and a long sword, with

207. Ford, 173–74.

> a finely wrought and polished steel hilt, which appeared at the left hip; the coat worn over the sword, so that the hilt, and the part below the coat behind, were in view. The scabbard was white polished leather.[208]

Washington was less formal at the Friday evening levees which began at 8:00 P.M.[209] Colonel David Humphreys or Tobias Lear (Washington's personal secretaries) welcomed the women entering the room, brought them forward, and introduced them to "Lady Washington," who sat in a chair on a raised platform. After a curtsey and a brief conversation, the visitor would be escorted to a seat. The president, considering himself as a private gentleman, wearing neither hat nor sword, approached each woman and conversed "with a grace, dignity & ease, that leaves Royal George far behind him." One chair was placed to the right of Martha's on the dais. Whenever Abigail Adams attended the levee, which was usually every other week, the president would make sure that the second chair was vacated. If another woman occupied the chair when Mrs. Adams arrived, Washington would engage the seated woman in conversation and then tactfully offer to introduce her to another woman across the room so that Mrs. Adams could take her rightful spot. It took little time before the guests understood that the chair must be given up when Abigail Adams attended the levee.[210] The guests were served tea, coffee, lemonade, cake, and, in the summer, ice cream. After two to three hours all the guests would have left.[211]

President Washington also hosted an annual 4th of July party. The president's mansion overflowed and long tables were placed in the yard. Not only Congress was invited (if

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208. Ford, 190.

209. Abigail Adams had a levee on Monday evenings, Lady Temple (wife of the British consul general) on Tuesday evenings, Lucy Knox (wife of the secretary of war) on Wednesdays, and Sarah Jay (wife of Chief Justice John Jay) on Thursdays.

210. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, January 5, 1790, *Adams Family Correspondence*, IX, 1.

211. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, August 9, 1789, ibid., VIII, 397.

still in session), but "all the Gentlemen of the city, the Governour and officers and companies." The president provided cake, punch, and wine at his own expense; more than 200 pounds of cake, two quarter-casks of wine, and other spirits, all costing more than $500.[212]

THE FIRST LADY

Martha Washington was described as combining "in an uncommon degree, great dignity of manner with most pleasing affability."[213] Abigail Adams came to respect and admire Martha Washington. At their first meeting in New York City after their husbands had been elected president and vice president under the new Constitution, Abigail described Martha as "plain in her dress, but that plainness is the best of every article. . . . Her Hair is white, her Teeth beautifull, her person rather short than otherways. . . . her manners are modest and unassuming, dignified and femenine, not the Tincture of ha'ture about her."[214] Two weeks later after their second meeting, Abigail again praised Mrs. Washington as "one of those unassuming Characters which Creat[e] Love & Esteem, a most becoming plasaentness sits upon her countenance, & an unaffected deportment which renders her the object of veneration and Respect, with all these feelings and Sensations I found myself much more deeply impressed than I ever did before their Majesties of Britain."[215] According to Mrs. Adams, "we live upon terms of much Friendship & visit each other often whilst the Gentlemen are absent we propose seeing one another on terms of much sociability. mrs. Washington is a most friendly good Lady, always pleasent and easy, doatingly fond of her Grandchil-

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212. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, June 23, 1797, ibid., XII, 171.

213. Ford, 101.

214. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, June 28, 1789, *Adams Family Correspondence*, VIII, 379.

215. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, July 12, 1789, ibid., 389.

dren to whom she is quite the Grandmamma."[216] "No Lady," Abigail wrote, "can be more deservedly beloved & esteemed than she is, and we have lived in habits of intimacy and Friendship."[217]

THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Despite all the dangers facing the country, Washington's two terms as president were highly successful. Through the force of his own personality Washington maintained American neutrality while all of Europe flamed with war and destruction. The financial policies of his secretary of the treasury restored solvency to the formerly bankrupt confederation. Tax uprisings were easily suppressed and the authority of the federal government over the states and the people was successfully asserted and maintained; yet, during the same years, a bill of rights, staunchly advocated by James Madison and seconded by Washington, assured former Antifederalists that the new Constitution would not be oppressive. Thoughtful appointments—especially to the federal judiciary—instilled confidence in the new government. Treaties with peaceful southern Indians and forceful measures against the powerful hostile tribes in the Northwest Territory opened new lands for settlement. A treaty with Great Britain kept the peace and obtained the evacuation of British troops from nearly a dozen Revolutionary-war forts on American soil near the Canadian border. A treaty with Spain promoted friendly relations between the two countries with an expansion of commerce and the Spanish opening of the Mississippi River to the navigation by Americans. A treaty with Algiers reestablished peace for American merchantmen in and around the Mediterranean and obtained the release of two crews of American seamen who had been held in slavery by Algiers for over a decade. His every

216. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, October 11, 1789, ibid., 421.

217. Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, New York, August 29, 1790, ibid., IX, 94.

act created precedent to be followed by his successors. His eight years in office saw the formation of two political parties that under any other person might have divided America into two or more competing countries. But, as Gouverneur Morris had predicted, the able charioteer guided and tamed the wild horses and made them manageable for his successors.

TOURS OF THE STATES

One of Washington's hopes as president was to visit every state in the Union. Illness prevented travel until October 1789 when Washington set out on his six-week Eastern tour. The President traveled with remarkable informality. Nine men made up the entire presidential entourage—two private secretaries (Tobias Lear and William Jackson), a valet, a postillion, and four horsemen. No military guard—the people, Washington said, would protect him. Inundated with invitations to be guests in private homes, the party stayed only in public inns and usually started traveling at 6:00 each morning—the President did not want to inconvenience anyone and he certainly did not wish to play favorites. During the long stretches between towns, Washington traveled in a coach pulled by four horses. Just before entering a town, he would leave the carriage and mount his white stallion. The party was often met on the outskirts of town by the local militia or light-horse cavalry. Parades, processions of citizens, congratulatory addresses, odes, and music became customary.

> "He comes! He comes! the HERO comes!
> Sound, sound your trumpets, beat, beat your drums;
> From port, to port, let cannon roar
> He's welcome to New-England's shore!
> Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome,
> Welcome to New-England's shore."[218]

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218. This first of two stanzas was printed in the Newburyport, Mass., *Essex Journal*, November 4, 1789, and reprinted in the *New York Weekly Museum*, November 14, 1789; the *Gazette of the United States*, November 14, 1789; the *New York Journal*, November 19, 1789; and the *Pennsylvania Packet*, November 19, 1789.

Formal dinners and evenings balls were held in the major towns. Washington enjoyed dancing every set with the local beauties attired in their finest dresses with sashes emblazoned with the initials "GW."

In addition to his public duties, Washington found time to do enjoyable things. He attended concerts, visited internal improvements and manufacturing facilities, inspected a French 24-gun man-of-war in Portsmouth, fished whenever possible, and talked to farmers about crops. Portrait-sitting was an unpleasant concomitant.

After Rhode Island ratified the Constitution on May 29, 1790, the President made a special effort personally to welcome the prodigal state back into the Union. Sailing from New York City, Washington accompanied by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, New York Governor George Clinton, Supreme Court Justice John Blair, Rhode Island Senator Theodore Foster, South Carolina Representative William Loughton Smith, David Humphreys, and secretaries William Jackson and Thomas Nelson visited both Newport and Providence. Washington was particularly moved by an address from the Hebrew congregation of Newport. As Jews, traditionally deprived "of the invaluable rights of free citizens," they asked the President to extend religious freedom and the "immunities of citizenship" to them. Washington responded:

> 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.[219]

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219. Printed in the *Newport Herald*, September 9, 1790, *A Great and Good Man*, 179–81.

Washington's three and a half month Southern tour started from Philadelphia, the new federal capital, on March 21, 1791. To avoid the bad roads between Delaware and Maryland, the eight-man presidential party sailed aboard a ship to Annapolis. The inexperienced or incompetent captain grounded the ship during a storm at the mouth of the Severn River leading to Annapolis. Soon after the captain dislodged the ship, he ran it aground again. There, throughout the night, the crew and passengers feared the ship would founder causing loss of life. When morning came, a rescue ship took the passengers off the marooned ship.

The Southern tour proceeded much as its Eastern counterpart. The party usually traveled between thirty-five and forty-five miles each day. Starting at first at 6:00 A.M., soon, to avoid the heat of afternoon, the party began traveling each day by 5:00 A.M. and then during the last three weeks by 4:00. The public's adoration was universal.

> He comes! he comes! the Hero comes!
> Sound, sound your trumpets, beat your drums.
> From port to port let cannons roar,
> He's welcome to our friendly shore.
> Prepare! prepare! your songs prepare!
> Loud, loudly read the echoing air;
> From pole to pole, his praise resound,
> For virtue is with glory crown'd.[220]

At Charlotte Courthouse in Virginia crowds waited to see the President. One observer scribbled in his diary: "Strange is the impulse which is felt by almost every breast to see the face of a great good man—sensation better felt than expressed." The next day, the same diarist recorded the feelings at Prince Edward County, Virginia, where crowds waited "anxious to see the saviour of their country and object of their love."[221] After a journey of almost 2,000 miles, the President returned to Philadelphia on July 6, 1791.

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220. Printed in the *Virginia Herald*, May 26, 1791, and reprinted throughout the country. See *A Great and Good Man*, 191.

221. Richard Venable Diary, June 6–7, 1791, ibid., 196.

Washington was pleased with his presidential tours. In a letter to North Carolina Governor Alexander Martin, he said that his purpose in visiting the states "was not to be received with parade and an ostentatious display of opulence. It was for a nobler purpose. To see with my own eyes the situation of the Country, and to learn on the spot the condition and disposition of our Citizens. In these respects I have been highly gratified, and to a sensible mind the effusions of affection and personal regard which were expressed on so many occasions is no less grateful, than the marks of respect shewn to my official Character were pleasing in a public view." To his old friend David Humphreys he confided that "Each days experience of the government of the United States seems to confirm its establishment, and to render it more popular. A ready acquiescence in the laws made under it shews in a strong light the confidence which the people have in their representatives, and in the upright views of those who administer the government."

The presidential tours did much to unify the country behind President Washington and the new federal government. Opponents of the Constitution saw firsthand the tremendous support the people had for the new experiment. In a way, the tours marked the end of the Revolution. The *Gazette of the United States* reported that "The time to pull down, and destroy, is now past." It was now time "to build up, strengthen and support" the Constitution. The tours had demonstrated that these sentiments "pervade the minds of the people."[222]

THE FAREWELL ADDRESS

In his farewell address, revised for him by Alexander Hamilton, Washington announced to the American people that he would not seek a third term as president. He felt that he had done his duty and that it was time to retire to the shadow of private life. He was happy "that, while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political scene, patriot-

222. September 19, 1796, *A Great and Good Man*, 149–51.

ism does not forbid it." He had entered the presidency knowing his frailties and the "weight of years" had only increased his desire for "the shade of retirement." Washington thanked the American people for the opportunity to serve them and for the "steadfast confidence" with which they had supported him. He admitted that there had been difficult times, but "the constancy of their support had always been his "essential prop." He hoped that God would continue to watch over the American Union and stamp every department of the government "with wisdom and virtue."

Perhaps, Washington felt, he should stop at this point. But his concern for his country, "which cannot end but with my life," and the dangerous world at home and abroad, forced him to recommend "some sentiments" that were "the result of much reflection" on "the permanency of your felicity as a people." These sentiments, Washington said, were offered as "the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel."

Washington's theme throughout the Farewell Address was the importance of the "national Union to your collective and individual happiness." Union, he said, "is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquillity at home; your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very Liberty which you so highly prize." Many at home and abroad would "covertly and insidiously" attempt to weaken the importance of Union," but Americans must always "cherish a cordial, habitual and immovable attachment" to the Union. It must be thought of as "the Palladium of your political safety and prosperity."

Washington stressed the importance of American citizenship. "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." He cautioned against being drawn into the treacherous affairs of European politics. "Observe good faith & justice towards all Nations. Cultivate peace & harmony with all," but "steer clear of permanent Alliances, with any portion of the foreign world."

He warned against the growing hostility of the contentious political parties at home that could start "a fire not to be quenched." He urged respect and allegiance to the new government under the Constitution as the culmination of the Revolutionary era.

> This government, the offspring of our own choice uninfluenced and unawed, adopted upon full investigation & 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 power and the right of the People to establish Government presupposes the duty of every Individual to obey the established Government.[223]

Washington hoped that "these counsels of an old and affectionate friend" would have a "strong and lasting impression" on his countrymen. He hoped that in his retirement he would feel "the benign influence of good laws under a free government, the ever favorite object of my heart, the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors, and dangers."

It had been Washington's aim to serve as President and help the new American republican experiment establish roots. "With me, a predominant motive has been to endeavour to gain time to our country to settle & mature its yet recent institutions, and to progress without interruption, to that degree of strength & consistency, which is necessary to give it, humanly speaking, the command of its own fortunes."[224]

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223. Ibid., 216–35.
224. Ibid., 234.

The American Revolution was over. The new institutions of government were solidly established. It was time for Washington to go home. He had done his duty. He compared himself "To the wearied traveller who sees a resting place, and is bending his body to lean thereon."[225]

Shortly before his retirement, Washington was visited by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, a young English-born engineer and architect. Latrobe saw that

> Washington has something uncommonly majestic and commanding in his walk, his address, his figure and his countenance. His face is characterized however more by intense and powerful thought, than by quick and fiery conception. There is a mildness about its expression; and an air of reserve in his manner lowers its tone still more. He is 64, but appears some years younger, and has sufficient apparent vigor to last many years yet. He was frequently entirely silent for many minutes during which time an awkwardness seemed to prevail in every one present. His answers were often short and sometimes approached to moroseness [i.e., peevishness or sourness]. He did not at any time speak with very remarkable fluency:—perhaps the extreme correctness of his language which almost seemed studied prevented that effect. He seemed to enjoy a humourous observation, and made several himself. He laughed heartily several times and in a very good humoured manner. On the morning of my departure he treated me as if I had lived for years in his house; with ease and attention, but in general I thought there was a slight air of moroseness about him, as if something had vexed him.[226]

Latrobe thought that if Horace had lived at the time, he would have described Washington as "The man [who is] just and firm in purpose."[227]

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225. GW to Henry Knox, Philadelphia, March 2, 1797, Fitzpatrick, *Writings*, XXXV, 409.

226. Lee, 65–66.

227. Lee, 67n.

THE RETIREMENT

The Washingtons happily returned to their private lives at Mount Vernon. They left dear friends behind in Philadelphia and found that many old Virginia friends had passed away. "Our circle of friends of course is contracted without any disposition on our part to enter into new friendships, though we have an aboundance of acquaintances and a variety of visitors."[228] Martha Washington wrote Lucy Knox that "I cannot tell you, My dear friend, how much I enjoy home after having been deprived of one so long, for our dwelling in New York and Philadelphia was not home, only a sojourning. The General and I feel like children just released from school or from a hard taskmaster." Nothing would now tempt them away from their "sacred roof-tree again."[229]

Although some visitors saw Washington as reserved and taciturn, others felt that "he does not avoid entering into conversation when one furnishes him with a subject. . . . At the table after the departure of the ladies, or else in the evening seated under the portico, he often talked with me for hours at a time. His favorite subject is agriculture, but he answered with kindness all questions that I put to him on the Revolution, the armies, etc. He has a prodigious memory."[230]

THE END

Rumors of Washington's illness and death amused the former President. Martha now endearingly referred to her husband as "the withered Proprietor."[231] He jokingly said that he was "glad to hear before hand, what will be said of him"

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228. Martha Washington to David Humphreys, Mount Vernon, June 26, 1797, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 312.

229. Martha Washington to Lucy Knox, Mount Vernon, post May 1797, ibid., 304.

230. Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Lee, 81–82.

231. Elizabeth Powel to Martha Washington, Philadelphia, January 7, 1798, Fields, *Worthy Partner*, 304.

after his death. He, Robert Morris, and several other men had entered into an agreement "not to quit the theatre of this world before the year 1800." Washington was committed "that no breach of contract shall be laid to him on that account."[232] But in the summer of 1799, Washington had a dream that he would soon die leaving Martha a widow. So deeply affected by the dream, Washington put his will and other papers in final order.[233] On December 14, 1799, after only two days of catching a severe cold that worsened into a condition in which he could not breathe, Washington died.[234]

Innumerable eulogies praised the dead hero. Typically Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, wrote that "To his conduct, both military and political, may, with exact propriety, be applied the observation, which has been often made concerning his courage; that in the most hazardous situations no man ever saw his countenance change." In describing the aura about Washington, Dwight said that "wherever he appeared, an instinctive awe and veneration attended him on the part of all men. Every man, however great in his own opinion, or in reality, shrunk in his presence, and became conscious of an inferiority, which he never felt before. Whilst he encouraged every man, particularly every stranger, and peculiarly every diffident man, and raised him to self-possession, no sober person, however secure he might think himself of his esteem, ever presumed to draw too near him."[235]

Many years later, James Madison remembered some of the things that made Washington great.

> The strength of his character lay in his integrity, his love of justice, his fortitude, the soundness of his judgment,

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232. Martha Washington to Elizabeth Powel, Mount Vernon, December 18, 1797, ibid., 310.

233. From Martha Washington, September 18, 1799, ibid., 321.

234. For Tobias Lear's account of Washington's death, see *GW Papers, Retirement Series*, IV, 542–55.

235. *A Discourse, Delivered at New-Haven, Feb.* 22, 1800; *On the Character of George Washington, Esq. at the Request of the Citizens* (New Haven, 1800), 28, 27.

> and his remarkable prudence to which he joined an elevated sense of patriotic duty, and a reliance on the enlightened & impartial world as the tribunal by which a lasting sentence on his career would be pronounced. Nor was he without the advantage of a Stature & figure, which however insignificant when separated from greatness of character do not fail when combined with it to aid the attraction. But what particularly distinguished him, was a modest dignity which at once commanded the highest respect, and inspired the purest attachment. Although not idolizing public opinion, no man could be more attentive to the means of ascertaining it. In comparing the candidates for office, he was particularly inquisitive as to their standing with the public and the opinion entertained of them by men of public weight. On important questions to be decided by him, he spared no pains to gain information from all quarters; freely asking from all whom he held in esteem, and who were intimate with him, a free communication of their sentiments, receiving with great attention the different arguments and opinions offered to him, and making up his own judgment with all the leisure that was permitted.[236]

No one, however, captured the uniqueness and the importance of Washington as well as Jefferson.

> 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, tho' 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. . . . 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

236. James Madison: Detached Memorandum, before 1832, ed. by Elizabeth Fleet, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. III (October 1946), 534–68.

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, & a great man. his temper was naturally irritable and high toned; but reflection & 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 expences 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. altho' 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. . . . 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 & merit of leading the armies of his country successfully thro' an arduous war for the establishment of its independence, of conducting its councils thro' 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, thro' the whole of his career, civil and military, of which the history of the world furnishes no other example. . . . 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 had 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.[237]

The experiment succeeded to a great measure thanks to George Washington.

In addressing a joint session of Congress for his eighth state of the union speech in December 1796, Washington said that he could not "omit the occasion, to congratulate you and my Country, on the success of the [American] experiment." He repeated from his first inaugural address his "fervent supplications to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and Sovereign Arbiter of Nations, that his Providential care may still be extended to the United States; that the virtue and happiness of the People, may be preserved; and that the Government, which they have instituted, for the protection of their liberties, may be perpetual."

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237. Jefferson to Walter Jones, Monticello, January 2, 1814, Looney, *Jefferson Papers, Retirement Series*, VII, 101–2. For another excerpt of this letter, see Washington's Library (above at footnote 145).

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Transcription Policy

The transcription policies of different documentary editions have varied over the years. I have relied on the text in the volumes cited in the footnotes. Whenever possible I have checked and used a literal transcription of the original manuscript.