

© 2013

Adrienne Marie Harrison

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

“HIS MIND WAS GREAT AND POWERFUL.”

GEORGE WASHINGTON’S READING AND THE FASHIONING OF HIS AMERICAN SELF

By

ADRIENNE MARIE HARRISON

A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

written under the direction of

Professor Paul G.E. Clemens

and approved by

---

---

---

---

New Brunswick, New Jersey

January 2013

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“HIS MIND WAS GREAT AND POWERFUL:”

GEORGE WASHINGTON’S READING AND THE FASHIONING OF HIS AMERICAN SELF

by ADRIENNE MARIE HARRISON

Dissertation Director:  
Professor Paul G.E. Clemens

This dissertation explores George Washington’s intellectual development through the reading he conducted over the course of his lifetime. The chapters that follow offer answers to the questions: why did he develop his unique reading preferences at different periods in his life; what did he read; how did he use the knowledge gained from his reading; and where did Washington read. Answering these questions opens a window into Washington’s mind. Over the course of his adult life, Washington meticulously cultivated his reputation and played a large part in the creation of his own myth. The success of this endeavor largely hinged on his ability to maintain a certain aloofness from those around him. As a result, Washington’s closest contemporaries and scores of historians and biographers over time all concluded that Washington’s mind was inaccessible. As long as the keys to understanding Washington’s intellect remained hidden, the studies of how he achieved such greatness were somewhat hollow. However, this dissertation argues that one of these keys has been hidden in plain sight – in his library. Washington eventually amassed a library of over nine hundred volumes, a fact that many scholars have noted, but none have seriously examined. By examining the library to determine what Washington read and then placing that reading in the context of the events taking place in his life and world, what emerges is a picture of a man driven to succeed. Washington spent a lifetime compensating for a “defective education” through self-directed study. He pursued useful knowledge so that he could lead scores of men who were often more qualified than he. This

reading was the key to Washington's self-fashioning project. This project not only makes Washington more real and accessible, but it also sheds important light on how his own American identity was formed. This project will therefore contribute to future research on the development of American nationalism.

## Acknowledgements

I have accumulated many debts over the course of this project. First, I must thank the members of my committee, Paul Clemens, Ann Fabian, Jan Lewis, and Ted Crackel for indulging my desire to pursue a dissertation about Washington and for being generous with their time and attention. I am further indebted to them and to the other members of the Rutgers University History Department including Seth Koven, Alastair Bellany, Jennifer Jones, Phyllis Mack, Rudy Bell, Camilla Townsend for allowing me to pursue the PhD at a breakneck pace in accordance with the requirements of my United States Army Advanced Civil Schooling fellowship by serving as my examiners, independent study directors, and faculty mentors. This project, and indeed my graduate studies as a whole would not have been possible if the faculty of the Department of History at the United States Military Academy had not been willing to offer this former cadet the opportunity to become a colleague. In particular, I wish to thank Colonels Lance Betros, Matthew Moten, and Gian Gentile, along with Lieutenant Colonel Gail Yoshitani. Additionally, my undergraduate advisor, Robert McDonald, has willingly lent his support through his willingness to listen to me play out my arguments and make useful recommendations. It seems that even now, I have not yet ceased to be his student. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who have listened to me talk about George Washington for way too long. Of all of them, my mother deserves the most credit for always supporting my passion for American History, for her ability to read my work with patience and understanding, and for being the ultimate cheerleader.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Pursuing Useful Knowledge.....	22
Chapter 2: Provincial Reading.....	75
Chapter 3: Revolutionary Reading.....	126
Chapter 4: Presidential Reading.....	178
Chapter 5: A Legacy Library.....	236
Chapter 6: A Place for Secluded Study.....	259
Conclusion.....	289
Bibliography.....	298
Curriculum Vitae.....	317

## Introduction

In 1812, nearly thirteen years after George Washington's death, an aging and bitter John Adams dashed off a letter to his friend and Washington critic, Benjamin Rush. "Washington was not a scholar," he told Rush. "That he was too illiterate, too unlearned, unread for his station and reputation is equally past dispute."<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the irascible Adams hunched over his desk in Quincy, surrounded by the library that he accumulated over a lifetime of scholarly pursuits. At age 77, his eyes were failing. He fumed over Washington's annoyingly enduring legacy as America's first saint. In Adams's estimation, Washington was hardly the self-made hero; on the contrary, Adams would argue that he made George Washington by nominating him to become the commander in chief of the Continental Army in 1775. Washington then achieved lasting fame by looking the part on horseback, pulling off a good act that carefully masked the fact that he was intellectually not qualified for the positions he occupied. Washington had admirable qualities to be sure, and in better moods Adams could see them. He admired Washington and respected him, particularly his "noble and disinterested" character that led Adams to conclude that there was "something charming" in the conduct of Washington.<sup>2</sup> However, Adams's pride in his own scholarly prowess combined with a healthy disdain for those who thwarted his ambitions often colored his judgment. As such, his harsh criticism of Washington must be read bearing in mind that Adams was still sulking over the decline of his own reputation and his failure to win a second presidential term. Nevertheless, this uncharitable assessment

---

<sup>1</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Rush, March 19, 1812; April 22 1812 in *Old Family Letters*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1892) 1: 372-73, 377.

<sup>2</sup> John Adams quoted in John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 127.

has run through the scholarship on Washington almost from the time the ink dried on Adams's letter. It is important to note, however, that Adams and the other critics who scoffed at Washington's illiteracy were unaware of the fact that he engaged in a lifelong program of self-directed reading that was specifically designed to provide him with the useful knowledge he needed to perform each occupation he was placed in.

Fortunately for Washington, even the harshest critics who cited Adams's slight against Washington's intellectual standing spared his overall legacy from the decline endured by some of the other most prominent founding fathers. A famous example is Thomas Jefferson whose star rose thanks to his brilliance as America's most enlightened founder and fell following the revelation that there was truth to the rumors that he had a relationship with his slave, Sally Hemings.<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Franklin's overall reputation was similarly tarnished by evidence that he was a womanizer, who enjoyed getting cozy with young ladies, even those that were married to other men, his intellectual prowess notwithstanding.<sup>4</sup> John Adams was tainted both in life and death with charges of vanity mostly because his confidence in his own intellectual abilities had a tendency to negatively impact his relationships with others.<sup>5</sup> Washington, however, has mostly managed to escape the scrutiny of revisionist historians and critics unscathed. Try as they might, no flaws they unearthed, even Adams's charge of illiteracy were enough to unseat him from his place in the American memory.

Why is this true? Is it really possible that only one of the founding fathers was that perfect while the others were simply human? Even those that do not think too highly

---

<sup>3</sup>Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), 24.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 2.

<sup>5</sup>James Grant, *John Adams: Party of One* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 1-13.

of Washington's abilities and decry the manner in which Americans deified him have a hard time finding any real evidence of character flaws other than his having a wooden personality and elitist manner. It seems that whatever the full extent of Washington's flaws were, he did a pretty good job hiding them from historians' probes. Washington's act of working assiduously to hide his imperfections from the public gaze while instead presenting a carefully crafted image has been widely studied and goes a long way to explain the degree of lasting fame that he was able to achieve. Over the course of his lifetime, Washington mastered the art of performance. He excelled at reading his audiences and had a natural talent for knowing just how to behave in order to attain their approbation. He achieved greatness by acting great, but that is not the whole story behind the success of Washington's self-fashioning.

Washington's physical graces may have helped him capture the attention of the right people over the years, but once placed in positions of responsibility, he had to deliver. This is one thing that must be distinctly understood — over time Washington developed a perfectionist mentality that drove him in all of his pursuits. He was thoroughly a man of the eighteenth-century world, where a gentleman's honor hinged on his ability to succeed. To make it in Virginia society, Washington had to excel in building wealth and cultivating a reputation through public service. Achieving these goals required a certain amount of useful knowledge, and Washington pursued it throughout his life.

Born the third son of a middling planter in colonial Virginia, Washington dreamed of climbing to the top of provincial society. As long as his father was alive there were plans for the boy to be educated in England in order to equip him for moving

up in society; however, those plans were aborted with his father's death when Washington was only eleven. Deprived of the educational opportunities afforded to his older half-brothers, the adolescent Washington suddenly realized the scale of the disadvantage he faced. He did have the chance to attend some local schools as a youth, and he had his older half-brothers to mentor him and introduce him to influential men who would become patrons to the upwardly mobile young man. Washington's mentors picked up where the school masters left off; introducing him to the books and subjects he would need to develop a working knowledge of in order to make his way in the world. This period of early intellectual development in the wake of his father's death is when he began to read with a purpose.

Washington's diligent reading has been largely overlooked by many historians and biographers, including those who have explored the extent of his self-fashioning. The overall trend in previous scholarship ranged between two extreme positions: either that Washington was born with inherent greatness that of course precipitated his meteoric rise; or that he had limited talents and owed his rise more to chance and the goodwill of others who were willing to see more in him than actually existed. David Humphreys wrote the first biography with Washington's cooperation and editing; it was sparse on detail but overburdened with hero worship. Parson Weems made the next significant effort to boost Washington's mythology with his hardly factual biography that famously proclaimed the boy Washington could not lie about chopping down his father's cherry tree. In the mid-nineteenth century, Jared Sparks, Washington Irving, James Paulding, and Joel Headley each wrote more factual, yet still reverent biographies of Washington that each argued the case for Washington's inherent greatness. In the post Civil War

years, the historiographical trend turned more towards realism, and biographers such as Henry Cabot Lodge, Woodrow Wilson, and Paul Leicester Ford attempted to chip away at the romanticized façade and make Washington human again. Still, none of them could seem to unearth any significant humanizing flaws that would diminish his standing. In the 1920s, Rupert Hughes and William Woodward tried to portray Washington the man rather than the monument, but they were heavily criticized for going too far and finding more flaws than Washington actually possessed. Fortunately for Washington scholarship, the publication of John C. Fitzpatrick's more comprehensive edition of Washington's papers enabled biographers in the second half of the twentieth century to base their work on a more concrete footing. Some of the best known recent biographers include: Douglas Southall Freeman, James Thomas Flexner, Barry Schwartz, and Ron Chernow.<sup>6</sup> For these biographers, Fitzpatrick's and the later editions of Washington's papers published by the University of Virginia have built up the evidentiary base significantly, but the old analytical trends still persist in albeit more subtle ways. Each of the more recent biographies portrays Washington as almost completely uninterested in anything to do with scholarly pursuits. While Freeman pays considerable tribute to Washington's positive character traits such as self-discipline, honor, willpower, dedication, integrity, etc., he also argues that "although his words usually were the mirror of his mind and his nature was disclosed daily in the transaction of business, none of his comrades could believe that he actually was as simple as he proved to be."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the tone of Freeman's treatment of Washington suggests that he was born with some of these traits, and was successful through diligence. In so doing, Freeman

---

<sup>6</sup> See Douglas Southall Freeman's seven volume biography on Washington, which was considered for a long time to be the most comprehensive biography on Washington ever written.

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, *Washington: An Abridgement* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1968), 516.

pays almost no attention to Washington's education, and no attention to his reading or library.<sup>8</sup> Freeman's work made a significant impact. This work was the standard on which most of the biographies since have been based including James Thomas Flexner's four volume series published in the 1960s, Willard Sterne Randall's one volume biography published in 1997, and most recently, Ron Chernow's one volume biography, published in 2010. Barry Schwartz's *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol* is not a traditional biography but rather is a study of Washington's elevation to virtual American sainthood. Schwartz definitely hints on more than one occasion that Washington may not have merited his exalted status.

All of these biographers correctly assert that Washington had considerable physical gifts that enabled him to stand out on a dance floor, as well as look good in uniform and powerful on horseback. But he also possessed a good mind that remained focused on the goals he set for himself. While it is true that he was not the most brilliant or imaginative thinker of his generation, he was far more intellectual than either historians and contemporaries like Adams recognized. One particular example is the study of agriculture, the great passion of Washington's life. The chapters that follow will illustrate the scholarly manner in which Washington read the latest farming and horticultural treatises and experimented with them at Mount Vernon in order to revolutionize and expand a modest tobacco plantation into a diverse agricultural empire over the course of forty years. So why have both the scholars who praise Washington's greatness and those argue for a less exalted interpretation largely missed the intellectual dimension? They missed it because Washington did a very good job at hiding it. He was

---

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington* 7 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1948, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1957.

forever conscious of his “defective education” and went to great lengths to disguise it. He did read, but that reading was a solitary pursuit. There are few concrete examples of Washington borrowing books from friends and neighbors like Franklin did as a youth. He seldom recommended books to others the way that Jefferson and Adams did. He made very few literary allusions in his writings and speeches. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence, however, of Washington leading the hunt and dancing the night away in the grandest ballrooms of the land. Therefore, on the surface it appeared that Washington had little interest in reading. Again, this conclusion is incorrect and there is one obvious resource standing in the way of the assumptions it was based on – the sizeable private library Washington amassed at Mount Vernon over the course of his lifetime.

This enormous window into Washington’s mind was largely overlooked by nearly every scholar who examined him. To date, there have been a few studies of the library at Mount Vernon to date. The first was P.C. Appleton Griffin’s annotated catalog of Washington’s books that were bought by the Boston Athenaeum in the 1870s and 1880s. Griffin examined each of the three hundred volumes in the Athenaeum and painstakingly traced the remaining six hundred volumes that had mostly been sold at auctions across the nation. Included in the catalog is the annotated version of the estate inventory made following Washington’s death in 1799, the only known complete list. Griffin’s work is the primary reference that historians have used when referring to Washington and his books. Despite the fact that it is a good resource, however, it does not shed much light on how Washington read those books, or if he read them at all. Another example is the slim volume, *The Library at Mount Vernon*, by Frances Laverne Carroll and Mary Meacham

published for the Mount Vernon Ladies Association in 1977, which exhibits just as much interest in the furnishings of the room as the books in it.

The best study of Washington's reading was done by Paul K. Longmore as an appendix to his book, *The Invention of George Washington*. Longmore's book traces the interaction between Washington's career and his public image from his debut in the Seven Years' War through the onset of the Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. Longmore shows how Washington went from being an upstart militia officer to becoming the "Father of his Country" by connecting his image with the political ideology and cultural values of his time. What Longmore effectively demonstrates is that Washington was more politically shrewd than commonly thought, and more closely in touch with the views of his contemporaries than many gave him credit for. He was the ultimate political leader who constantly sought to be perceived as embodying the highest ideals of his society.<sup>9</sup>

In covering Washington's career in public service from blundering beginnings to national symbol, Longmore tries to leave no aspect of the self-fashioning effort unexplored. He portrays Washington as someone who managed to strike the perfect balance between selfishness and public-mindedness, between egotism and patriotism. That balance drove his pursuit of fame, yet fostered an overwhelmingly positive public perception of his character. Longmore argues that it was not Washington's admirers who created this image of infallibility; it was Washington himself. By seeking to embody all of society's norms, he became increasingly adept at hiding his flaws, rendering a public image of himself as the consummate man of his age, ideally suited to lead a people that

---

<sup>9</sup>Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), ix-x.

he knew so well. While all of this is true, Longmore does not really examine where Washington was taking his guidance from in order to give this masterful performance over the course of more than forty years; he may have had a talent for leadership and good intuition, but surely he must have had examples that he was drawing on.

Longmore explores this question of what intellectual sources Washington leaned on in the appendix entitled, "The Foundations of Useful Knowledge" that specifically addresses Washington's reading habits and the contents of his personal library. Here, Longmore argues that Washington was a practical reader who devoted more time, thought, and attentions to reading than historians have traditionally given him credit for. But this argument is laden with problems in the way that Longmore presents it. First, the essay is brief and is largely based more on compilations of the inventories of Mount Vernon's holdings as compared to references to Washington's reading in his correspondence. Longmore does not make a concerted effort to determine what Washington actually read; he instead makes broad assumptions that are based largely on a comparison of the book inventories made over time along with Washington's expense accounts. Also, although he claims to advance the argument that Washington was more of a reader than anyone previously thought, Longmore devotes a considerable portion of the essay to the opposing argument by quoting Washington as having once remarked that he was too busy in his daily routine to make time for reading after his return to Mount Vernon following the presidency. Longmore further leaps to conclusions, including Washington's assumed disinterest in religion based on the contents of the library, noting that he did not own all of the most popular religious books in Virginia, and that there was no Bible listed on the 1783 list. This assumption is problematic in light of the fact that

Washington did purchase a considerable number of religious works and the 1783 listing was actually compiled by Lund Washington and was noted at that time as being incomplete.<sup>10</sup> Besides the issues inherent in Longmore's assumptions, there is another factor that detracts from his argument about the importance of Washington's reading – it is not even included as a full chapter in his book. With this construction, it does not appear that Longmore considered reading to be as central a component of the self-fashioning project as his appendix alone suggests.

Longmore's treatment of Washington's reading is what makes this project possible. While on the surface I agree with Longmore's argument about Washington being a practical reader, I find fault with his methodology and assumptions. By picking up where Longmore left off and delving more deeply into the questions of what did Washington actually read and why, it is possible to properly argue that reading was a key component behind Washington's success. The story of how Washington exceeded all expectations to become the father of his country can now have a new degree of richness.

This project is not a conventional biography, for such work has been repeated too many times after the publication of the first one by David Humphreys in 1789. This project instead explores the questions of where Washington read, why he pursued a lifelong habit of reading only certain subjects, what he read, and how he used the knowledge gained from the reading. Answering these questions makes it possible to then renew the argument that Washington was a deliberate reader, always seeking to expand his knowledge base in ways that would help him accomplish specific goals. A thorough

---

<sup>10</sup> Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 217. See also A List of Books at Mount Vernon, July 23, 1783. The original copy of this list is the collection of the Washington papers at the Library of Congress and had been made digitally available. It is also reproduced as an appendix in Frances Laverne Carroll and Mary Meacham, *The Library at Mount Vernon* (Pittsburgh, PA: Beta Phi Mu, 1977), 162-3.

examination of Washington's reading also sheds new light on the creation of his American identity. He is the quintessential American success story. He eschewed the fashionable classical education that was the foundation of a European style mind in favor of a more practical approach to learning that included only those subjects that had an immediate application. This is what intellectually separated Washington from many of his contemporaries. Washington had no patience for the idea of acquiring knowledge simply for the sake of it. For him, the popular phrase, "useful knowledge" was to be applied in a literal sense only. Whereas Jefferson found the study of Italian, Latin, Greek, French, and Hebrew absolutely essential in order to read works of literature in their original form, Washington instead threw himself into the study of the latest agricultural advances so he could free himself from the nightmare that was the tobacco market.

Washington's "defective education" combined with the widely known fact that he never learned to read and write in any language other than English in part led to Adams's charges of "illiteracy." Indeed, these defects make Washington's rise and lasting fame seem astounding. Furthermore, that fame cast Washington as the father figure for a people who went from being colonials who admired nearly all things European to citizens of a new type of nation who came to believe that they were setting the trend for an increasingly modern Europe to follow. As such, this project affords the opportunity to understand Washington's ideas about the types of reading that would shape his personal development and how he used the knowledge he gained from it in conjunction with his own experiences to envision a new type of American future that would be more independent in every way from Great Britain and the rest of Europe. Although he was

not the first to become a full fledged revolutionary, once he did make that evolution he far outstripped most of his peers in seeing past the rebellion to begin conceiving ideas about nation building. Therefore, in order to develop a core understanding of the significance of reading to Washington, it is essential to understand what he read, where he read, and why he read certain things and not others.

With that in mind, chapter one delves into Washington's background to determine why he was so self-conscious about his defective education. His father's death aborted his formal education and would leave an indelible impact on the boy's life. As the young Washington made his way in the world, he had a big dream of a career in the British army that was thwarted because of his colonial birth and woeful lack of a classical education and money. This burned the already thin-skinned Washington to such a degree that he began to mentally break with Great Britain long before the Revolution was even an idea. This intellectual shift was to cause him to refocus his reading on the subjects that would make him a financial, political, and social success in a Virginian sense.

Having thus established why he gravitated towards certain kinds of reading material, the collection itself can then be explored in a richer context. Chapter two will examine the works Washington read and collected during the early phase of his life in Virginia before the outbreak of the American Revolution and his appointment as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. In this early period Washington purchased most of the books he collected, so it therefore presents an interesting opportunity to understand Washington's priorities when it came to selecting reading material during this formative phase of his intellectual development. This chapter will lay the foundation for the overall argument that Washington was a very serious reader by making direct

connections between what he was reading and what he was doing in both public and private pursuits. The need to make the connection between Washington's choice of reading and the different positions he occupied is grounded by the argument made in Kevin Sharpe's *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England*. In his chapter, "Reading in Early Modern England," Sharpe argues that "a close examination of texts could reveal one of the curiously neglected strands of the political tapestry: the relationship between the word and the exercise of power."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, "the process of reading is more complex than a simple acceptance or rejection of a unified meaning produced by an author or text, and that reading is a cultural as well as personal action, and indeed that, even in our own lives, is specific to moments and places."<sup>12</sup> Although Sharpe's argument is based on his study of Sir William Drake, a university trained academic in Stuart England, it can be applied to Washington because the relationship between texts, politics, and power in the eighteenth-century world was still understood in much the same terms as in seventeenth-century England. Much of Washington's life revolved around his ability to both hold and exercise power. Whether it was mastering the agricultural science so that he could maximize the output of his plantations so that he could control his financial future; commanding military units at various levels, or serving in political offices, Washington was consumed with this need to gain, use, and then surrender power appropriately in order to cement his legacy. It therefore makes perfect sense to use Sharpe to understand that all of Washington's reading was politicized. Understanding what he read within the context of what was

---

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

taking place in his life will reveal his true attitude towards the printed word and the knowledge that can be gained from it.

Chapter three will examine Washington's reading during his time as a delegate to the Continental Congresses and his tenure as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. This chapter is very much at the core of the argument being advanced in this study for it explores the period in which Washington was catapulted onto the world stage in a central leadership role. Although he did attract high level attention on both sides of the Atlantic for his exploits during the Seven Years' War it was short-lived and he was largely a peripheral character, at least as far as the British were concerned. The American Revolution, however, placed Washington in a unique and extremely difficult position. He was charged with securing a victory over the most powerful military force on earth to secure a new nation. As such, he found himself having to build an army and gain recognition of its military capacity while simultaneously proving to be a general officer worthy of the rank. For the Revolution to be a success, that recognition would have to come from both sides: his fellow Americans and his British adversaries. This, even more than the presidency, would prove to be the greatest challenge of Washington's career. He quickly found that he was out of his depth, and that his army was not up to the task. This chapter will show that Washington's conspicuously limited military education actually forced him to transform his thinking to embrace a new strategy that flew in the face of eighteenth-century military convention. He came to understand that he did not have to win all the battles in order to win the war. He simply needed to survive. The fact that Washington retained his position as the head of the victorious American army wreathed his head in more laurels than any of his Revolutionary contemporaries. This

unparalleled degree of fame ultimately would not allow him to remain a private citizen for long, despite his dramatic, Cincinnatus like act of ceremoniously returning his commission to a packed session of Congress before galloping as fast as his horse could back to his home at Mount Vernon.<sup>13</sup>

With Washington's rise therefore placed in context, chapter four will then explore Washington's reading from the end of the American Revolution to his final retirement from public life at the end of his second presidential term. The significance of Washington's presidency is profound, but his position was in several ways far less precarious than during the Revolution. At the point of his election, Washington's fame was at its zenith. He was keenly aware of the fact that the greatest contribution he could make to the newly instituted federal government was his presence. Although this appears simple, it was anything but because he found that he was the precedent setter for all who would come after him. As the nation's first chief executive, he had to strike the right balance in his public performances between the familiar monarchical past and the demands of a new republican future. This called for both delicacy and precision, and he had few examples to guide him. Washington therefore had to pay particular attention to the coverage he and his administration were receiving in print media including newspapers, pamphlets, and published political sermons to maintain awareness of just how his performance was being received by the American people. In the end, this chapter will draw the curtain back on Washington's presidential performance in order underscore exactly how carefully orchestrated his every move actually was.

---

<sup>13</sup> Staneley Weintrub, *George Washington's Christmas Farewell: A Mount Vernon Homecoming, 1783* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003); Garry Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment* (New York: Doubleday, 1984).

The image of Washington as president offered in chapter four will set the stage for chapter five, which will examine the period of Washington's final retirement from public life in 1796 to his death in 1799. During these twilight years, Washington was primarily concerned with legacy building. This chapter will show that the additions made to his library during this period reveal that he intended the library to contain not just the volumes from which he gleaned "useful knowledge" over the course of his lifetime, but also all of the writings and records that would be necessary to set the record straight for posterity. Here, he was concerned with collecting copies of legislative and judicial records, the latest writings about the Revolution and American history, as well as a considerable number of periodicals. It is also interesting to note that during this period Washington collaborated with his first biographer, David Humphreys, a fact which underscores the criticality of shoring up his legacy as he felt his life drawing to a close.

The final question that remains to be explored regards where Washington read. A large part of the reason why historians have hitherto neglected this subject is that the anecdotal evidence of Washington engaged in reading is scant. He was obsessively private about reading, going so far as to build himself a library within his home that is quite literally sequestered from the rest of the house. The fact that Washington was an owner/builder raises tantalizing questions about the design decisions he made to ensure that his library was a safe haven of sorts, a place where he could read and think away from the prying eyes of the scores of visitors that passed through his doors and from the many children who called Mount Vernon home over the years. Moreover, the manner in which the room was furnished also yields some important insight to how he approached reading as an activity.

Painting an accurate picture of Washington's reading is not without its challenges. For as much as is known about his life, any project which attempts to get into Washington's mind requires a certain number of assumptions to fill in the methodological framework that is staked on a certain number of facts. First, when Washington died his executors made an inventory of the property in his estate in accordance with Virginia law. In the process, nearly all of the contents in Mount Vernon at the time were incorporated in the resulting catalogue, including those that did not belong to Washington personally. In terms of the library, the estate inventory listed books that clearly belonged to Martha Washington, her predeceased son, John Parke Custis, Bushrod Washington, and other members of the family that over various periods resided, or were residing at Mount Vernon at the time of Washington's death. It is therefore incorrect to state that Washington's collection consisted of over nine hundred volumes. The majority of the books were his such as: Bland's *Treatise on Military Discipline*, Duhamel's *Husbandry*, Smollett's *History of England*; however, not all of them were.

Second, there is the blunt truth that Washington was not a widely read scholar in the sense that not only did he lack formal academic training, but also that he limited his reading to works with an immediate, practical application. If he needed to read, he did; however, if he was too busy to read, he did not seem to lament it. Moreover, he simply did not foster a love of learning for the mere sake of it. As such, Washington did not seem to approach every piece of writing with the same sense of need to master it. For example, John Adams's diary from his days as a law apprentice is littered with entries detailing his re-reading of legal texts. On October 5, 1758 he recorded, "I have read Gilbert's 1<sup>st</sup> Section, of feuds this evening, but am not master of it." The following day

his entry read, "I am now reading over again Gilberts section of feudal tenures." Adams continued to re-read it the next day, the day after that, and the day after that. On October 9 he exclaimed, "Read in Gilberts Tenures. I must and will make that Book familiar to me." On October 10, Adams boasted that "I read him slowly, but I gain Ideas and Knowledge as I go along." By the October 12<sup>th</sup> he wrote "this volume will take me a fortnight, but I will master it." He kept at it until he had.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Washington's diary never mentions his reading. Moreover, with a few notable exceptions that will be discussed throughout the pages that follow, Washington did not leave very much in the way of marginalia, nor did he leave many pages of reading notes that would be ever so helpful in delineating just how he mentally processed the material that he was reading. While this may indicate varying degrees of interest on Washington's part, it may also simply reflect that with such a limited formal education, he was never taught a scholarly method for reading and he did not make note taking a long standing habit on his own. That said, those texts which did have accompanying reading notes were easily assumed to be more significant to Washington than those that do not. Just because there are no marginal or reading notes in a given work, as in the example of Bland's *Treastise*, however, does not mean that Washington did not read it.

Conversely, it would be problematic to take the overall dearth of reading notes as license to assume that if Washington had a book in his library, he must have read it. The simple fact that Washington had in his collection multiple works in foreign languages is the clear evidence that underscores the dangers of such an assumption because he could not speak, read, or write in any language other than English. Additionally, many of the

---

<sup>14</sup> John Adams, *The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* 4 vols. ed. L.H. Butterfield, et.al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 1: 45-48.

items in Washington's collection were gifts, especially those that were acquired in the latter part of his life. Both ambitious authors and individuals looking to curry favor sent various pieces of writing to Washington. As these gifts were unsolicited and Washington's responses did not always indicate whether or not he did anything beyond glance at the title, it would be sheer folly to assume too much.

Washington did make a habit of writing his name and placing his bookplate in his books. These markings of ownership are both useful for delineating which books on the final estate inventory were his and which ones he was more likely to have read or at the very least perused. Every work in the collection purchased by Washington had at least his name, if not both his name and bookplate in it. His purchases can be corroborated by examining his expense accounts and correspondence with his agents over the course of his lifetime. Therefore, if an item in the collection bore no mark of Washington's ownership, there was no evidence to substantiate his purchase of it, and/or there was no concrete evidence in any form to indicate that he did read it, that item was disregarded for the purposes of this study. Determining which works were purchased by Washington allowed for another critical assumption. Given that the library at Mount Vernon was a space designed for his solitary use and was therefore not open to either guests or even other members of household, nothing in the room was intended to be a showpiece. Therefore, if Washington purchased a book for himself, it was because he intended to read it. He designed the rest of the mansion to overawe his visitors; it would have been inconsistent with his character to construct an ostentatious library filled with fine, but unread books for the sake of impressing others. Washington never presented himself as a scholar in any other way, shape, or form to others, so it simply did not make sense when

looking at his library purchases to assume that he was doing it to show off in the same way he purchased bold paint colors, fine carriages, and fancy clothes.

Therefore, the books and other printed materials from the collection that are discussed were carefully selected to steer clear of the aforementioned fallacies. The majority of the selected works can be proved to have been purchased and read by Washington. The rest of them can be reasonably assumed to have been read by Washington because they bear evidence that he handled and cared about them enough to make clear his ownership, and they fit well within the context of his intellectual needs at the time when he acquired them. The result that this carefully constructed analytical framework reveals is that Washington was a man who almost never read for pleasure. He read for the sake of gaining the knowledge needed to accomplish whatever task he was saddled with at a given time and maintain the reputation that he worked a lifetime to cultivate. Washington read works on agriculture, history, religion, law, government, military science, and current affairs; this left little room for belles lettres, philosophy, and poetry.

Washington was a practical reader. He clearly valued “useful knowledge” that made many of his tasks easier.<sup>15</sup> He was and still is the quintessential American success

---

<sup>15</sup> Washington used the word “defective” to describe his education on several occasions throughout his life in correspondence with his closest friends and associates. For one such example see Washington to David Humphries, 25 July 1785, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008). Additionally, Washington was a keen supporter of the further development of American universities. See Washington to George Chapman, 15 December 1784, in *ibid.* In this letter Washington wrote, “the best means of forming a manly, virtuous, and happy people, will be found in the right education of youth. Without *this* foundation, every other means, in my opinion, must fail.” Earlier in 1781, Washington wrote to the president and professors of the College of William and Mary that he would do all in his power to reestablish the college because “an Institution, important for the Communication of useful Learning [is] conducive to the Diffusion of the true principles of rational Liberty.” See Washington to the President and Professors of the College of William and Mary, 27 October 1781, in *The Writings of George Washington* 37 vols., ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: 1931-1940), 23:276-277. In his first annual message

story because he applied his mind to achieving success. He was relentless in the pursuit of his goals and his reading is an applied demonstration of it.

This study reveals Washington's mind at work. Painfully aware that he was underprepared for just about every occupation he undertook Washington turned to reading as a means by which to prepare, rather than rely on others too heavily. It is true that as he matured, he developed a network of carefully chosen advisors and aides whose services were indispensable; however, Washington never relied wholly on them to make his decisions, even in the most precarious situations. The effect of Washington's self-directed reading over the course of a lifetime was a series of intellectual revolutions that caused him to evolve from a provincial Virginian steeped in a keen sense of Britishness into one of the pioneers of a newly emerging American identity. He, more than any of his contemporaries became the embodiment of the American Revolution, and as such, there was no one else who could have served as the new nation's first chief executive. For far too long, historians, biographers, and commentators have either celebrated his status as one of history's great men or condemned it as unwarranted without sufficiently examining the method behind Washington's success. This study sheds important light on just how he did that. Far from either being born inherently great or being the product of good fortune, Washington was a man driven to rise to new heights. Reading was very much at the heart of his efforts.

---

to Congress Washington wrote, "There is nothing which can better deserve your patronage than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is in every Country the surest basis of public happiness. To the security of a free Constitution it contributes in various ways. By convincing those who are entrusted with the public administration, that every valuable end of Government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people: And by teaching the people themselves to know and value their own rights." See Washington's First Annual Message to Congress, 8 January 1790, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. These sentiments when combined reflect that Washington was both conscious of the limits of his own education, and that he placed a premium on education as the means to developing a prosperous American society.

## Chapter 1 6 Pursuing Useful Knowledge

The sun was just beginning to peek through the windows at the dawn of a new day on Ferry Farm, but thirteen year old George Washington was already up and hard at work at a small table by the bedroom window. As his younger brothers Samuel and John Augustine still lay sleeping nearby, and the first of the sun's rays stretched through the neatly curtained windows and across the small table the future father of his country was busy copying out word for word a translation of an old guidebook for princely behavior written by a French Jesuit priest called *The Rules of Civility*. Such a project was no small undertaking for the boy, but little by little, he was determined to press on to the end and so kept scratching away at the paper with his quill, careful to keep his ink stained fingers off the paper. By the time he was finished, young Washington's manuscript consisted of 108 rules for how to properly conduct himself as a respectable member of society. He took pride in his work, for he would rely on these maxims to guide him through a long career in the public light.<sup>16</sup>

Washington's youthful act of copying out this antiquated French courtesy manual is almost as well known as Parson Weems's wholly invented cherry tree episode. Parents and teachers of young students have used the real episode of the teenaged Washington working at his desk as an example to study hard and/or as an admonition to behave

---

<sup>16</sup> Washington's notebook that contained his manuscript of *The Rules of Civility* went unnoticed for nearly a century until his papers were purchased for the Library of Congress in 1849. By then, reverent biographers began to explore the manuscript and its possibilities. Jared Sparks misused the manuscript first in his biography. Later, Washington Irving sensationalized it in order to create a homespun origin for the *Rules of Civility*. By the 1880s, an interest in the study of the subject of etiquette had developed and *The Rules of Civility* were reprinted both in England and the United States. American publishers began to use Washington's manuscript as a way to boost sales, rather than simply rely on the French translation that he used. Dr. J.M. Toner's 1888 work, *George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation*, revealed the full extent of Washington's work including his abbreviations, capitalization, and nonstandard spelling. Toner also left gaps where mice had eaten away several dozen of the rules on several pages. See John T. Phillips, trans. *George Washington's Rules of Civility* (Leesburg, VA: Goose Creek Productions, 2005), 13.

properly; few however, spend any time trying to work out why exactly Washington did this. Some chalk it up as an early testament of Washington's future greatness of the sober, ambitious adolescent grooming himself for the spectacularly public life he is destined to lead. Others perhaps take a more dim view of this episode as an example of Washington's obsessive need for self-control of a sad attempt by a less than intelligent, socially awkward youth to be able to act normally in the presence of his betters in the desperate hope to attract the attention of powerful patrons. The reality between these extreme interpretations is somewhere in the middle. Washington was ambitious and yes, even a little desperate to transcend the social station he was born into. However, his solitary act of copying a courtesy manual word for word into a commonplace book offers an insight into how seriously he took the act of reading, studying, and internalizing the material that he considered to contain "useful knowledge." This chapter will examine why he developed a taste for reading material that yielded practical knowledge that could be put immediately to use. To answer this question, it is necessary to probe Washington's biography, exploring where his rigid mentality came from by penetrating to the heart of his lifelong self-fashioning project to reveal how the unique way in which he pursued "useful knowledge" helped him refine his sense of self.

### Washington's Childhood and Early Life

When Washington was eleven years old, his father, Augustine, died leaving his widow, Mary Ball Washington, the single parent to six young children.<sup>17</sup> Whatever emotional toll this loss took on the young Washington has been lost to history.

---

<sup>17</sup> James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience (1732-1775)* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1965), 17.

Washington apparently remembered little of his father, scarcely referring to him in his later writings, and there is no evidence that testifies to how the young boy grieved. The significance of Augustine Washington's death, however, can still be considered profound for three other reasons. First, Washington lost his father at that particular stage of adolescence when he needed his father's guiding hand to steer him to maturity. Second, as Augustine's widow never remarried, it meant that Washington and his siblings were to be raised by a single mother, so Washington and his younger siblings were in need of a positive male role model to introduce them into the patriarchal society of the time. Third, and most critical was that the death of Augustine Washington aborted all plans to further his sons' formal educations.

With Augustine Washington's death in context, it is therefore possible to trace the origins of George's self-fashioning back to his mother. Mary Ball Washington set about the task of rearing her children with intensity uncommon in eighteenth-century women; she sought to instill in her children deference and well regulated restraint.<sup>18</sup> Toward the

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 19-25; George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 130. Much of what is known about Mary Ball Washington comes from anecdotal evidence. She was born in 1708 to English born Joseph Ball and his second wife, Mary Johnson. Her father died when she was three, and her mother died when she was twelve rendering Mary an orphan. From that point, she was raised by a family friend, George Eskridge. Mary was thankful for Eskridge's kindness; Washington family lore indicates that in gratitude, Mary named her eldest son George after her guardian. Her few surviving letters are littered with errors, well beyond what was considered normal in the eighteenth century, indicating that she was not well educated. Given her middling social status, it is likely that she was taught to read and write passably, was given ample religious instruction (it was a mother's responsibility to teach religion to her children in Virginia), and trained in the necessary female tasks of running a home and raising children. Later in life, she shunned high society and the favorite Virginia pastime of dancing, and it is unclear whether she just didn't enjoy such activities or never learned them. See Ron Chernow, *George Washington: A Life* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010), 5-6. Girls' education in Virginia had not changed greatly by the time Martha Washington was born, so she would have been instructed in the same things as Mary Ball Washington had been; however, evidence suggests that she was more highly educated. Martha was born into a higher social standing, so she received more training in social graces, riding, needlework, and dancing. More importantly, the quality of her letters reveal that she was more educated in terms of reading and writing than Mary Ball Washington. Martha Washington must also have received ample religious instruction, for she owned many of the religious tracts and prayer books that eventually made their way into Mount Vernon's inventory, and her children and grandchildren attested

end of his life, long after his fame reached beyond American shores, Washington is said to have remarked, "All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her."<sup>19</sup> Those who knew her described Mary Ball Washington as a force of nature; her trademark stiff personality and iron will were traits that were inherited by her famous son. A relative and childhood friend of Washington recalled:

I was often there with George, his playmate, schoolmate, and young man's companion. Of the mother I was ten times more afraid than I ever was of my own parents. She awed me! I could not behold that remarkable woman without feelings it is impossible to describe. Whoever has seen that awe-inspiring air and manner so characteristic in the Father of his Country, will remember the matron as she appeared when the presiding genius of her well-ordered household, commanding and being obeyed.<sup>20</sup>

One particular area that Mary Ball Washington maintained command over was her eldest son's education. Washington was educated at local schools and for a brief period by a private tutor while he was living in the home of his older half brother, Lawrence. The time spent under the direction of this tutor was the closest that the young Washington would ever come to a classical education, for he was schooled in the "principles of grammar, the theory of reasoning, on speaking, the science of numbers, the elements of geometry, and the highest branches of mathematics, the art of mensuration, composing together with the rudiments of geography, history, and the studies which are not improperly termed 'the humanities.'"<sup>21</sup> Furthermore he received instruction "in the

---

to her leading their religious instruction at home. See Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* (New York: Viking Press, 2005), 23-25.

<sup>19</sup> George Washington in *Quotations of George Washington* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2003), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Washington cited in George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 131.

<sup>21</sup> David Humphreys, *Life of General Washington: With George Washington's Remarks*, ed. Rosemarie Zagarri (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 6-7.

graceful accomplishments of dancing, fencing, riding, and performing the military exercises,ö all of which he gained conspicuous proficiency in a remarkably short time.<sup>22</sup> A university education, however, was financially out of the question and with little hesitation, Mary Washington squelched Lawrence's plans to train her son for an officer's career in the Royal Navy.<sup>23</sup>

To supplement her children's educations, Mary Ball Washington read aloud to them from the Bible and from several anthologies of sermons on a daily basis.<sup>24</sup> Most, if not all of these books, would be given to George who retained them in his private library for the rest of his life.<sup>25</sup> These daily catechisms were meant to inspire piety in the Washington children as well as underscore the central place religious texts occupied in an orthodox, moral life. Mary Ball Washington's was equally Spartan with regard to her treatment of her children's accomplishments. Throughout her long life, she made a habit of deriding her eldest son's achievements, never appearing to exhibit the least bit of parental pride.<sup>26</sup> The contradictory versions of highly embellished stories of Washington's relationship with his mother as told by the likes of the Marquis de Lafayette and Parson Weems were fabrications designed to obfuscate the imperfections in Washington's personal history in favor of an idealized image of Mary Ball Washington, advanced at a time when the concept of Republican Motherhood was shaping women's roles in the new republic. Mary Ball Washington's parenting style was

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 141; Mary V. Thompson, "In the Hands of a Good Providence" *Religion in the Life of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 16-20.

<sup>25</sup> Appleton P.C. Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 497-503.

<sup>26</sup> Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience*, 20.

to leave an indelible mark on her eldest son, who throughout his life was incredibly thin-skinned and painfully fearful of criticism.<sup>27</sup>

### Washington's Early Reading

Thus with his mother's discipline to guide him, the youthful Washington devoted a considerable amount of time in his daily routine to reading and self-improvement, and in so doing cultivated what would become a lifelong habit of seeking out instructional books first, and to a secondary degree, books for pleasure such as travel narratives and literature.<sup>28</sup> One of his earliest notes in his childhood commonplace books recorded that he read "the reign of King John, and in the *Spectator* read to No. 143."<sup>29</sup> These schoolboy commonplace books offer just a few glimpses of what Washington the student was like. Although they are small and limited in scope, these notebooks reveal fleeting glimpses into the workings of one of the most difficult to penetrate minds in American history. The most important message embedded in these early writings is not the content that reflects the typical lessons children across the colonies were learning, rather, it is the artistry and care with which these lessons and notes were committed to the pages. Just as he would demonstrate on the much larger and grander scale of Mount Vernon as an adult,

---

<sup>27</sup> Washington's fear of criticism is borne out in his correspondence over the course of his public life. From his first days in the Virginia Regiment, he developed a bad habit of deflecting blame onto others whenever possible when reporting a defeat or some other unfortunate event. He maintained this habit throughout the Revolution, as in the example of his official report of the losses of forts Washington and Lee to the Congress wherein he squarely blamed his subordinate commanders, including Nathanael Greene, while completely neglecting to report the decisions he made which contributed to the defeat. During his presidency when the partisan press began to attack him, he vented his frustration and anger to his close associates in a more outward manner than in his younger years.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. In his young adulthood Washington also read Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*. These novels are among those listed on the 1764 inventory of the books at Mount Vernon, which Washington compiled. See the list in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>29</sup> The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress (Reel I, Washington Papers Microfilm).

the young Washington enjoyed connecting beauty and utility.<sup>30</sup> The neatness of Washington's early reading notes demonstrates a serious approach to his studies, which is reflective of the discipline his mother instilled in him.

From childhood Washington harbored ambitions to circulate in the most elite social circles and serve in the highest levels of the military and government, so he set out early to acquire the requisite knowledge to achieve those goals. Not only did he copy the *Rules of Civility*, but capitalizing on his natural mathematical ability, Washington taught himself how to conduct land surveys using his father's instruments and books borrowed from William Fairfax.<sup>31</sup> Learning how to conduct land surveys paid dividends to Washington in several important ways. First, he developed an appreciation, and indeed a hunger, for land. The desire to acquire profitable real estate would be one of his lifelong passions. Second, he gained the skills necessary to earn a living, essential for an ambitious youth with little inheritance and no benefactor. Third, once he established himself as a reputable surveyor, he was able to reach out to some of the wealthy landowners of Virginia who could use his services and in the process become his patrons. Fourth, he learned patience and perseverance in reconnoitering land by spending days at a

---

<sup>30</sup> Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> There is evidence in Washington's surviving papers that he largely taught himself to survey through trial and error. He ran his first lines at his childhood home, Ferry Farm. His sketches and calculations survive in his notebooks. Biographers Freeman, Flexner, and Chernow all attest that Washington had an aptitude for surveying and before long was being paid by neighbors for his work. His first earnings were three pounds and two shillings. Surveyors in Virginia were officially licensed through the College of William and Mary after making an application and presumably submitting a sample of work to prove competency. It was possible to apprentice to an experienced surveyor; however, this practice did not appear to be as long or as formal as apprenticeships for other skilled trades who often required more than seven years of training. There is insufficient evidence to support the claim that Washington was ever formally apprenticed to any surveyor. What is documented is that he conducted his first extensive surveying trip with George William Fairfax and several others from March to April 13, 1748 to chart and subdivide the Lord Fairfax's land grant from the Crown. See Washington, *A Journal of my Journey Over the Mountains Began Fryday the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1747/8*, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

time in the wilderness, which greatly hardened his constitution and prepared him for the military life he wanted so badly to lead.<sup>32</sup>

In the absence of his father to guide him, the upwardly mobile Washington earnestly sought to gain the attention of a surrogate who could usher him into Virginia society. Through Lawrence and even more importantly, Lawrence's in-laws, the Fairfaxes, Washington slipped into the mix of provincial Virginian high society. His imposing physical size made him hard to miss in crowded ballrooms. He was graceful, especially on the dance floor, and he quite literally danced his way into the attentions of the rich and powerful. Because of his natural shyness, lack of formal education, and perpetual fear of ridicule, however, he shied away from learned conversations, observed much and preferred to speak only when he was sure of himself.<sup>33</sup>

Just as the ambitious young man was beginning to make his way into the world of tidewater society, he was dealt another crushing blow with Lawrence's death in 1752 after a long and painful struggle with tuberculosis. Lawrence's death was no doubt harder for the younger Washington to bear than the death of their father, for not only was Washington older and better able to grasp the ways in which death affected the lives of those left behind, but Lawrence had been his younger brother's savior, hero, and mentor throughout his formative teen years. In his will, Lawrence bequeathed his heart-broken younger brother three lots in Fredericksburg, and the remote hope that if he were to outlive Lawrence's widow, Anne, and infant daughter (as long as she died without issue),

---

<sup>32</sup> Humphreys, *Life of General Washington*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 155; John E. Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

he would inherit the clear title to Mount Vernon and the lands connected to it.<sup>34</sup> This was small comfort to Washington, who felt both the emotional and practical loss of a beloved older brother and mentor. Although he could take comfort in the fact that Lawrence's father-in-law, William Fairfax, would step into the role of benefactor and Lawrence's brother-in-law, George William Fairfax would breach the emotional gap as a best friend who could be relied on, Washington surely knew that it was time that he seriously made a name for himself in the world. He lobbied for and received a commission as an adjutant in the Virginia Regiment, one of Lawrence's old posts, and he became a member of a newly organized Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg, rising quickly to Master Mason. Additionally, he continued to conduct land surveys accumulating handsome profits.<sup>35</sup>

#### Washington First Enters Public Life

Now twenty-one years old, Washington was finally climbing up the daunting social ladder, one rung at a time. He still needed an opportunity to impress the powerful men of Virginia who had noticed him only long enough to commission him. After all, military officers who earned no laurels typically failed to achieve lasting fame, for Virginia society was teeming with men who styled themselves, "colonel." Washington got his opportunity to make a name for himself when the French invaded the Ohio territory, lands traditionally claimed by Virginia's Ohio Company for the British Crown. In October 1753, George II ordered the Virginians to construct forts along the Ohio River and to send an emissary to the French to find out if they were in fact trespassing on

---

<sup>34</sup> Flexner, 52. The particular details of Lawrence Washington's will can also be found in more extensive detail in Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, 7 vols. Volume 7 completed by J.A. Carroll and M.W. Ashworth, (New York: 1948-1957), 1: 325.

<sup>35</sup> Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience*, 53.

English soil. If they were, they were to be driven out by force of arms.<sup>36</sup> The prospect of traveling from Williamsburg to the French fort near what is now Pittsburgh in the winter was nothing short of frightening in the three-mile per hour world in which Washington lived, but with what would become a typical disregard for physical danger, he leapt at the chance to deliver his king's ultimatum. Virginia's lieutenant governor, Robert Dinwiddie, chose Washington probably because no one else stepped up to volunteer for such a dangerous mission; however, there really was no one more qualified than Washington. All those years of surveying experience taught him valuable lessons about how to navigate difficult terrain and survive in the wilderness and he was physically very strong. The journey was harrowing, and Washington escaped death on at least two occasions. On the return leg of the trip an Indian guide turned on him and fired a musket at near point-blank range only to miss. The unscathed Washington wisely opted not to hunt his attacker down and instead pushed ahead at a blistering pace to avoid any further attacks by other hostile Indians. As he and his guide, Christopher Gist, were trying to cross a rushing river on a hastily built raft, Washington fell in and came close to freezing to death.<sup>37</sup> Washington survived, however, and his mission was successful on a number of levels. On a strategic level, it was clear that the French planned to stay, and their presence made war probable.

On a personal level, this mission made Washington famous. He kept a detailed record of his journey, complete with rich descriptions of the lands that he crossed and the French fortifications he visited along with all the details of his narrow escapes which he

---

<sup>36</sup> Freeman, *George Washington*, 1:275.

<sup>37</sup> George Washington, *The Journal of Major George Washington, Sent by the Hon. Robert Dinwiddie, Esq., His Majesty's Lieutenant-Governor, and Commander in Chief of Virginia, to the Commandant of the French Forces on Ohio* (Williamsburg: William Hunter, 1754), 21.

gave to Dinwiddie as a record upon returning to Williamsburg. Dinwiddie immediately had it published both in Virginia and in London to advertise the severity of the crisis on the frontier and in so doing made Washington a celebrity. Washington was given a day to prepare and submit the manuscript, and he evidently felt pressured. Although not uncommon for authors at that time, he made a point to write the advertisement for the book himself in which he apologized, "for the numberless Imperfections of it," and that he had "no leisure to consult of a new and proper form to offer it in, or to correct or amend the diction of the old, neither was I apprised that it ever would be published."<sup>38</sup> The text of the journal offers evidence that Washington did not intend for it to be published. Many of the entries appear hastily written while others read like minutes of a meeting. Moreover, he makes frequent use of abbreviations, and the sentence structure is halting. Despite Washington's apparent fears that his work would be ridiculed for its amateurish prose, the book was widely read, frequently re-printed on both sides of the Atlantic, and often quoted.<sup>39</sup> At the age of twenty-two, the young man whose prospects had previously been uncertain, was an internationally published author and newly promoted to lieutenant colonel and second in command of the Virginia Regiment.

Washington was completely unprepared and unqualified for this promotion. For example, British officers who occupied comparable ranks and positions had spent decades in the army before reaching such a level. During their course of service they would have been expected to remain engaged in the study of the military art through

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. See also the editor's note in Dorothy Twohig, ed. *George Washington's Diaries: An Abridgement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 33. The journal was printed in various colonial newspapers including: *Md. Gazette.*, 21 and 28 March 1754; *Boston Gazette.*, 16 April 6 21 May 1754. On 15 February 1754 the journal was delivered to the House of Burgesses and the members voted to award Washington £50 for his efforts.

reading both classic and new texts on the science of warfare, histories of well known campaigns, and biographies of great commanders. British officers had an overwhelming preference for Continental books as opposed to English ones. Additionally, most British officers preferred reading those Continental books in their original languages. It was therefore expected that British officers were able to read in multiple languages, French, Italian, and German being the most important. At a minimum, however, a mastery of French was virtually required for all senior officers.<sup>40</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Washington read *Caesar's Commentaries* and a life of Alexander the Great on recommendation from William Fairfax; however, that was the limit of Washington's military education to date.<sup>41</sup> His limited formal education never included French lessons. This would prove to be a significant factor as Washington's mission unfolded.

By mid-March 1754, reports were filtering into Williamsburg from the Ohio country that the French were about to make a hostile move. Dinwiddie soon tasked Washington with building up Virginia's defenses on the frontier in anticipation of a possible French invasion. What followed was a blunder from top to bottom. On April 2, 1754, Washington set out for the wilderness with 160 soldiers who were as inexperienced as he was. His convoy moved slowly as they had to forge the road they were traveling on. Three weeks later, Washington received intelligence that the French had attacked a small, combined force of British soldiers and Indian allies who were in the process of constructing a fort on the forks of the Ohio and renamed it Fort Duquesne. The news that a numerically superior French force was bearing down on them trickled through the ranks

---

<sup>40</sup>Ira D. Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 1-53.

<sup>41</sup>See the correspondence between Washington and William Fairfax in 1754 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

of Washington's men, taking a devastating toll on morale. Many threatened to desert. Washington was unfazed. He responded to the unfolding situation with a glowing zeal.<sup>42</sup> He was so confident in his abilities and his position as commander that he dashed off briskly phrased letters to Lieutenant Governor James Hamilton of Pennsylvania and Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland urging them to send reinforcements. Still, in his attempt to be diplomatic in the face of his utter brashness, Washington included a half apology to Sharpe, "I ought first to have begged pardon of your excellency for this liberty of writing, as I am not happy enough to be ranked among those of your acquaintance." Then, trying to spur the governors to act through patriotism; he continued in his appeal that the present crisis "should rouse from the lethargy we have fallen into the heroic spirit of every free-born Englishman to assert the rights and privileges of our king."<sup>43</sup> These clumsy attempts at fostering good civil-military relations by Washington were evidently successful, for the governors complied.<sup>44</sup> Washington's continued audacity that led to the series of unfortunate events in the coming days is of course attributable to his youth, inexperience, and lack of education. He seemed to lose sight of the fact that in addition to his demonstrated abilities during that initial mission to the French, he also owed his promotion to his connections. In short, Washington allowed his ego to drive his actions, and this would lead catastrophically to poor decision making in the days and weeks to come.

---

<sup>42</sup> Freeman, *George Washington*, 1:354.

<sup>43</sup> Washington, "Letter to Governor Horatio Sharpe, April 24, 1754," in *The Papers of George Washington: Colonial Series*, 10 vols. ed. W.W. Abbott, Dorothy Twohig, and Philander Chase (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993-95), 1:86.

<sup>44</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 60.

## Washington and the Seven Yearsø War

The unfortunate events that followed sparked the Seven Yearsø War. On May 28, 1754 Washington's old guide, Christopher Gist, reported that he saw a small party of French soldiers heading to Washington's position and were closing in with less than five miles to go. Washington hastily dispatched one of his subordinates, Captain Peter Hogg with seventy-five men to intercept the French party between the meadows and the Monongahela River. An intelligence update from his Indian ally, the Half King, however, alerted Washington to the fact that he sent his men in the wrong direction. He decided that he had to act. Taking forty seven men on a night march through a driving rain, Washington rendezvoused with Half King early the following morning, and the two leaders decided to jointly attack the French.<sup>45</sup> Indian scouts led Washington's force to the French location, and as Washington described in his diary:

We formed ourselves for an Engagement, marching one after the other in the *Indian* manner: We were advanced pretty near to them, as we thought, when they discovered us; whereupon I ordered my company to fire; mine was supported by that of Mr. *Wag[gonn]er's*, and my Company and his received the whole Fire of the *French*, during the greatest Part of the Action, which only lasted a Quarter of an Hour, before the enemy was routed.

We killed Mr. *de Jumonville*, the commander of that Party, as also nine others; we wounded one, and made Twenty-one Prisoners, among whom were M. *la Force*, M. *Drouillon*, and two Cadets. The *Indians* scalped the Dead, and took away the most Part of their Armsí <sup>46</sup>

Washington repeated this almost word for word in his official report to Dinwiddie on May 29. In giving this version of the events, however, Washington omitted several key details that brought him dangerously close to rendering a false report. Washington neglected to include the specific details surrounding Jumonville's actual death.

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>46</sup> Washington, "Diary entry, May 27, 1754," in *George Washington Diaries, 1748-1799*, 4 vols, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 1:87.

Jumonville was wounded in the brief exchange of fire, but he was conscious and trying to communicate with Washington to explain he was on a diplomatic, rather than a hostile mission. The problem was that Washington didn't speak French, nor apparently did he have a capable interpreter with him. As Washington struggled in vain to understand what Jumonville was trying to tell him, Half King stepped forward and drove a hatchet into Jumonville's skull, splitting it open, and then proceeded to wash his hands in the brains of his victim. At that point, the rest the Indians swooped down on the French wounded, scalping them and stripping them of their arms. The horrified Washington just stood there, unable to stop the frenzied attack for what must have seemed to him to be an eternity. When he did regain his composure, he ordered his men to gather the twenty one survivors, now prisoners whom Washington would vehemently insist to Dinwiddie were spies, and began the march back to his tiny garrison in the Great Meadows.<sup>47</sup>

Washington must have been haunted by the atrocity. This was his real first taste of battle, which disintegrated into a murderous bloodbath under his command. Also, he must have been worried about what the French response would be when word reached them. There was also the possibility that others would offer differing accounts to his. The French survivors insisted that they were a part of a diplomatic mission and the British force attacked them without provocation. One of Washington's men, an illiterate Irish immigrant named John Shaw provided a sworn statement after the fact which filled in some of the collapsed details from Washington's account. Shaw indicated that there was a ceasefire during which the wounded Jumonville was speaking to Washington, and

---

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 53-57.

the real massacre began.<sup>48</sup> It is primarily from Shaw's statement that we can gain the closest understanding of what actually happened in that glen. This incident is telling in a couple of ways. First, Washington had failed to keep control of his men. Also, this was the first, but not the last, time that his defective education severely handicapped him. The fact that he could not speak or read French led to confusion and arguably created that critical, tense moment where he was unable to understand what Jumonville was saying and Half King butchered him.

The situation in the Great Meadows was rapidly deteriorating for Washington and his men. After the incident in Jumonville's glen, Washington and his men retreated back to the heart of the Great Meadows to construct a crude set of defensive works named Fort Necessity. Washington knew to expect a French reprisal once word of Jumonville's death spread. He must have been relieved to see the remainder of the Virginia regiment coming down the rude road into the meadow, only to be shocked with the news that his commander, Colonel Joshua Fry, was not with them – he suffered a fatal fall from his horse. Washington had therefore been promoted again. He was now a full colonel and commander of the entire expedition. A couple of weeks later, a company of British Regulars under the command of Captain James Mackay arrived from South Carolina to

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid; Anderson traced the other accounts of the events at Jumonville's Glen, some which supported, and others which contradicted Washington's version. The French account was written by one of the French soldiers who escaped the glen before the massacre was complete, Contrecoeur. His account was published in Europe at the beginning of the European phase of the Seven Years' War. It was reprinted first in London as *A Memorial Containing a Summary View of Facts, with Their Authorities. In Answer to the Observations Sent by the English Ministry to the Courts of Europe* and then again in New York in 1757. For the original see Fernand Grenier, ed. *Papiers Contrecoeur et autres documents concernant le conflit anglo-français sur l'Ohio de 1745 à 1756* (Quebec, 1952). Contrecoeur insisted that the French party had been asleep or had only recently woken up at the time of the British attack, thereby making the point that the attack was unprovoked – a direct challenge to Washington's claim that he was acting in self-defense. This would seem to indicate that Contrecoeur escaped without putting shoes on first. Contrecoeur's evidence is corroborated by an Indian messenger who came to Washington at Great Meadows on June 5 and reported having "met a Frenchman who had made his Escape in the Time of M. de Jumonville's Action, he was without Shoes or Stockings, and scarce able to walk; however, we let him pass, not knowing they had been attacked" (*Diaries of George Washington*, 1:91).

reinforce Washington. Mackay behaved politely to Washington, but declined to garrison his men with Washington's. The British made their own camp, much to Washington's consternation. While he was obsessing over this British affront to his position, Washington's Indian allies were about to desert him. It seemed that Half King was losing his will to fight the French. Washington's best efforts at diplomacy failed. The Indians all left him. Washington felt vulnerable, but nevertheless pushed his men forward into the woods to try and maintain the initiative against the French force he knew would be coming.<sup>49</sup>

The French were indeed coming. A vastly superior force under the command of Captain Louis Coulon de Villiers, Jumonville's older brother, was bearing down on Washington's force, hounding them back to Fort Necessity. When the haggard Virginians made it back to Fort Necessity, it offered little comfort. The supplies were depleted, the tents were ruined, and a heavy rain reduced the ground to a sea of mud. The little fort suddenly looked exposed and dangerously weak. The fact that Washington even selected this site for a fort reveals his lack of military education. Washington intended the fort to be a protection against a frontal assault; however, he didn't seem to notice at first that it was surrounded by high ground, and the wood line was within musket range. He also made the mistake of neglecting to clear his sectors of fire. An advancing enemy could simply hide in the woods and pick off the defenders with ease. If Washington had been schooled in military science, he would have read the books by British fortifications expert, Charles Bisset including *The Theory and Construction of Fortification*, as well as Jean-Francois Bernard's, *Remarks on the Modern Fortification*.

---

<sup>49</sup> Edward Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York: Random House, 2005), 39-41.

*To Which is Added the Easiest and Most Reasonable Manner of Constructing All Sorts of Works.* These books on conducting campaigns in the defensive make clear that fortifications are strongest when they occupy high ground, as long as the defenders have taken the time to clear anything that obscured the views of the surrounding areas and avenues of approach. Failure to plan according to these guidelines will turn the defensive works into a trap for the defenders.<sup>50</sup>

When the French and their Indian allies arrived, Washington and Mackay did their best to make a stand, but the unseasoned Virginians fled behind cover, and the French maintained the initiative. Soon, the most tremendous rain that be conceived started coming down, and the exposed Virginians could not keep their gunpowder dry. By evening, there were one hundred total casualties, 30 of whom had been killed.<sup>51</sup> The only thing that saved Washington and the Virginians from total annihilation was that Villiers did not know whether or not the British were about to be reinforced, so instead of pressing the attack to completion, he sought Washington's sword instead.<sup>52</sup>

When Villiers sent an emissary to negotiate with Washington's representatives, the Virginians lost all discipline and broke into the rum supply and proceeded to get drunk. Washington's chief negotiator, Jacob Van Braam, went back and forth between Villiers and Washington, finally delivering the French word that the British were ready to capitulate. Villiers dictated his terms to an aide with poor penmanship, and by the time Van Braam slogged back to Washington's tent, the document was wet, the ink running all

---

<sup>50</sup>Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, 147-149; Jean-Francois Bernard, *Remarks on the Modern Fortification. To Which is Added the Easiest and Most Reasonable Manner of Constructing All Sorts of Works...Translated by William Horneck* (London: J. and R. Tonson, 1738); Charles Bisset, *The Theory and Construction of Fortification....* (London: S. Buckley, 1727).

<sup>51</sup>Humphreys, *Life of General Washington*, 12-13.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 42-46; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 63-64.

over. In the flickering candlelight, Washington, Mackay, and their officers struggled to read the terms. What further complicated the reading of the water logged parchment was that none present, except Van Braam, could read French. Relying on his inaccurate translation that bordered on the dishonest, Washington and Mackay missed some key phrases in the preamble *ó òvenger Løassin,ö and òløassinat du Sur de Jumonville.ö*<sup>53</sup> In missing these key incriminating phrases, Washington and Mackay agreed that the terms of the surrender seemed generous. The British survivors were allowed to surrender with full military honors, marching out of the fort with their colors flying and drums beating.<sup>54</sup> The crucial fact that Washington and Mackay failed to understand is that the phrases in the preamble that referred to the assassination of Jumonville gave the French a legal cause to declare war on Great Britain. This confession that Washington and Mackay unknowingly signed was the French commander's main object; he had no interest in taking prisoners or flags.<sup>55</sup>

In the aftermath of the defeat, Washington failed to grasp the full implications of the surrender document. However, he had supporters. None of his officers condemned him in their respective reports. Captain Mackay also notably stood by Washington, probably to salvage his own reputation, for he cosigned the articles of capitulation. Even Dinwiddie was loyal. When Washington delivered his official report on July 17, 1754, the House of Burgesses passed a resolution thanking him for his efforts and expressing

---

<sup>53</sup>Articles of Capitulation, July 3, 1754,ö in *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, 1: 165-166. The description of the circumstances of the British surrender are taken from öPoint of Woodsö account by George Washington and James Mackay of the Capitulation of Fort Necessity, July 19, 1754, in the *Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, 1: 160. For the French description of the events see, *A Memorial Containing a Summary View of Facts, with Their Authorities. In Answer to the Observations Sent by the English Ministry to the Courts of Europe*, translated from the French (New York: H. Gaine, 1757), 99-100.

<sup>54</sup>Humphreys, *Life of General Washington*, 13.

<sup>55</sup>Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 64.

condolences for his losses. However, despite the initial show of support, Dinwiddie, in deciding to wait for further British reinforcements, reorganized the Virginia Regiment back into its constituent companies and offered Washington command of one of them, with a demotion of rank from colonel to captain. Washington, who already was feeling unappreciated, resigned his commission in humiliation.

Washington was not to remain a civilian for long. When he resigned, he hinted to William Fitzhugh, "I have the consolation itself, of knowing that I have opened the way when the smallness of our numbers exposed us to the attacks of a Superior Enemy; That I have hitherto stood the heat and brunt of the Day, and escaped untouched, in time of extreme danger; and I have the Thanks of my Country, for the Services I have rendered it." He further remained certain that his "inclinations were strongly bent to arms."<sup>56</sup> Although this, Washington's first foray into the reality of combat command, had been abysmal, he outwardly lost none of his original thirst for a military life. Furthermore, Washington's command at Great Meadows underscores the impact that his lack of education and training had on this pivotal historical moment. He couldn't speak or read French, nor did he think it prudent to ensure that he had a competent translator with him. He made numerous tactical errors in judgment, letting bravado as opposed to reason drive his decision making. However, youthful false confidence aside, Washington learned some valuable lessons about the art of war on the frontier that would serve him well in the future. As would become his lifelong custom, Washington set out from this point forward to never make the same mistake twice.

---

<sup>56</sup>George Washington, Letter to William Fitzhugh, November 15, 1754, in *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, 1: 226.

Washington jumped at a new opportunity to serve when he heard of the arrival of General Edward Braddock who was to lead a new expedition to recapture Fort Duquesne. Washington congratulated the general on his safe arrival in the colonies, but then wisely allowed his powerful patrons do the rest of the talking to Braddock on his behalf. Before long, Washington was offered a position on the general's staff. Washington's status on the staff says a great deal about what Braddock thought about colonial government administration; Washington was told to report directly to the general, thereby avoiding a repeat of all the annoying clashes Washington as a provincial officer had with regular officers of inferior rank.<sup>57</sup> Braddock seemed to value Washington for his hard earned situational awareness and welcomed his advice. One of the lessons that Washington learned from his previous forays into the wilderness was to travel light. He advised Braddock to use pack mules as opposed to wagons for logistical support wherever possible. Additionally, Washington further recommended that Braddock divide his army, sending a lighter, faster force that would be more adept at encountering an enemy in the woods. Despite the notorious contempt that Braddock had for colonials, he liked Washington, and promised to help his young protégé find preferment in His Majesty's regular forces.<sup>58</sup>

Although Washington still clashed with other officers and didn't always get his own way with Braddock, he still must have been buoyed with confidence with the fact that Braddock became his newest benefactor. The comfort was to be short lived. During

---

<sup>57</sup>Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 27. See also Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life*, 49-62; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 94-107.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.* For further evidence of Braddock's dislike for colonials see Stanley M. Pargellid, ed. *Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1765* (New York: Archon Books, 1969). For further evidence of Braddock and Washington's senior-subordinate relationship, see *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, 1: 267, 272, 278, 312, 320-323; 4: 89; and Freeman, *George Washington*, 2: 52-53.

the campaign of 1755, a combined Franco-Indian force attacked Braddock's army. Panic began to spread through the British lines as a near invisible enemy began cutting men down where they stood in their ranks. Washington urged Braddock to allow him to reorganize the Virginians into an irregular formation to beat the enemy back, but Braddock refused. The British in their tight formations and scarlet uniforms were easy targets for the hidden enemy. Braddock soon fell from his saddle, mortally wounded, with his officers falling around him. Washington, however, remained unscathed. Despite having two horses shot from under him and four bullets pierce his clothes, Washington remained calm under fire and brought as much order as possible from the chaos. He organized the retreat, and supervised the removal of the dying Braddock from the field. Furthermore, when Braddock succumbed to his wound three days later, Washington presided over his burial in the middle of the road, so as to prevent hostile Indians from finding his grave and defiling his body.<sup>59</sup> Buried with Braddock was Washington's only real chance at a royal commission.

In the aftermath of Braddock's defeat, the worst in eighteenth-century British history, the blame fell squarely on the dead general. Braddock's inability to heed Washington's advice to take cover seemed like an arrogant disregard for the lives of the men under his command. Virginia's ruling class lavished praise on Washington. Furthermore, word of the young colonel's deeds spread outside of Virginia's borders to the greater Anglo-American world. From the Carolinas to England, Washington's heroic tale was repeated in the press, and the accolades poured in.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup>Humphreys, *Life of General Washington*, 19.

<sup>60</sup>Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 29. See also *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, vol. 1 for congratulatory letters from Dinwiddie, 26 July 1755, 344-5; from William Fairfax, 345-6; from Sally Fairfax, Ann Spearing, and Elizabeth Dent, 26 July 1755, 346; from

## Washington's Reading and His Virginia Regiment

Shortly after Braddock's defeat, Dinwiddie enlarged the Virginia Regiment and offered Washington command. He accepted at the end of August 1759 and began building the regiment from the ground up. Here we first catch a glimpse of the commander that Washington was going to become less than twenty years later. Washington had to do almost everything single handedly, from designing uniforms, conducting drill based on the latest British drill manuals, and punishing disobedient soldiers. With specific regard to training, Washington was responsible not just for training raw recruits, but also training officers. Washington pushed his officers to study, particularly the latest in British military texts such as Humphrey Bland's *Treatise of Military Discipline*. Washington wrote that "Having no opportunity to improve from example, let us read" for it was not possible for an ambitious officer to obtain the requisite expertise "without application, nor any merit or applause to be achieved without certain knowledge thereof."<sup>61</sup> Bland's *Treatise* was the fundamental textbook for all

---

Charles Lewis, 9 August 1755, 357-8; from Philip Ludwell, 8 August 1755, 356-7; from John Martin, 30 August 1755, 2:12; from Christopher Gist, 15 October 1755, 2:115. Congratulations from England came first from Washington's uncle, John Ball in a letter dated 5 September 1755, 2: 15.

<sup>61</sup>Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 36. See also *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* for Washington to Andrew Lewis, 6 September 1755, 2: 23-4; to Adam Stephen, 11 September 1755, 27; Memorandum 11 September 1755, 28; Address, 8 January 1756, 257; Instructions to Company Captains, 29 July 1757, 4:344. Washington must have anticipated the need to train himself for future service, for during the Braddock campaign he took the time to copy out general orders for his personal reference; see *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* for his letter to Robert Orme, 28 July 1755, 1:347, 348n.7; Enclosure of invoice to Richard Washington, 6 December 1755 placing an order for a copy of Bland's *Treatise on Military Discipline*, 2: 209. He most likely also read Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars* and other works from ancient military writers and theorists on the suggestion of his mentor, William Fairfax; for the reference see the letter from William Fairfax, 13-14 May 1756, in *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, 3:125. Bland's *Treatise* was considered to be the Bible of the British Army and Caesar's *Commentaries* were considered to be required reading for any British officer aspiring to high command; see Ira Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution*. Gruber made the same point in an earlier essay, "British Strategy: The Theory and Practice of Eighteenth Century Warfare," in Don Higginbotham ed., *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War* (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1978), 19-20. Don Higginbotham previously advanced the argument that the basis of Washington's military reading was built upon a tutorial mainly from Lawrence Washington and William Fairfax who taught the younger Washington based off of their

British officers. Known throughout the army as “the bible,” this three hundred sixty page manual spelled out everything a new officer needed to know about how to form and operate a regiment, both in garrison and in the field. Bland outlined what an officer’s duties were and what officers could reasonably expect from their subordinates. Bland’s work is a field manual, a practical guide for new officers that dictated in step-by-step fashion everything that needed to be done on a daily basis in order to keep the army functioning under any circumstances. Bland also included leadership advice, specifically in the sections that discussed battlefield orders. In chapter IX, “General Rules for Battalions of Foot, when they Engage in the Line,” Bland stated:

It being a General Remark, that the Private Soldiers, when they are to go upon Action, form their Notions of the Danger from the outward Appearance of their Officers; and according to their Looks apprehend the Undertaking to be more or less difficult. In order therefore to dissipate their Fears, and fortify their Courage, the Officers should assume a serene and cheerful Air; and in delivering their Orders to, and in their common Discourse with, the Men, they should address themselves to them in an affable and affectionate manner.<sup>62</sup>

What is interesting about this particular passage from Bland’s *Treatise* is that it seems to fit with the lessons Washington learned from *The Rules of Civility* about the need to maintain self-control. By reading Bland, Washington was able to put into practice in his military life some of the same lessons he learned to use in his civilian life. These mutually reinforcing guidelines shaped Washington’s conduct and eventually contributed to the growth of his mythology.

Colonel Washington’s immersion into the study of the military art is the first significant example we have of his pursuing a specifically designed course of study to

---

experiences. See Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 14-15. Both Longmore and Lengel pick up on Higginbotham’s argument and build on it in their respective books.

<sup>62</sup> Humphrey Bland, *A Treatise of Military Discipline: In Which is Laid Down and Explained The Duty of the Officer and Soldier, Thro’ The Several Branches of the Service* (London: S. Buckley, 1727), 144.

help gain the requisite knowledge to deal with the station he occupied at that moment. Furthermore, in these early years of Washington's career in the Virginia Regiment, when he was in relentless pursuit of a regular commission, the fact that he made a considerable effort to study military theory in concert with the trends emerging from British military Enlightenment says something about Washington's sense of his own Britishness.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Britain was going through a military renaissance. As stated earlier, books were central to preparing officers to serve, particularly in the combat arms like the artillery and engineers, teaching them the tactics to lead an army both on the battlefield and in peacetime. British officials used books to set standards for the army, including defining service obligations for those receiving commissions. Eighteenth century officers increasingly had an appetite for books to expand their knowledge of the military art through reading about the latest developments on war and encouraging their fellow officers to become professional students of warfare. Those officers who aspired to high commands tended to read and recommend a wide array of books to others on the art of war, or what would later become known as grand strategy. One such example is the Duke of Albemarle's, *Observations upon Military and Political Affairs*. The Duke of Albemarle fought in the English Civil Wars and was one of the principle advocates for the restoration of Charles II. His book opines on civil-military relations at the highest level, and therefore appealed to readers who actively sought high level leadership positions.<sup>63</sup> Another example is Niccolo Machiavelli's, *Libro della Arte della Guerra*, which is a study of the usefulness of war to a state, and

---

<sup>63</sup> George Monck, Duke of Albemarle, *Observations Upon Military and Political Affairs...* (London: Printed by A.C. for Henry Mortlocke and James Collins, 1671).

what a state's war aims should be in theoretical terms.<sup>64</sup> A third example is Vicomte de Turenne's, *Military Memoirs and Maxims of Marshall Turenne*. Although Turenne's work was largely autobiographical, he offered many strategic level insights about how to effectively wage a war that really place it more under the heading of the military art than memoir. He was considered one of the foremost military minds of the age and British officers considered him among their favorite authorities.<sup>65</sup> Histories, biographies, and memoirs of famous commanders were all particularly popular, as well as the latest texts on artillery and engineering, works on classical Greece and Rome, and Continental European books on the art of war.<sup>66</sup> Several examples of the field or technical manuals that were the most popular included, Guillaume Le Blond's, *A Treatise of Artillery or of the Arms and Machines Used in War*, Sebastien Le Prestre de Vauban's *The New Method of Fortification, as Practiced by Monsieur de Vauban...To Which is Now Added a Treatise of Military Orders, and the Art of Gunnery*, and John Cruso's *Militarie Instructions for the Cavallrie*.<sup>67</sup> Some of the favored biographical subjects included Oliver Cromwell, Louis XIV, the Duke of Marlborough, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Charles VII of Sweden, and Gustavus Adolphus.<sup>68</sup> Given the British officers' overwhelming interest in reading and discussing military books, it is reasonable to assume that Washington was made aware of this trend during the course of his service. With this in mind, the ambitious Colonel Washington's military reading and his advice to his subordinate officers makes perfect sense. Unfortunately, Washington would have

---

<sup>64</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *Libro della Arte della Guerra* (Florence, 1519). See also Peter Withorne's 1573 English translation of the book, which was reprinted several times in the eighteenth century. The most recent edition that Washington's contemporaries would likely have read was published in 1732. See Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, 194.

<sup>65</sup> Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, 225.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 34-45,

little opportunity to read anything beyond Bland's *Treatise* given his situation in command of the Virginia Regiment out on the frontier.

This experience was to provide him with lessons that he would need twenty years later. In the near term, Washington's miraculous work to turn a ragged handful of recruits into a respectable regiment of obedient soldiers, however, did not merit the attention of those in the British military establishment with the ability to grant preferment for royal commissions. The rest of Washington's career with the Virginia Regiment was undistinguished in terms of battlefield glory. In 1758 he led two regiments in General Forbes's final expedition against Fort Duquesne, but did not directly contribute to the fort's ultimate recapture.<sup>69</sup>

While Washington was clearly demonstrating some of the qualities that are now so synonymous with his later career in the War for Independence, in 1755 there was nothing about his words or deeds that indicated that he was the future leader of a revolution. Washington, like the majority of his colonial contemporaries, was proud to be British and he was trying to build the pedigree worthy of that British identity so that he might achieve fame and glory in the scarlet tunic of His Majesty's regulars. Indeed, a close reading of Washington's correspondence from his career in the Virginia Regiment is almost painful. This young, ambitious Washington comes across as an artless office seeker with little to actually recommend him beyond a couple of narrow escapes. At times when he should have been more preoccupied with his soldiers' welfare, he instead petulantly whined to those in power about the officers' pay inequity. Although Washington had a certain capacity for flattery, especially when it came to dealing with

---

<sup>69</sup> Lengel, *General George Washington, A Military Life*, 77.

his superiors, he also had no problem with bluntly blaming them for his every failure. Such acts of tactless insubordination did little to ingratiate him with the likes of Dinwiddie, Governor Shirley, and General Forbes. Furthermore, he was relentless in pestering his superiors in Virginia for leave to seek out those in the British establishment with the ability to grant his wish for preferment. Each time Washington appealed to the great and powerful in the British civil-military administration, he was denied.

#### Washington Meets Lord Loudoun: The Dream of a British Uniform is Ended

The most significant of these repeated British rejections is Washington's interview with the recently appointed commander-in-chief for North America, John Campbell, Earl of Loudoun. In the time leading up to Washington's meeting with Loudoun, he was growing increasingly frustrated with the string of rebuffs from various British officials. Over time, Washington became convinced that Dinwiddie was the root cause of the problem. In Washington's mind, Dinwiddie repeatedly refused to listen to his strategic advice, and instead made contradictory decisions, repeatedly fell short with supply requests, and would not heed Washington's repeated calls for equal pay for the officers. Washington's supporters in Williamsburg went further in convincing him that Dinwiddie was maneuvering against him in order to engineer his replacement with some of Dinwiddie's Scottish cronies.<sup>70</sup> Although Dinwiddie was actually patient with his ambitious commander, Washington could not recognize it and instead persisted in requesting leave to meet with those in the British establishment in North America that had more authority than Dinwiddie could boast. After Washington previously met with

---

<sup>70</sup> Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 39.

only partial success in dealing with Governor Shirley of Massachusetts on a matter of rank, he shifted his attention to winning over Lord Loudoun.

What Washington did have from Governor Shirley as leverage for dealing with Loudoun was an endorsement recommending him as second-in-command for any future offensive into the Ohio country. He also had another endorsement from Dinwiddie, recommending him for a royal commission. These gave Washington the confidence to send a petition signed by the members of the regiment to Loudoun asking for patronage. This petition apparently fell on yet another deaf ear. Loudoun announced no new offensive into the Ohio, nor did he pay any heed to the idea that the Virginia Regiment warranted regular commissions. Instead, Loudoun announced the recruitment of more American soldiers to be led by imported British officers. Upon hearing these latest pieces of bad news, Washington became ever more convinced that the British harbored irrational biases against the colonials. From this point forward, Washington's relationships with those in political power increasingly soured. He clashed with Dinwiddie repeatedly over frontier defensive strategies. Washington and his allies collaborated in order to defeat the governor's measures that they believed ran contrary to the colony's interests. These would prove to be the opening salvos of the long struggle for colonial control between provincial leaders and members of the British administration.<sup>71</sup>

In the face of mounting frustration and challenges to his command and his reputation, Washington decided that he needed to make his case to Loudoun directly. Dinwiddie, acting on instructions from Loudoun, ordered Washington to abandon his

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 41.

frontier forts in favor of reinforcing Fort Cumberland. Although Washington obeyed the order, he made sure everyone knew that it was contrary to his advice. Again, it was just another example of British imperial authorities going against the expert opinions offered by the colony's rightful leaders.<sup>72</sup> By December 1756, Washington began a series of letters requesting, indeed almost begging, for leave in order to travel to Loudoun's location to plead his case. After nearly two months of requests, the now exasperated Dinwiddie relented, adding, "I cannot conceive what Service You can be of in going there....however, as You seem so earnest to go I now give you Leave" .<sup>73</sup>

As Dinwiddie hinted, Washington was in for yet another disappointment. The disappointment Washington felt at this juncture was tinged with a new level of bitterness, for he had taken pains to ensure that Loudoun knew he was not just any other provincial office seeker. Washington prepared a lengthy report on Virginia's military situation, which laid out the multitude of problems that existed with supply, discipline, and desertion. Furthermore, he recommended that an all out assault on Fort Duquesne was the only way to mitigate the threat on the frontier.<sup>74</sup> Washington had a dual intent in compiling this rather frank assessment: to convince Loudoun that taking Fort Duquesne should remain the British strategic objective; and to show off his expertise, thereby lending credence to his request for preferment for not only his officers, but more

---

<sup>72</sup>For Washington's opinions on the decision to reinforce Fort Cumberland at the expense of other frontier positions, see *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* for the letter to Dinwiddie, 23 September 1756, 3: 414-15; to Lieutenant Colonel Adam Stephen, 23 October 1756, 440-442; Remarks on the Council of War, 5 November 1756, 450-52; to Dinwiddie, 24 November 1756, 4: 32; December 34-6; from Dinwiddie, 30 September 1756, 3:424; from Dinwiddie, 26 October 1756, 443; from Dinwiddie, 16 November 1756, 4: 26; Minutes of Council, 15 November 1756, 27-8; from Dinwiddie, 10 December 1756, 50-5; to Captain William Bronaugh, 17 December 1756, 59; to Dinwiddie, 19 December 1756, 62-3.

<sup>73</sup>For Washington's requests for leave see his letter to Dinwiddie, 19 December 1756, in *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* 4: 64-5; from Dinwiddie, 27 December 1756, 72; from Dinwiddie, 2 February 1757, 107.

<sup>74</sup>Washington to John Campbell, Earl of Loudon, 10 January 1757, 4: 79-93; to Captain James Cunningham, 28 January 1757, 105-7; from Cunningham, 27 February, in *ibid.* 4: 111-112.

importantly for himself. This personal and overwhelming desire for a British commission is apparent in his somewhat artlessly included appeal for Loudoun's patronage, "Altho' I have not had the honor to be known to Your Lordship: Yet, Your Lordship's Name was familiar to my Ear, on account of the Important Services performed to his Majesty in other parts of the World & don't think My Lord I am going to flatter. I have exalted the Sentiments of Your Lordship's Character, and revere Your Rank & my nature is honest and Free from Guile." Further down, he came more to his personal objective, "In regard to myself, I must beg leave to say, Had His Excellency General Braddock survived his unfortunate Defeat, I should have met with preferment equal to my Wishes: I had His Promise to that purpose, and I believe that Gentleman was too sincere and generous to make unmeaning offers, where none were asked. General Shirley was not unkind in His Promises & but & He is gone to England."<sup>75</sup> Loudoun apparently received the report, but he had other ideas about Great Britain's way ahead in the North American front.

Washington arrived in Philadelphia to meet Loudoun on 21 February 1757; however, Loudoun did not arrive until 14 March. Washington just had to wait. As he demonstrated before, patience was not one of his virtues. Already suspicious that there was a significant amount of anti-colonial bias inherent among the great and powerful in Britain's civil-military administration, Washington's opinion was rapidly hardening during his wait for Loudoun. Outraged, he wrote to Dinwiddie that, "we cant conceive, that being Americans should deprive us of the benefits of British subjects; nor lessen our claim to preferment: and that we are very certain, that no Body of regular Troops ever before Servd 3 Bloody Campaigns without attracting Royal Notice." Rebuffing the

---

<sup>75</sup> Washington to John Campbell, Earl of Loudon, 10 January 1757, in *ibid.*, 4: 79-93.

British claim that the Virginians were only defending their own property, Washington asserted that "We are defending the Kings Dominions, and altho the Inhabitants of Gt Britain are removed from (this) Danger, they are yet, equally with Us, concernd and Interested in the Fate of the Country, and there can be no Sufficient reason why we, who spend our blood and Treasure in Defence of the Country are not entitled to equal prefermt."<sup>76</sup> When Washington finally met Loudoun, his hopes of impressing the commander-in-chief were dashed for Loudoun received him with the cold civility of an aristocrat to a social inferior. He was not the least bit interested in hearing Washington's strategic overview, nor could Washington convince him to pay any attention to the list of grievances that he previously outlined on behalf of the Regiment. Washington seemed to have traveled all the way to Philadelphia to receive orders and nothing more. Loudoun only made one concession to Washington's position " Maryland should have to garrison Fort Cumberland, not Virginia. There would be no expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1757. There was no mention of royal commissions. Washington was thus treated as an incompetent provincial, capable only of executing orders rather than commanding in his own right."<sup>77</sup> All of Washington's youthful dreams of wearing scarlet tunics were reduced to ashes once and for all.

Washington returned to his regiment and in anger, he resumed clashing with other officers over strategy for 1758. He drew rebukes from General Forbes and other regular

---

<sup>76</sup> Washington to Dinwiddie, 10 March 1757, in *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* 4: 112-15.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Dinwiddie, *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie in the Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, 2 vols. (Richmond, VA, 1933-34), II: 184,191; Flexner, 174-175. After the meeting with Washington, Loudoun sent a curtly written letter back to Dinwiddie that communicated the orders issued during the meeting and made clear to the lieutenant governor in no uncertain terms that none of Washington's wishes were granted. This communiqué is noteworthy because it exemplifies the increasingly negative attitudes some British imperial officials harbored towards colonials during the Seven Years War.

officers, but in Virginia, he was still held in high regard. He did manage to achieve a brevet rank of brigadier general on the final expedition to Fort Duquesne, but by the time General Forbes's British force arrived, the French had abandoned and burned the fort. Washington was never able to exact revenge for the stinging loss of Fort Necessity. Moreover, his career in the Virginia Regiment was over.<sup>78</sup>

Washington's encounter with Loudoun signifies an important moment in his life where he realized his dreams of becoming a British officer would never be realized. All of his hard earned, valuable experience could not earn him a place in the British army whose officer corps was demarcated by blood lines. He saw that this British administration that he was taught for so long to admire by his half-brother and the Fairfaxes had serious flaws.

#### Washington Turns His Attention to Civilian Life

The fact that Washington did not immediately resign his commission after the ill-fated meeting with Loudoun underscores that his transformation to an American was not yet complete. He simply accepted that it was better to be a Virginian in the British Empire. He therefore turned his attention to doing his duty to his country, Virginia, and shifted his focus to becoming a leader in that provincial society which did actually appreciate his achievements.

That said Washington abandoned his study of the military art begun some four years earlier, for that reading no longer served a practical purpose for him. He instead would devote his energies in the coming years to increasing his wealth and status in Virginia society. Even before he left the Virginia regiment Washington was elected to

---

<sup>78</sup>Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 49.

the House of Burgesses. and he was active in politics while serving. In 1758, Dinwiddie was replaced by Francis Fauquier, and Washington wasted no time in attempting to curry favor with the new lieutenant governor, writing that he was "anxious to earn the honor of kissing your [Fauquier's] hand."<sup>79</sup> Although by 1758 Washington earned the respect of his fellow Virginians for his military service and he was getting better at diplomacy, he could not rely on those attributes alone in order to sustain himself in high society.

To successfully mix in the best social circles, Washington had to learn more about the science of agriculture, as well as history, politics, and religion for he had to balance being a planter, a member of the House of Burgesses, and a parish vestryman. After he returned to Mount Vernon and began assembling a library, those subjects that had practical purpose of advancing his social stature would dominate the burgeoning collection.

That Washington's transformation into an American was gradual says something about the nature of his decision making process. Thomas Jefferson would later write that Washington's mind was "slow in operation, being aided little by invention or imagination, but sure in conclusion."<sup>80</sup> The question is why did Washington develop such a slow, deliberate decision making process? His early military career indicated his propensity for rashness, so why such a gradual shift in mentalities? Part of the transformation can be ascribed to maturity ó as he aged, he lost some of that youthful impetuosity. However, maturity can only account for part of Washington's mental shift.

---

<sup>79</sup>Washington to Francis Fauquier, 9 December 1758, in George Reese ed. *The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, 1758-1768*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 130-131. For more on Washington's career as a burgess see Charles Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 19-25, 41-58, 68-70, 73.

<sup>80</sup>Thomas Jefferson to William Jones, 2 January 1814, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 20 vols. ed. Andrew Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh (Washington, D.C.: 1903), 14:48.

To fully understand Washington's mental world, it is necessary to place him in context with other future revolutionaries.

Washington came of age in a colonial society dominated by intense royalists. Virginians and indeed nearly all colonists in British America considered themselves fortunate to be ruled by Protestant kings and queens who stood for liberty in the face of their oppressive, Catholic enemies. Colonists looked to British history to cultivate this extreme degree of approbation for the empire they were a part of.<sup>81</sup> Washington was no doubt similarly schooled in how best to appreciate the British Constitution, the legacy of the Glorious Revolution, and the monarchy itself by his teachers and mentors during his formative years.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the evidence to support this argument is imbedded in Washington's angry letter to Dinwiddie following the interview with Loudoun that recorded Washington's outrage at the realization that colonists were not afforded the

---

<sup>81</sup>Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 7, 82, 86. See also Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 5; Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2, 19, 268, 315; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism, 1715-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 23; Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Trade, and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian England: The Case of Admiral Vernon," in *Past and Present* no. 121 (1988), 94-5; and Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (London: MacMillan Press, LTD, 1997), 161.

<sup>82</sup>Humphreys, *Life of General Washington*, 6. Humphreys provides an overview of Washington's education, and since this biography was written with Washington's cooperation and heavy editing, it can be safely concluded that the reference to Washington's study of history to be true. While his surviving schoolbooks do not provide a wealth of evidence as to which history books he read, a reasonable assumption can be made based on the knowledge of what histories were the most popular in Virginia at the time. The study of ancient Greek and Roman history as well as British history was popular from the seventeenth century on. Among the favored British history books during Washington's youth were Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, William Camden's *Britannia*, Sir Richard Baker's *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, and Bishop White Kennett's *Complete History of England*. Collectively, these books celebrated monarchy while also placing emphasis on individual liberty, highlighting the possibility of a clash between governmental and Crown prerogative. See Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1979), 35-37. Given the enduring popularity of these books, it is entirely probable that Washington would either have been assigned or directed to read at least one if not more of them, or that he would have heard about these books (and British history in general) from his older half-brothers who had been educated in England and oversaw young Washington's education for a time. It is also likely that he was schooled in British history from the Fairfaxes as a teenager, from William Fairfax, and from Thomas, Sixth Lord Fairfax, who was the first member of the aristocracy that Washington became acquainted with.

same rights as British subjects. Washington, like all his future revolutionary compatriots, was raised to believe that they shared the same British identity as those raised in England. It was therefore a harsh moment when colonists realized that their long cherished assumption was wrong, as Washington's example illustrates. However, a majority of colonists in the 1750s and 1760s still argued that it was better to be a British subject than any other sort. Caught up in the increasing Anglicization of Virginia politics and the celebratory atmosphere following Britain's final triumph over the French in 1763, the development of Washington's American identity slowed.<sup>83</sup>

Still, Washington was beginning to think differently than his colonial contemporaries. By the mid-eighteenth century, many of Virginia's planter elite expanded their reading interests as they increased the size of their private libraries. This was in stark contrast to their seventeenth century forbearers who maintained smaller, utilitarian libraries that consisted of mostly religious, historical, agricultural, and medical books, with perhaps a few volumes on English common law.<sup>84</sup> Less than one hundred years later, when the members of Virginia's ruling class were secure on their plantations and were no longer preoccupied with mere survival in an infant colony, they had the time and the means to broaden their reading to include more languages and subjects. Over time, privileged boys were taught to read in Latin, Greek, French, and Hebrew. Libraries began to include more works of literature, natural philosophy, and mathematics along

---

<sup>83</sup>See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 1, 5 for the argument that nationalism is partially contingent on the ability to define oneself against another. This argument partially explains the surge of patriotic sentiment that fueled the American colonists before, during, and immediately after the Seven Years' War. T. H. Breen builds on this idea and applies it directly to Washington and his fellow Virginians in *Tobacco Culture: the Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), xiv.

<sup>84</sup> The average colonial library in seventeenth century Virginia had fewer than ten books. The most common were the Bible, *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Whole Duty of Man*, *The Compleat Lawyer*, *History of England*, *The Young Secretary's Guide*, and *The Family Physician and the House Apothecary*. See Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf*, 24.

with the staples on religion, history, law, and medicine.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, Williamsburg eventually developed a small academic world with the faculty and students of the College of William and Mary and a growing population of lawyers who had to travel to the town to apply for admission to the bar and try their cases. Furthermore, the arrival of Francis Fauquier as lieutenant governor provided an opportunity for members of the gentry who were not trained scholars or attorneys to participate in intellectual conversations on a range of topics. Fauquier fashioned himself as the quintessential enlightened aristocrat. He epitomized everything that young, wealthy Virginians like Washington and Jefferson aspired to be: classically educated, carefully trained in cultivated social graces, and interested in broadening his understanding of scientific curiosities. Fauquier was a Fellow of the Royal Society and he regularly reported back to England on the latest scientific experiments conducted in his colony. Furthermore, he enjoyed music, genteel company, and intellectual conversations. He quickly recognized Jefferson's intellectual gifts when he met him when he was still a student at the College of William and Mary. Fauquier included Jefferson in his inner circle along with Jefferson's law tutor and eminent legal practitioner, George Wythe. Jefferson later remarked that during his

---

<sup>85</sup>For the best comprehensive works that analyze and compare education and private libraries in seventeenth and eighteenth century Virginia, see Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964), 95-155; and Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*, 3 vols. (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1978) 1: 257-386; 2: 489-627, 3: 1307-1507. According to Wright (who concurs with Davis, see footnote 135), in the seventeenth century most planters had very small libraries consisting mainly of a Bible, an additional religious book or two, and perhaps a few utilitarian books on medicine and agriculture that contained the necessary knowledge for establishing working plantations. The largest libraries then belonged to the few members of the clergy in the colony. Davis builds on this more extensively, and continues the analysis into the eighteenth century, highlighting that the intellectual interests of planters widened as they increased their wealth and land holdings over time. By Washington's time, William Byrd of Westover reportedly had the largest private library in the colony with over 3,600 volumes covering a wider range of genres.

numerous dinners with Fauquier, he ðheard more good sense, more rational and philosophical conversation, than in all my life besides.ö<sup>86</sup>

Interestingly, despite Washington's eagerness to kiss hands and curry favor with the new lieutenant governor, he apparently did not attempt to increase his learning in order to ingratiate himself with Fauquier. Whereas Jefferson had the benefit of a college education, legal training, and exceptional intellectual gifts and the Fairfax men had the advantages of blood ties to the English aristocracy and had additionally been educated in England, Washington's military fame, continued dedication to public service in the House of Burgesses and the parish, along with his dancing skills would enable him to effectively associate with the new governor. That said, at this stage in Washington's emerging political career, trying to acquire even a rudimentary classical education by reading everything he could as quickly as possible would probably not have gained him any additional political favor. Instead, Washington would focus his reading on agriculture, politics, and religion, the three subjects that were necessary to the enhancement of both his fortune and his political career.

#### Washington Contrasted With Benjamin Franklin: Another Self-Educated Founder

The significance of Washington's change in mentality resonates more when he is placed in context with that of another founder, Benjamin Franklin. Although not a Virginian, Franklin offers an interesting contrast to Washington as his formal education came to an early end and he also had to make his fortune and reputation without the

---

<sup>86</sup>Thomas Jefferson quoted in Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello: the Biography of a Builder*, 43. Herein also is a description of the types of entertainments Fauquier hosted and whom he included in these events. Not entirely surprisingly, Washington was not among those who engaged with Fauquier in academically oriented conversations.

benefit of an inheritance like Jefferson's. Like Washington, the beginning of Franklin's transformation into an American also can be traced back to a single moment of humiliation at the hands of a British official. Unlike Washington, however, Franklin did not abandon the pursuit of cultivating a European mind at the point where he embraced his Americanness.

Twenty-six years Washington's senior, Franklin was born in Boston in 1706, the fifteenth of seventeen children of Josiah Franklin, a tallow chandler. Although Franklin's father decided early on that Benjamin was destined for the clergy, the cost of the requisite education was too expensive, and he pulled the boy from Boston Latin and sent him to a less expensive school that taught basic writing and arithmetic. At the age of ten, almost the same age at which Washington's formal education ended, Franklin was pulled from school altogether in order to learn a trade. He was apprenticed to his older brother, James, a printer, and learned the business rapidly. Working in the printing business afforded him access to those in the book trade. Franklin fostered an appetite for learning by maintaining good relationships with the owners of Boston's bookshops who let him borrow books. Franklin was able to use his natural talents to capitalize on the kindness extended to him in order to establish and build his reputation. He used his brother's newspaper to publish his first writings, and later when he struck out on his own and moved to Philadelphia, his abilities and ambition caught the attention of wealthier printers who were influential in getting him established on his own. The teenaged Franklin's ability to win over influential men to serve as patrons is somewhat akin to what Washington did as a young surveyor. Washington used his natural gifts for mathematics and his father's surveying instruments to learn a trade that would not only

earn him wages, but also introduce him to influential men. Franklin used his intellect, wit, and writing ability combined with the skills he learned in his brother's printing shop to attract men who could help advance him.<sup>87</sup>

Despite Franklin's humble origins and the fact that he was building his fortune as a tradesman rather than through a rich inheritance, it did not stop him from wanting more gentlemanly, intellectual pursuits. He continued reading as much and as often as he could, broadening his reading to include works in French, Spanish, Latin, and Italian. Together with other ambitious trades and professional men in Philadelphia, he founded the Junto and a subscription library. As a city dwelling tradesman, establishing an intellectual club like the Junto and gaining entry into other somewhat exclusive members' only societies like the Freemasons were the best way for Franklin to transcend his middling social status as a tradesman. Furthermore, he worked through these organizations and used his newspapers to suggest civic improvements for Philadelphia. Franklin's efforts to foster cultural and public works improvements in his city went a long way toward improving his social standing as he likewise increased his fortunes through his businesses. However, in order to become a gentleman and leader of Philadelphia society, Franklin needed to leave the shop floor and devote himself entirely to intellectual pursuits. He was able to do just this by the 1740s after his printing business had become a successful media empire. Franklin's social rise differs from Washington's. In the planter dominated South, land ownership, tobacco profits, and military glory could pave the way for an ambitious man into the most exclusive social circles. In the bustling, up and coming cultural center of British America, a gentleman

---

<sup>87</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Re-printed New York: Tribeca Books, 2011), 13-36.

was demarcated by different characteristics. Fortunately for Franklin, he was perfectly suited to join in the growing colonial fascination with the Enlightenment that was already flourishing throughout the upper classes of both Britain and France.<sup>88</sup> Although he tried to continue fostering a folksy image of a hard working, leather apron man for a long time after his retirement, Franklin aspired to more worldly occupations.

In 1744, building on the Junto, Franklin launched the American Philosophical Society. He conducted scientific experiments, most notably with electricity. This was all possible because Franklin was confident enough in his talents to explore beyond the confines of the profession that he was trained in. His lack of an extensive formal education up through university level did not hinder him in the same way that it did the less self-assured Washington. Franklin was comfortable at the vanguard of American scientific exploration.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. See also Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin, An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 126; and Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 41.

<sup>89</sup> See Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 122-147; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1991), 77, 85-86, 199. Isaacson makes a point of disagreeing in part with the argument that Wood makes that Franklin did in fact have aristocratic aspirations, and the leather apron image was a fabrication created after Franklin's English social ambitions were crushed. Isaacson instead puts much more weight on Franklin's continued references to aligning with the middling people throughout his long life, an argument that seems to suggest Franklin's carefully stage managed reputation in France as an American rustic was not simply an act; that it instead had a degree of sincerity that has been systematically downplayed by other scholars and biographers. However, it is important to note that Wood's definition of aristocracy is far more encompassing than simply those landed elite with hereditary English titles; Wood includes wealthy commoners who could legitimately claim the status of a gentleman. Furthermore, Wood locates Franklin's aristocratic aspirations as manifested during the period from about 1748 to the late 1760s, and later during the Constitutional Convention when Franklin argued that officeholders should serve without pay. Given Wood's broader definition of what it meant to be aristocratic and that he isolates Franklin's aspirations to the period when he was deliberately working to establish relationships with Fellows of the Royal Society both from a distance and during his tenure in London as a colonial agent. Further evidence to support Wood's thesis as opposed to Isaacson's is that during Franklin's time in London he continually worked to acquire lucrative government appointments for himself and for his eldest son, William. Additionally, during Franklin's long residence in London, he primarily associated with members of the aristocracy as well as England's intellectual elite, not London's leather apron population.

The fact that Franklin along with wealthy colonists throughout British America were broadening their intellectual interests demonstrates how much they were in touch with what was fashionable among the latest trends in the English aristocracy, for in England a parallel movement of increasing intellectual curiosity was taking place.<sup>90</sup> Again, these twin developments occurring on both sides of the Atlantic are a testament to the colonists' belief that they shared an identity with their English brethren. Both Lieutenant Governor Fauquier in Virginia and Franklin in Philadelphia were actively working to establish a scientific dialogue across the Atlantic. Through the Library Company of Philadelphia's agent in London, Peter Collinson, Franklin was able to obtain new instruments for scientific experiments, and Collinson made sure that Franklin's theories on electricity were presented to the Royal Society in 1750. Excerpts from Franklin's theories were then printed in London in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and were subsequently translated into French where they caused a sensation in the court of Louis XV. Additionally, Franklin was awarded gold medals from and was made a member of the Royal Society in honor of his achievements, rare accolades for an American colonial with no official pedigree, either hereditary or academic, to recommend him. At home, Harvard and Yale awarded him honorary masters' degrees.<sup>91</sup> Franklin had become internationally acclaimed, all without the aid of actual university study.

Science may have opened the path to Europe for Franklin; however, his Anglicization reached its zenith when he was appointed colonial agent for Pennsylvania.

---

<sup>90</sup> Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 178-80; 234-236.

<sup>91</sup> Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 134-39; *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London: Jan. and May 1750); *Experiments and Observations on Electricity, Made at Philadelphia in America, by Mr. Benjamin Franklin* (London: 1750, 1756, and subsequent editions); Abbe Guillaume Mazeas to Stephen Hales, May 20, 1752 in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* 37 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 4: 315; Franklin, *Autobiography*, 132-35.

He traveled to London in 1757, where he would remain for years, with only a brief sojourn back to the colonies in his official capacity as Postmaster General in 1763. In 1762 he was awarded an honorary doctor of laws from both Oxford and Edinburgh and was hereafter known to the world as Doctor Franklin. In 1766, he visited Gottingen University and was presented at the French court. Six years later, Franklin was elected Associ é Étranger of the French Academy.<sup>92</sup>

During this long residence in London, Franklin was as ardent a royalist as any other Englishman. He campaigned vigorously for a royal charter for Pennsylvania, and sought out those in the British administration with the power to grant him preferment and was somewhat successful. For a time he was the trusted source on all things American for a ministry struggling with how to reform its imperial administration under the weight of a staggering debt from the Seven Yearsø War. In fact, Franklinø testimony before the House of Commons was instrumental in getting the Stamp Act repealed. Franklin did an excellent job of presenting the American case to Parliament on February 13, 1766. He patiently answered the one hundred seventy four questions leveled at him by members of Lord Rockinghamø ministry, striking down all the arguments for virtual representation. He only made one mistake that would come back to haunt him; Franklin stated flatly that the American colonists recognized Parliamentø right to levy external taxes, such as tariffs and export duties. His testimony, the longest public oration he would ever give, had the desired effect both in Britain, as the act was repealed, and back in America where Franklinø reputation soared and he was made commissioner for Georgia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.<sup>93</sup> The printer and self taught scientist had become a statesman.

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 149-50.

<sup>93</sup> Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 222-32.

As an office seeker, the Franklin of the early 1760s was not altogether different from the Washington of the 1750s. Both were ambitious men who eagerly sought preferment from within the British imperial administration, and in that eagerness each overlooked or excused the flaws they saw both in the system and in the individual bureaucrats they encountered. Additionally, just as Washington's evolving Americanness was a slow process that accelerated only in the wake of repeated failures and crystallized at the supreme moment of rejection in the encounter with Loudon, Franklin's own transformation into an American was slow, and somewhat reluctant. Throughout the 1760s, even as Franklin clashed with Lord Hillsborough and was denied much of the advancement that he sought, he was still slow to catch up with the anti-British sentiment that was building in many of his fellow Americans. Even after the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, Franklin's loyalty to the Crown did not yet waver; instead, he advocated a new relationship with stronger ties between the king and the colonies, without any subservience to Parliament. For Franklin to transform his national identity, he had to also experience an Americanizing moment. That moment was to be a spectacularly public humiliation at the hands of the solicitor general, Alexander Wedderburn, in the Cockpit.

By 1772, Franklin's British nemesis, Lord Hillsborough, had resigned as head of the American Department and was replaced with Lord Dartmouth, one of Franklin's close associates and a known American sympathizer. Franklin was as optimistic about the future as he had ever been, boasting that Dartmouth had "express'd some personal Regard for me."<sup>94</sup> Indeed, it seemed that it would be easier from this point forward for

---

<sup>94</sup>Benjamin Franklin to Joseph Galloway, 22 August 1772, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 19: 275.

Franklin to both transact imperial business on behalf of the colonies that he was representing and to further his personal ambitions as well. It was during this year that Franklin took the opportunity to try to diffuse the tensions between Britain and the colonies once and for all by making it clear to his associates in Massachusetts who had borne the brunt of British occupation that it was not the British ministry that was to blame, rather it was a few cunning colonial officials, namely Thomas Hutchinson, who were the source of their countrymen's miseries. Franklin did this by sending some letters he had come to possess written by Hutchinson to a small group of influential men, including a British undersecretary, Thomas Whately. In these letters, Hutchinson, then lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, made it clear that he believed that firm measures including, "an abridgment of what are called English liberties," were needed in America to maintain colonial dependence on Great Britain, otherwise, "it is all over with us. The friends of anarchy will be afraid of nothing be it ever so extravagant."<sup>95</sup> When Franklin sent the letters to Massachusetts, he included a cover letter that argued the letters were proof that it was these native colonial officials who had traded "away the Liberties of their native Country for Posts" and therefore betrayed not only the interests of their own colony, but also the Crown and "the whole English Empire." These designing men "laid the Foundation of most if not all our present Grievances." Here were the men responsible for instigating the "Enmities between the different Countries of which the Empire consists."<sup>96</sup> Franklin was so convinced he was right that he went so far as to make the outlandish argument that given the extent of the responsibility borne by

---

<sup>95</sup>Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 141; see also The Hutchinson Letters, 1768-1769, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 20:550.

<sup>96</sup>Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Cushing, 2 December 1772, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 19:411-413.

Hutchinson and his successor as lieutenant governor, Andrew Oliver, they should willingly be the scapegoats and sacrifice their reputations to avert the further disintegration of Anglo-American relations.<sup>97</sup>

The fact that Franklin thought he could engineer reconciliation between Great Britain and the colonies by leaking private letters between colonial and British officials was absurd in hindsight. This incident represents a spectacular miscalculation on Franklin's part of his own influence, as well as a critical misreading of how this leak would be perceived by the British officials whose side Franklin was trying so hard to remain on. Just as Washington as a young officer was often guilty of dramatically overstating his own abilities in hopes of currying British favor, Franklin made very similar mistakes with the Hutchinson letters.

Despite Franklin's stipulation that the letters be circulated only among a few men of worth, they were compiled into a pamphlet, printed, and circulated throughout Massachusetts in 1773. The publication sent the colony into an uproar and had the exact opposite effect than what Franklin hoped for. The colonists read the letters as proof of a conspiracy against them, as opposed to what Franklin argued - that they illustrated the isolated opinions of a few powerful men. As a result, the Massachusetts radicals began to look for another opportunity to reinvigorate the struggle. That opportunity came in

---

<sup>97</sup>Ibid. See also Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 142 and Bernard Bailyn, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 237. Bailyn argues that Franklin's act of sending the letters to Massachusetts under the assumption that Hutchinson and Oliver should be willing to sacrifice their reputations was either the most naïve or most cynical acts Franklin committed. The argument that Franklin was naïve is bolstered by his overt Englishness and extreme emotional attachment to the Crown and empire. However, as Bailyn further points out, at the same time, Franklin seems to have seriously believed that his old friend Hutchinson had in fact become so cunning and so detested by the people of Massachusetts that he deserved to be destroyed in order to preserve America's relationship to Great Britain. For evidence of this, see Benjamin Franklin to William Franklin, 6 October 1773, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 20: 437, 439. Wood agrees with Bailyn for the most part, but thinks that instead of it being a case of one or another, Franklin was both naïve and cynical.

December 16, 1773, when in the wake of the passage of the Tea Act, the radicals dumped £10,000 worth of recently arrived tea into Boston harbor. Almost at the same time, the uproar in Britain over the publication of the letters reached fever pitch, and finally, Franklin felt he could no longer keep silent. He publically confessed to being the one responsible for leaking the letters to the Massachusetts rebels. The confession transformed Franklin into a symbol of colonial treachery. On January 20, 1774, news of the Boston Tea Party reached London, and the Privy Council, which was supposed to meet to decide on the Massachusetts petition to remove Hutchinson from office instead became a full indictment of Franklin. Franklin was summoned to the appeal before the Privy Council in the Cockpit, a gallery that was packed with many members of the king's court and London high society on January 29. Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn berated Franklin for nearly an hour, hurling such abuses as had never been heard before in polite English society. Indeed, much of the abuse was too harsh for the newspapers. Wedderburn called Franklin "the true incendiary" and the "first mover and prime conductor" behind all the troubles in Massachusetts. Franklin furthermore had "forfeited all the respect of societies and of men," for he was not a gentleman; he was in fact nothing less than a thief.<sup>98</sup> Franklin stood stock still throughout Wedderburn's entire tirade, despite the cheers and jeers from the crowd. His plan having completely backfired, Franklin's humiliation was complete. His hope for being the great reconciler was shattered, as too were his dreams of holding political office in London or at least

---

<sup>98</sup>Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 146; The Final Hearing Before the Privy Council, 29 January 1774, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 20: 60, 47-49.

wielding political influence. This was Franklin's Americanizing moment. He could no longer harbor any delusions of Englishness.<sup>99</sup>

Although Washington's transformation into an American was nearly a decade before Franklin's, and America and Great Britain were not yet on a full-fledged road to war, there are some striking similarities between the two future founders that underscore their respective political growth. Franklin's Americanization happened later than Washington's both in terms of chronology and his age at the time. Having become wealthy and established an international reputation on the strength of his natural intellectual abilities, Franklin was able to attract the attention of powerful men in Great Britain first through the Anglo-American academic channels who in turn introduced him into the world of British imperial politics. Also, those natural abilities gave him a healthy dose of self-confidence, which caused him to clash with those who failed to afford him the proper respect as an Englishman of letters. Furthermore, his self-confidence combined with his inexperience with diplomacy led him to seriously miscalculate the degree of increasing hostility between Great Britain and the colonies. Even though Great Britain's intellectual elite feted him and bestowed honorary degrees on him, Franklin was ultimately unable to similarly charm England's political elite into granting him the real preferment that he sought and to treat him with the respect he thought he deserved. From

---

<sup>99</sup>Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 147-50. Wood argues that Franklin was hanging on in London because as a believer in the empire, he was still trying to save it. I would disagree, and instead think that Franklin's decision to stay in London over the advice of his friends was motivated more from a desire to try and weather the political storm and save his reputation. While I would not argue that he had completely become a revolutionary at this point, I think Wood makes too much of a patriotic argument and does not pay enough attention to the fact that Franklin knew he was controversial both in America as well as in England. Therefore, it was in his best interests to try and do some damage control before running away in the face of so very public a humiliation. It made sense for him to wait it out and see if a change in ministries would bring more rational voices to the Parliamentary forefront. This way, all of his misguided and controversial actions might come to some fruition and restore him to the public's good graces.

an intellectual standpoint, when Franklin became an American he did not turn his attentions away from cultivating a European mind. On the contrary, Franklin was able to use his intellectual gifts and honorary academic pedigree to his advantage during his diplomatic career in France. Although it is true that by the time he arrived in France Franklin honed his diplomatic act in contrast to his often awkward performance in England, to his delight Franklin found that the French embraced him in ways that the English never did.

As discussed earlier, during Franklin's residence in London, he made several trips to France where he received a great deal of attention from the royal family and from the country's intellectual elite. By the time he arrived in France on his diplomatic mission from the Second Continental Congress, Franklin found that interest in his scientific achievements had not waned. Additionally, Franklin discovered that many at the forefront of the French Enlightenment, including Voltaire, were in the midst of a struggle to reform the Ancien Regime, and they increasingly came to regard America as the symbol of everything that France lacked.<sup>100</sup> Franklin's intellectual gifts, international renown, and his reputation as one of the American Revolution's most eloquent champions helped him mix with these reform minded French intellectuals. Wearing his trademark fur cap in the carefully orchestrated guise of an American rustic, Franklin used his advantages to become a darling of the French Enlightenment. In other words, Franklin's final acceptance of an American identity coupled with his embrace of emerging European intellectual trends helped make him the successful diplomat that history remembers him for. His efforts to secure a Franco-American alliance were instrumental to the ultimate success of the Revolution. Undoubtedly, Franklin's tenure in

---

<sup>100</sup>Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 172-3.

France would have been much more difficult if he had not been able to move so readily in France's intellectual salons. Since Doctor Franklin had made his fortune and his reputation on the basis of his academic talents, it makes perfect sense that his legacy as an American revolutionary leader hinged on his ability to circulate in the highest intellectual circles. His continued embrace of the European mind in concert with his Americanness made Franklin; however the absolute opposite is true for Washington.

#### Washington's Intellectual Pursuits in Context

It is worth noting that Franklin and Washington made similar mistakes in their attempts to prove their Englishness. Franklin's self-assurance that stemmed from his natural academic ability and positive reception in British intellectual circles caused him to be over-confident in dealing with political officials who did not share the same regard that the intelligentsia had for the American colonial agent with no international political experience. Washington had also over estimated his own abilities because he was confident in his physical prowess. His self-assuredness is more striking than that of Franklin because of Washington's comparative youth; however, the two mistakes in judgment are not that dissimilar. Washington expected that having proven his worth to some of Virginia's most influential men, he would thus enjoy preferment from the British military elite despite his total lack of military experience.

However, in contrast to Franklin, Washington's earlier evolution caused him to reject his contemporaries' interest in cultivating a European style persona. Instead, he devoted himself to practical subjects that would make his plantations more profitable, thereby enhancing his wealth to such a degree that would keep him at the top of the social

ladder that he labored so long to climb. His acceptance of the fact that no amount of battlefield experience or laurels would make him English despite his Virginia birth thus allowed Washington to develop intellectual interests that were more akin to his seventeenth-century colonial forbearers than to his eighteenth-century contemporaries. Washington made his mental break with his Englishness in the wake of a very personal affront harshly dealt to him by Lord Loudoun, and in this key moment, he was forced to confront his academic shortcomings. This when coupled with his extreme sensitivity to criticism drove Washington intellectually inward toward the subjects that he felt most comfortable with and that more importantly could meet his immediate needs at that time. He was fortunate to have made his public reputation in Virginia on the basis of his natural propensities for physical bravery and leadership based on experience. Learning to read Latin or becoming an amateur scientist was not going to sustain that hard earned reputation in planter-dominated high society; earning money and being a dedicated public servant would. Consequently, Washington focused his reading and intellectual pursuits accordingly and reading remained an intensely private activity. For example, when in residence at Mount Vernon, he spent on average two hours in the morning and all afternoon alone in his library.<sup>101</sup> Ironically, these insecurities that discouraged Washington from ever trying to develop his intellect in a similar manner to that of Franklin made him a better American revolutionary. Washington's lack of self-confidence in intellectual matters kept him humble enough to realize that he might not be up to the task ahead of him, and he was also willing to listen to the learned opinions from his advisors in order to make decisions. He learned powerful lessons from his early errors in judgment, a feat which might not have been possible if he had not been able to

---

<sup>101</sup> Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 171.

grasp what his weaknesses were. He may not have had an extensive European education in the military art, but he had hard-earned American experience in how to form and lead armies of his fellow countrymen. Franklin's Americanness was based on a conscious rejection of Englishness while still embracing European ideas. Washington's Americanness was based on his conscious rejection of English ideas. In so doing, both developed identities that they were entirely comfortable with.

Washington filled his library with books that helped him confront the challenges that faced him in both his public life and the running of his plantations. Its catalog therefore looks very different from that of fellow Virginians Thomas Jefferson, William Byrd II of Westover, John Mercer of Marlborough, and Councilor Robert Carter of Nomini Hall. Notably, these four Virginian contemporaries of Washington all enjoyed the advantage of university and legal educations. Their great libraries therefore reflect that as readers, they had the training required to facilitate reading across a broader spectrum of genres and languages.<sup>102</sup> Washington's reading stands in stark contrast to the similarly educationally deprived Franklin, however, who taught himself to read in several languages about a variety of subjects. Nevertheless, Washington assembled an extensive library at Mount Vernon, the quality of which has hitherto been unappreciated by historians and biographers alike for the library reflects the unique intellectual development of the man who more than any of his fellow founders epitomizes what it is to be an American.

The next three chapters will explore the contents of the library in the context of the public roles that Washington played over the course of his lifetime. It is interesting that Washington would always be placed in situations that charged him with leading men

---

<sup>102</sup> Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, 2: 555-60.

who were far more intellectually and/or academically qualified than he for his post.

Moreover, he was never comfortable with political power. His choice of reading material therefore reflects one of the ways that he met those challenges head on. Deprived of the benefits of a university education, he compensated with a program of self-education to the best extent possible. As the first chapter outlined where Washington did his reading and this chapter explored Washington's early intellectual development and sense of self thus helping to understand why he engaged in a certain type of reading, the stage is therefore set to better understand what he read and how he used the knowledge he gained.

## Chapter 2 ó Provincial Reading

As the first warm rays of the sun that heralded the arrival of spring to Virginia stretched their way across the landscape melting away the last of winter's frost, George Washington was busy mulling over plans for the ongoing 1759 planting season. He was filled with a mix of anxious anticipation and frustration. Washington loved the land. In his mind, the possibilities of what good land could yield were limitless and now more than ever he needed to be right. This year's crops had to be successful, for the yields would be needed to finance his plans for a larger extension to Mount Vernon's main house that as yet had only been modestly expanded. There was a problem, however, ó the cash crop itself. Tobacco had been the staple of Virginia planters since John Rolfe harvested the first meager crop in Jamestown more than one hundred years earlier, and over cultivation over the course of that period robbed the once rich soil of its nutrients reducing subsequent yields to an inferior quality, which drove prices down. Tobacco was also a needy crop, demanding hours of intense labor from a large workforce while delivering diminishing returns year after year. This simply would not do for Washington, who was brimming with ambitious and expensive plans for the future. The fact that tobacco was becoming increasingly problematic was constantly nagging at him. He was too much of a provincial Virginian at this point to abandon the traditional cash crop just yet. No, it simply would not do. A man of his social status could not get away with raising tobacco that led to diminishing returns. He had to do better, to produce crops of the utmost quality; that was what was expected of one of the leaders of Virginian society. To that end, he dispatched orders to his London agent, Robert Cary and Company, for among other things, "the newest and most approved Treatise on

Agriculture! a new System of Agriculture, or a Speedy way to grow Rich...<sup>103</sup> Cary first sent Washington a copy of Batty Langley's *New Principles of Gardening, or the Laying out and Planting Parterres* and in 1761 filled Washington's specific request for Thomas Hale's *Compleat Body of Husbandry*.<sup>104</sup> Although Washington found these books useful, when he heard of a new English translation of Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau's *A Practical Treatise of Husbandry*, he quickly obtained a copy in 1764.<sup>105</sup> Duhamel's book was of particular interest to Washington for among other things, it outlined a new method for planting that was superior to the old, established common way. Duhamel advocated closer attention to soil preparation, rotating crops to preserve the soil, careful record keeping, and a willingness to be innovative.<sup>106</sup> Washington internalized these lessons and spent the rest of his career as a planter transforming Mount Vernon from a one crop plantation into a multifaceted agricultural enterprise.<sup>107</sup>

These agricultural books provide the best example of Washington as a "student." His copy of Duhamel's *Husbandry* has more than fifty pages of marginalia wherein he meticulously converted the European measurements into the English system that he could

---

<sup>103</sup>Invoice to Robert Cary and Company, Williamsburg, 1 May 1759, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008).

<sup>104</sup>Ibid; George Washington to Robert Cary and Company, Virginia, 12 June 1759, in *ibid*.

<sup>105</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 544.

<sup>106</sup>Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau, *A Practical Treatise of Husbandry* (London, 1762). Washington's copy with the marginalia is housed at the Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>107</sup>For a broader context as to the economic realities and their social ramifications facing Virginia's elite planters throughout the eighteenth century see Emory G. Evans, *A "Topping People:" The Rise and Decline of Virginia's Old Political Elite, 1680-1790* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 90-176; Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit*, 472-538. According to the evidence cited by Walsh, Washington seemed to set a trend for diversification that his fellow planters started to follow. The other prominent planter family that came closest to mirroring what Washington was doing at Mount Vernon were the Carters, who interestingly also engrossed themselves in the study of agriculture, although they struggled more with grain cultivation, probably because of the quality of the soil where their plantations were located and the fact that they were trying to exactly replicate the latest English practices, which did not always work in North America. This is where Washington differs from them because he worked through European agriculture books and experimented in order to come up with the necessary adaptations that had to be made because of the geographic and climate related differences between America and Europe.

better understand. Given all that we know about his relentless drive to excel at everything he did, it is not difficult to imagine him bent over his book at his desk, pouring over each page with care, making sure that he got the necessary conversions absolutely right. The notes are mostly found throughout the 200 pages that make up part two of the book, the "experiments" with wheat. This extensive and exacting marginalia was unusual for Washington, for due to his "defective education" he never developed the scholarly habit of marking up his books in the way that Jefferson and John Adams did. In fact, the evidence suggests that he made extensive notes in only a handful of other works he owned, most notably a harsh critique of his presidential administration by James Monroe (to be discussed in greater length in a subsequent chapter). Although slight in comparison to the overall size of his library by the end of his life, these isolated examples of marginalia seem to indicate that Washington's most intense reading was done in circumstances when he stood to either gain or lose a tremendous amount. In the case of Duhamel's *Husbandry* that will be addressed within this chapter, Washington's financial future was on the line. As one of Virginia's preeminent gentlemen, he had a responsibility to maintain a certain lifestyle which cost money, all the while doing his best to enhance his overall fortune and not become entrapped by the endless cycle of debt to British financiers as so many of the gentry had. After years of pulling himself up by his bootstraps and more than once by the coattails of others, Washington made it to the top of Virginia society. Now he had to stay there - no small undertaking if ever there was one. No wonder he took the study of agriculture seriously.

The first chapter offered an argument as to why he read the things he did & why he shied away from some of the classical reading that was so popular among both the

colonial elite and the English gentry in favor of more practical subjects that would help him accomplish the short term goals he outlined for himself. Having therefore established why he read, the question of what Washington read will hopefully make more sense within this broadly established context. The next three chapters will explore the contents of Washington's library, broken down over three separate phases of his lifetime. The first phase that this chapter will address is the first forty three years of his life, before he was given command of the Continental Army and became an American figure. The next chapter will explore the period of Washington's life when he was in the national spotlight from the American Revolution through the end of his presidency. The subsequent chapter will focus on his final retirement from public life to his death.

#### The Library and the Analytical Framework

At his death, Washington's library consisted of over nine hundred volumes including books, pamphlets, printed sermons and religious tracts, maps, and periodicals. The first question that must be answered is: did he read all of them? The short answer is no. For instance, the library at Mount Vernon had multiple volumes in various foreign languages including German, Italian, French, and Latin. It is well known that Washington did not speak or read any foreign languages, so those works can immediately be ruled out. Also, many of the books that Washington obtained later in life were gifts from the authors or from other admirers hoping to curry favor or win an endorsement of some sort. Now of course, just because some books were gifts does not mean that Washington did not read them; however, if he did not take the time to search them out and purchase them, the gift books must be closely examined for evidence that he read

them and didn't simply thank the giver and place the book on a shelf, never to be so much as thumbed through. Additionally, some of the books that were labeled by the estate appraisers as belonging in the library were women's magazines and literature that in reality either belonged to Martha Washington, her daughter, Patsy Custis, or any of the other female relatives who periodically resided at Mount Vernon over the years.

Furthermore, Washington furnished his stepson, John Parke Custis with a handsome library to facilitate the young man's education; however, Custis died of typhoid in 1782 and some of the books that belonged to him ended up back at Mount Vernon after his death, presumably to facilitate the education of his son, George Washington Parke Custis, who was to be raised by his grandparents at Mount Vernon.

These are just several examples of the limiting circumstances discovered over the course of the research for this project that must be taken into account in order to truly understand what Washington actually did read. In the end, after the total list of the library's contents is pared down, what remains is still an extensive list that demonstrates that Washington was in fact a deliberate and prolific reader in that he was discriminating in his selection of reading material, and when circumstances allowed, he read deeply in certain subjects like agriculture. While he was not in the same intellectual league with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, or John Adams, Washington had a sharp, clear mind with a focus that enabled him to use reading as a tool to refine his image and enhance both his wealth and his social status.

In examining the content of the library, one of the next questions that must be answered is how did he acquire the various works that filled his shelves? This can be answered with a reasonable degree of certainty by comparing the inscriptions in the

individual volumes, the five different book lists that were compiled between 1759 and 1799, Washington's expense accounts, the invoices of goods he ordered from his London agents, and his correspondence. Washington purchased a fair amount of reading material throughout his lifetime, which can be neatly traced through his meticulously kept expense accounts. He inherited some from his parents, and absorbed a few volumes from the extensive Custis library upon his marriage to Martha. The rest were mostly gifts that were unsolicited.

The question of which of these volumes did Washington read is far more difficult to answer. Washington made a habit of writing his name and sometimes the year in which he acquired the particular work in the flyleaf or the title page of the books he owned. He also had a bookplate that he used intermittently. In all, 397 volumes have his signature or bookplate, or both. One can assume that he at least looked at each of these volumes, and valued it enough to definitively mark it as belonging to him, indicating maybe just a cursory read, if not a careful one. That said there are a number of volumes that Washington did not put either his name or his bookplate in; often, these books were gifts. With only a few exceptions that will be discussed later in greater depth, there is no indication whether or not Washington read these books. Also frustrating is a severe dearth of marginalia that would indicate what Washington read and how thoroughly he read it. As was stated earlier, this is not altogether unexpected because of his truncated education. He was never trained to read as a scholar, and on his own, he never really developed the habit of taking notes in his books. There are only a few volumes that are the exceptions to this general rule, Duhamel's *Husbandry*, and Monroe's *View of the*

*Executive*.<sup>108</sup> Without extensive marginalia or commonplace books filled with reading notes in his hand, it is difficult to determine with complete certainty the names of all the books that Washington did read. However, by eliminating the books that belonged to other members of the family who were resident at Mount Vernon and those in foreign languages which he could not read, a plausible case as to which books Washington did read can be made by using a carefully chosen set of assumptions based on several established facts. First, members of Washington's family attested to the fact that no one entered the library at Mount Vernon without orders from Washington; it makes sense to assume that Washington was not simply collecting yards of unread classics for the sake of appearances.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, with regard to the books he purchased for himself, we can assume that Washington did so with the express reason of wanting or needing to read them. Second, although Washington did not take many notes on his reading, and he seldom directly quoted anything in his writings, he did make certain literary allusions from works he possessed, including, among others, the Bible and Shakespeare, thereby indicating that he read carefully and felt comfortable enough with the material to make reference to it in his correspondence.<sup>110</sup> Since Washington carefully preserved his writings and understood that his popularity meant that his correspondents would preserve his letters, it is hard to believe that someone as calculating as Washington would write anything he was unsure of. Third, by establishing as accurate a timeline as possible of when he acquired the various works in his library and then putting it in context with what

---

<sup>108</sup>Appleton P.C. Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection at the Boston Athenaeum*, 522, 544.

<sup>109</sup>George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 167.

<sup>110</sup>For an example of Washington's use of a direct quote from Shakespeare see: Washington to George Washington Parke Custis, 28 November, 1796, in *ibid.*, 76. Washington used biblical allusions throughout his adult life in both public and private writings. They will be explored more completely in this and the subsequent two chapters.

was taking place in his life at the time, reasonable assumptions can be made about how he could have used each particular piece to assist him with whatever he was occupied with at that time. Again, a timeline of Washington's literary acquisitions can be constructed by referencing his expense accounts, correspondence with his agents and authors, the lists of Washington's book inventory made during his lifetime, and the publication dates of each work. On average, with the exception of the books he inherited from his parents and those that came from the Custis library, Washington seems to have acquired his books within ten years of their publication. Additionally, the presentation books were typically given to Washington as soon as they were published in first edition print runs.<sup>111</sup> All of this information combined with an understanding of Anglo-American print culture will shed light on not only what Washington read, but also on the significance of each work at various points throughout his life.

---

<sup>111</sup>The original list as compiled by Washington's executors, Tobias Lear, Thompson Mason, Thomas Peter and William H. Foote was deposited with his will and the schedule of his property at the Fairfax Court House. The original will is still there; however the additional documents, including the book list were scattered during the Civil War. However, John A. Washington, the last private owner of Mount Vernon had a copy of the original list, which he shared with Edward Everett, who printed it in his *Life of George Washington* in 1860. All subsequent printings of Washington's book list stem from Everett's reproduction. There are numerous spelling errors and abbreviated titles, and it is impossible to know whether those errors were committed by the appraisers or the various historians who have reproduced the list since 1860. After Everett, Benson J. Lossing was the next historian to publish the list, which he claimed to have obtained from the Fairfax Court House, but most likely it was based on Everett's work. Lossing's list has several inconsistencies in spelling and abbreviation from both Everett's list and the Griffin's list. Neither Everett nor Lossing detail whether or not each book bears Washington's autograph, bookplate, or any other significant signatures or markings. That information was added by Griffin who personally studied the portion of Washington's collection that is now at the Boston Athenaeum and the various auction lists that had detailed descriptions of the rest of Washington's books that were sold off intermittently throughout the 1870s. Presumably the auctioneers wanted to advertise which books had either Washington's signature or that of other members of his family in order to raise prices. Griffin additionally cross-referenced the list with Washington's expense accounts and correspondence to determine which books were purchased by Washington and which were gifts and what if any additional pertinent information could be determined. As only one third of Washington's library is housed at the Boston Athenaeum and a few volumes are in Mount Vernon's special collections with the rest having been sold to private collectors at auction, Griffin's work is the most accurate complete listing that we have to work from. See also: Benson J. Lossing, *The Home of Washington* (New York: A.S. Hale, 1870), 376-392; and Edward Everett, *The Life of George Washington* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), 286-317.

### Washington's Religious Collection: Growing Up Anglican

With this methodological framework established, it is now possible to begin exploring the books Washington collected during the early part of his life in Virginia before he rose to national prominence. As stated in the previous chapter, Washington's education was abruptly truncated by the death of his father. He spent his formative years under the tutelage of his mother. Washington family lore tells us that Mary Ball Washington was a stern, pious woman who in the tradition of Virginia colonists since the mid-seventeenth century maintained a small religious library and read to her children daily from the Bible, and from several other texts including Sir Matthew Hale's *Contemplations Moral and Divine*, James Hervey's *Meditations and Contemplations*, Offspring Blackhall's *The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation in General*, and Thomas Comber's *Discourses on the Whole Common Prayer*.<sup>112</sup> These books were all standard reading for Anglicans in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and were widely available on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>113</sup> This early instruction in the Anglican Communion is where the young Washington gained his lifelong commitment to orthodoxy, as did the majority of his fellow Virginians.

Although the subject of the veracity of Washington's true faith remains a subject of heated debate among historians, the fact that he was a practicing Episcopalian is beyond dispute.<sup>114</sup> Leaving the question of faith aside, it is not difficult to see the impact

---

<sup>112</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 498-500.

<sup>113</sup>See David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 334; Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1979), 65-90; Davis, *Intellectual Life of the Colonial South*, 580-84; Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class*, 134; Mary V. Thompson, "In the Hands of a Good Providence," 17-18.

<sup>114</sup>Frank E. Grizzard Jr., *The Ways of Providence: Religion and George Washington* (Charlottesville: Mariner Publishing, 2005), 1. Of all the work done on the subject of Washington and religion, Grizzard's offers the most concise and plausible argument by stripping away the Parson Weems

of the lessons from his parents' religious library on the developing youth. During his adolescence, Washington began to develop the formidable willpower and self-discipline that would become his chief characteristics later in life. While the anecdotal sources all pinpoint his mother as the source of Washington's discipline, she certainly imparted it to her son through the Anglican doctrine that she read to him. In direct contrast to Puritan sermons that were intensely theological and often centered on the subject of salvation, Anglican sermons were shorter, less theological and more pietistic, emphasizing sound morality as opposed to predestination.<sup>115</sup> For example, Offspring Blackall's eight sermons that comprise *The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation in General* are free of complex structures and concisely make the argument that Scripture is the only moral guide that one needs in life. The simplicity of the message of each of these sermons was intended to reach a wide audience and therefore made a good instructional catechism for children.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Thomas Comber's *Short Discourses Upon the Whole Common Prayer* provided a straightforward guidebook as to how to read and use the *Book of Common Prayer*. What is particularly striking about Comber's work is that in addition to teaching readers how to behave in church, he argues that sinfulness must be acknowledged and forgiveness must be asked from God, but in doing so, it is important not to go overboard. Maintaining self-control and living a life of quiet yet reverent

---

inspired myths to argue that while Washington was a practicing Episcopalian, there is simply not enough evidence to suggest that he was either a Diest, or a deeply spiritual Christian. Furthermore, Grizzard argues that it is beyond doubt that Washington believed that religion was good for society, and that inherent in that was toleration.

<sup>115</sup>Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 336.

<sup>116</sup> Offspring Blackall, *The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation in General, and of the Scripture Revelation in Particular. Both as to the Matter of it, and as to the Proof of It; ...In Eight Sermons, ....By Offspring Blackall* (London: Printed and sold by H. Hills, 1769), 18.

devotion was the correct way of living.<sup>117</sup> As Washington is the very epitome of self-control, it makes sense to connect that character trait in part with the lessons he learned from reading Comber as a young man.

Growing up a good Anglican was an important quality to Virginia's ruling class, so it made perfect sense that not only did Mary Washington find it necessary that her children understood the lessons of the Bible, but also that they knew how to perform the role of communicant in an Anglican service. After all, a Church of England service follows the *Book of Common Prayer*, which is not so much a prayer book in the sense that it is a collection of prayers, as it is a playbook, or the *ōscriptō* that proscribes how worship is acted out. Although the Anglican liturgy is not as physically performative as its Roman Catholic counterpart, it nonetheless requires participants to know when to stand, sit, and kneel at given intervals, when to pray, and how to do it. Different speeches are made by different individuals, there is collective and individual repetition, and there are carefully laid stage directions inherent in the prayer book.<sup>118</sup> In other words, in order to behave with proper reverence and decorum in these services, one must first be instructed in what to do. Learning how to behave in church without embarrassing oneself was crucial for Virginia church services featured a veritable who's who in the upper crust of society. Performing well in church would have been doubly important for Washington after the death of his father when his adolescent mind was dreaming big dreams that would require the patronage of a powerful benefactor; the shy teenager needed to make an appropriate impression if he was ever to transcend his middling position. Being

---

<sup>117</sup>Thomas Comber, *Short Discourses Upon the Whole Common-Prayer. Designed to Inform the Judgment, and Excite the Devotion as Such as Daily Use the Same. The fourth edition. By Thomas Comber, D.D.* (London: Printed for J. Nicholson, 1712), 2.

<sup>118</sup>Charles Sheffling and Cynthia Shattuck, *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

confined to the second tier of Virginia society did not appeal to Washington, for that would likely have meant greater difficulty escaping the dominance of his mother.

### Travel Narratives, Magazines, and Heroics: Fuel for the Imagination

Such a prospect must have weighed on the youth's mind whose imagination at the same time was being fueled by stories in the popular magazine, *The Spectator*, and his reading of *The Travels of Cyrus* and Lord Anson's *Voyage Round the World*.<sup>119</sup> Founded in 1711 by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator* was widely read on both sides of the Atlantic and was a great favorite of the Virginia gentry because it communicated current events in an enlightened, erudite manner which brought philosophy out of libraries and classrooms and into the coffeehouses. The literary style of *The Spectator* inspired Virginia printers to fill their pages with essays and poetry rather than straightforward re-prints of old news.<sup>120</sup> *The Travels of Cyrus* was a bestselling fictional work by Chevalier Ramsay. It describes an ideal world populated by figures from ancient Greece. Ramsay interwove a discourse on pagan theology into the text of

---

<sup>119</sup>Evidence exists that Washington read at least some issues of the *Spectator* as a schoolboy, for notes in his commonplace books in his early hand attest to this. Those commonplace books are currently in the archives of the Library of Congress, and are available on microfilm. Washington's copy of the seventh edition of Chevalier Ramsay's *The Travels of Cyrus To Which Is Annexed, A Discourse Upon the Theology and Mythology of the Pagans* is in Boston Athenaeum and bears Washington's youthful signature on the title page. It makes sense that he would have read this book on the ancient world as a schoolboy for as an adolescent he would just have been beginning the typical classical education before his father's death and his education came to an abrupt end. It further makes sense that Washington would have been exposed to and encouraged to read Lord Anson's *A Voyage Round the World in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV, by George Anson, Esq; Afterwards Lord Anson... Compiled From His Papers and Materials, By Richard Walter* at the point when it looked like he might actually embark on a career in the Royal Navy for the book catalogs the expedition against the Spanish in their ports in 1739. Washington's copy is one of the sixth editions of the book, and it is in the Boston Athenaeum and bears his autograph in a youthful hand. This book was popular as it was published in fifteen editions. Travel narratives had captured the attention of Englishmen since the days of Richard Hakluyt's promotional efforts in Elizabeth I's court; see Peter C. Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 86-92.

<sup>120</sup>Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865*, 62.

the travel narrative, a subject of particular interest to Virginians who were developing and refining their knowledge of the classics. Therefore the classical setting for this work captured readers' attention, which the fantastical prose held it. Lord Anson's *A Voyage Round the World* recounted the details of the British naval expedition of 1739. The British were anticipating that war would soon break out with Spain, and the admiralty decided that the best strategy would be to attack Spain in her colonies in order to deprive her of their wealth and natural resources. Anson was ordered to sail the world and reconnoiter the colonies to determine the feasibility of this plan of action. This book offered readers a contemporary assessment of the world outside the British Empire. It also offered a romanticized view of service in the Royal Navy. At the time when it seemed possible that Washington would embark on a naval career, it would have made perfect sense for him to read such a travel narrative.

It was William Fairfax in consultation with Lawrence Washington who arranged for George to become a midshipman in the Royal Navy; Mary Ball Washington vetoed the plan after she heard from her brother that George would be ill-treated and would have little hope of advancement in that service because he lacked the necessary connections. Although his mother closed the first window of military opportunity for Washington, he still dreamt of a life in uniform.<sup>121</sup> These dreams were fueled by his first documented book purchase, *A Panegyrick to the Memory of Frederick, Late Duke of Schomberg*. This slim volume is a eulogy of a persecuted Huguenot driven from France and into the service of William III whose character traits were strikingly similar to Washington's. Schomberg was renowned for his personal bravery on the battlefield. He was praised for his "kind of Capacity for the greatest Trusts" along with his "Worth and Abilities."

---

<sup>121</sup>Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience*, 30-31.

Moreover, ðhe was Naturally Active, a great lover of Exercise, Healthful and Temperate to Admiration. He neither Courtèd nor Fearèd Danger, ever Himself, ever Fortunate, ever preventing the worst, and surmounting the Greatest Difficulties.ö Schomberg was said to have closely adhered to a set of rules of civility, likely a similar version of the manual that Washington copied in his schoolbook. What is also interesting is the short passage dealing with his education which argues, ðeducation makes us truly what we are; and if Nature prepares Men to, it is that that lays the Foundation of Great Actions.ö<sup>122</sup> Given the extremely close parallels between the descriptions of the character and attributes between the two men later in life, it seems plausible that this book was extremely influential in the development of Washington's character as a young man. The heroic language in which the panegyric was written was deliberately chosen to illicit admiration from readers.<sup>123</sup> As such, it is not difficult to imagine that the teenaged Washington would have been captivated by such a story of a successful life. If Washington was really taken with this memorial to Schomberg, it makes sense that he would seek to follow Schomberg's example and take seriously the admonition that education was the foundation of a man's identity.

#### Surveying: Employment and Opportunity

Learning how to act in the presence of greatness in order to curry favor was only one aspect of what Washington needed to do in order to further his lofty ambitions. In

---

<sup>122</sup>Email exchange with Ted Crackel, 8 March 2011; H. de Luzancy, *A Panegyrick to the Memory of His Grace Frederick Late Duke of Schonberg* (London: R. Bentley, Russel-Street in Covent Garden, 1690).

<sup>123</sup>Panegyrics commemorating the lives of great men were popular on both sides of the Atlantic in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, by the early 1800s, critics complained that such works obscured the true character of the subject in the interest of gaining patronage and increasing sales. See Scott E. Casper, *Biography and Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 35.

Virginia, social status was also determined by the amount of land one owned, and since Washington's inheritance from his father was modest as the third son, he needed to earn money to begin speculating in real estate. He had his father's old surveying instruments and from William Fairfax he obtained a copy of William Leybourn's *The Compleat Surveyor; Containing the Whole Art of Surveying of the Land by the Plain Table, Circumferentor, Theodolite, Peractor, and Other Instruments*. This book was a straightforward handbook for surveyors that outlined how to employ each tool to determine measurements of a tract of land and how to turn those measurements into maps. It was written in plain language, so that anyone could read it, with or without any previous experience in an apprenticeship.<sup>124</sup> It is interesting to think of the influence that this book had on the very beginning of Washington's career, for it is from this text that he gleaned enough knowledge of surveying to obtain a license from the College of William and Mary. Once licensed, he embarked on his first job, surveying lands for the colony's elite landowners, Lord Fairfax among them. It is important to note that although Washington's transactions with these wealthy men were only a part of the overall dividend from this early occupation, the most valuable lessons from his surveying career were knowledge of the land and wilderness survival. These attributes are what made him the right choice for Dinwiddie to select as the emissary to the French in the Ohio Valley just prior to the start of the Seven Years War. As was previously argued, this episode is what first made Washington a household name as his journal cataloging the entire harrowing experience was widely published and read in the colonies and in England.

---

<sup>124</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 550. According to Griffin's catalogue and the 1764 list of books at Mount Vernon, the fact that this book belonged first to William Fairfax was confirmed by his autograph on the title page, along with that of Edward Washborne. The book was sold at auction to private buyers twice in 1876 and February 1891, so Griffin's account that is based on the auction records is the best evidence available.

## Military Art and Science

Once war with the French became a reality and Washington found himself saddled with the responsibility of command, he was in need of guidance. As argued in chapter two, he obtained a copy of Humphrey Bland's *A Treatise of Military Discipline*. First published in 1727, the book went through nine editions and quickly became known as the British army's bible. It was a foundational text that outlined daily operations at every level of command from platoon level up. Almost of all British officers serving at the time of the Seven Year's War had copies of this book: General Sir William Howe owned one in 1732, Brigadier Thomas Paget in 1741, Lieutenant General Henry Hawley in 1753, Major General James Wolfe in 1756, Major General Alexander Dury and Lieutenant Colonel William Wade in 1758. Colonel Samuel Bagshawe in 1751 and Lord John Murray in 1762 each owned two copies. Furthermore, the book maintained its popularity through the end of the eighteenth century, as Field Marshal John Earl Ligonier obtained his copy in 1770, Lieutenant General William Tryon and Captain George Smith in 1773, Major General Sir Charles Hotham Thompson in 1784, Lieutenant Colonel William Calderwood in 1787, and Captain John Montresor in 1799.<sup>125</sup> Washington also read Caesar's *Commentaries*, one of the most popular military books on the art of war in the eighteenth century Anglo-American world and there were numerous translations readily available in the colonies. Washington read the book on the advice of William Fairfax, but many officers recommended, discussed, listed, or cited Caesar's

---

<sup>125</sup>Ira D. Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 149-50. See also John Houlding, *Fit For Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795* (New York: 1981), 182. Houlding declares Bland's book was "the best known of all eighteenth-century military treatises in the English language."

*Commentaries* so it is equally possible that other officers such as General Braddock could have recommended the book to him.<sup>126</sup>

There is little evidence to support that Washington did any other military reading during the Seven Yearø War. For one thing, Washington was building a regiment from the ground up, so devoting what spare time he had to reading the latest in European grand strategy would not have provided him with practical knowledge that would have been immediately useful. Also, he was ill and away from his regiment for a considerable period of time from November 1757 to March 1758 with a severe bout of dysentery that by the accounts of his physicians brought him to deathø door.<sup>127</sup> By the time he recovered, he had only one more campaign with General Forbes which Washington viewed as one more chance to showcase his experience as a battle hardened, frontier combat leader; grand strategy and European tactics were expressly not useful in this situation. There was also one other reason why Washington never returned to military reading in the years before the American Revolution ø he turned his mind to planning for a future life outside of the army.<sup>128</sup> The repeated rejections Washington received to his requests for a regular commission burned him, and as time passed and they kept coming from higher levels of authority, he must have known in the back of his mind that he was never going to get his wish. He therefore turned his mind to new dreams of prosperity and fulfillment in civilian life. He began to think of marriage.

---

<sup>126</sup>Stanislaus Murray Hamilton ed., *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers*, 5 vols. (1892; reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2009), I: 231-232, 256; Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution*, 154-155.

<sup>127</sup>Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience (1732-1775)*, 185-7.

<sup>128</sup>During his final months in command of the Virginia Regiment in 1758, Mount Vernon was undergoing a major renovation designed personally by Washington. In his absence, Washington asked George William Fairfax to supervise the project. Washington sent Fairfax repeated letters asking numerous, detailed questions on progress. Fairfax for his part, faithfully answered them. See the exchange of letters between Washington and George William Fairfax during the summer and early fall of 1758 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

Washington was twenty six years old when he paid his respects to the recently widowed Martha Dandridge Custis. He had met her before, at a ball in Williamsburg when he was officially elevated to commander of the Virginia Regiment, and although she was married, she must have made an impression on Washington for he proceeded straight to her house after doctors pronounced him well after his illness. After that first visit (an overnight stay) she must have given him some encouragement, for he was back within a week. He also made it a point to impress Martha's children, four year old John Parke Custis (Jacky), and two year old Martha Parke Custis (Patsy). Much to the frustrations of historians and biographers, few details are known about exactly what attracted George and Martha Washington to each other. He was well aware of the fact that she was the richest widow in Virginia, with an estate valued at £23,632, which would certainly catapult him to the top of Virginia society, but there was more to it than that. By all accounts Martha was a gentle person who communicated warmth to those who interacted with her. While her wealth was almost certainly a compelling reason for Washington to consider courting the widow Custis, he must also have found her gentle personality soothing, especially in light of his cool relationship with his mother.<sup>129</sup> In Martha he would have a supportive partner, and that was definitely a worthy goal that he set out for with his characteristic determination. The extremely brief courtship was fruitful, for the couple became engaged sometime during or shortly after his second visit. His expense accounts record that he ordered a ring from Philadelphia, as well as a suit of new clothes at about the same time as Martha placed an order for a new dress and

---

<sup>129</sup> See footnote 71.

shoes.<sup>130</sup> The bachelor soldier was about to become the head of a family and a gentleman planter.

The prospect of marrying Martha posed a problem for Washington. The house at Mount Vernon was too small. He met and courted Martha and her children in her world. He could impress them with his grace and impressive physical appearance. But the house at Mount Vernon in 1758 was not yet the architectural manifestation of the man; indeed, it was little altered from its original seventeenth century appearance. As he was always eager to impress, Washington recognized that he needed to expand ó and fast. Designing and supervising the extension of a house was as arduous task then as it is now, and complicating matters was the fact that Washington was to be away with General Forbes's expedition against Fort Duquesne. While Washington entrusted the supervision to his best friend and neighbor, George William Fairfax, he did most of the planning himself. There were a fair number of architectural books available to him, but most likely he relied on Batty Langley's *Builder's and Workman's Treasury of Designs* among others as discussed in chapter one.<sup>131</sup>

The year 1759 was filled with new beginnings. Washington retired from the Virginia Regiment and married Martha on January 6. Not only was he a husband and stepfather, but he also was responsible for managing the Custis estates that were left to Martha and her children by her first husband. Washington threw himself into his new roles and the task of running the sprawling plantations. One of the first major responsibilities he had to face following the marriage was the settlement of Daniel Parke Custis's estate, which was still in turmoil because Custis died without a will. As

---

<sup>130</sup> Flexner, George Washington: The Forge of Experience (1732-1775), 193.

<sup>131</sup> Helen Park, *A List of Architectural Books Available in America Before the Revolution* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc, 1973), 49-75.

Washington sifted through the assorted legal hassles to divide the property that belonged to Martha, Jacky, and Patsy, he began to make provisions for his stepson's education by going through the Custis library, taking the volumes he thought would be suit the boy's future education to Mount Vernon.<sup>132</sup>

### Washington Begins to Build His Library

Through the early years of his marriage, books seemed to take on a new degree of importance for Washington. In 1764, Washington made another list of books, this time of the ones that were at Mount Vernon. This list was made sometime after Washington received Tobias Smollett's eleven-volume *History of England* in the summer of 1763 and before he received twelve issues of *Country Magazine* sent to him from London by Robert Cary and Company in February 1765. Analyzing this list is a challenge for several reasons. First, the list was apparently made by shelf or whatever other container in which the books were stored, and not by alphabetical order by author or even by genre.

---

<sup>132</sup>Appendix D: Inventory of the Books in the Estate c. 1759, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition* ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008). This is a list of all the books in the Custis estate that Washington had transported to Mount Vernon for Jacky. Almost all of the books belonging to Daniel Parke Custis had been inherited from his father, John Custis. The list is in Washington's own hand. He most likely made the list at the Custis townhouse in Williamsburg. The appraisers valued the books in the townhouse as being worth £25 and the books at White House in New Kent County at £4. Jacky Custis took possession of the books when he came of age. It is not known precisely how many he read or used throughout the course of his studies at King's College which were abandoned. When Jacky died of typhoid in 1782, his executors wrote to Washington on 20 March 1782 asking him if he wanted the books to be kept or sold. Washington replied on 20 April, 'I had no particular reasons for keeping and handing down to his Son the Books of the late Colo. [Daniel Parke] Custis, saving that I thought it would be taking the advantage of a low appraisement to make them my own property at it; and that to sell them was not an object, as they might be useful to him [young Custis].' Nearly all of the books listed in the probate records of Jacky Custis's will were subsequently listed in the catalog of Washington's books made after his death in 1799. With the exception of two Custis books that bore both Daniel Parke Custis's signature and Washington's underneath, there is no indication that Washington read any of them. Washington encountered multiple problems with the management of the Custis estate. There were thorny legal problems, and inefficient plantation overseers whose actions negatively impacted the quality of the crops being produced on the Custis plantations. See Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit*, 447-48.

Washington stored his books by size, so the titles do not flow together in a logical sequence. Second, as he made this list, Washington began putting either the initials "GW" or "JC" after each title to indicate whether they belonged to him or to Jacky; however Washington stopped doing this approximately one third of the way through the list. Third, Washington abbreviated most of the titles. These abbreviations are in most cases slightly different than the ones he created in the 1759 list, and are also different for the subsequent list made of the books at Mount Vernon in 1783, the list of Jacky Custis's books at the time of his death in 1782, and final list of Washington's books made at the time of his death in 1799. Fourth, there are several volumes that are simply listed as "Miscellanies" offering no clues as to what the actual identity was. However, despite these problems, the true list of which books were Washington's can be deduced with some certainty. Before he stopped placing the initials next to each title, Washington claimed ownership of twenty-nine titles totaling some thirty-eight volumes. By comparing the 1764 list with the list Washington made of the Custis books in 1759 and that of Jacky Custis's books in 1782, eliminating the titles that appear on all three lists as Custis property, about twenty-nine more titles on the 1764 list can be identified as belonging to Washington.

When all of the processes of elimination are complete and the list of which books belonged to Washington are sifted from the rest, what emerges is a telling picture of Washington's views on reading and what books could offer. Washington's books span several genres: agriculture, history, religion, law, military art, science, and periodicals with a few literary works. Of these, agriculture, history, and religion dominate his relatively small collection. All things considered, these preferences make sense given the

station he occupied. At this point, the military was behind him and in 1764, Washington thought that was forever, so he had only the two books that he owned during the Seven Year's War. He was responsible for managing a complex conglomerate of plantations that he was trying his best to make profitable for not only himself, but also for his two stepchildren. He was a member of the Virginia Assembly, and had recently become a vestryman of Truro Parish in 1762.<sup>133</sup> All of these roles required a certain kind of knowledge, and Washington was making a concerted effort to acquire it.

#### Washington Studies Agriculture: The Great Passion of His Life

Of these fields, Washington more fully immersed himself in the study of agriculture than any other subject. Agricultural books were readily available in the colonies; however, as Washington began to grow frustrated with tobacco as his staple crop, he recognized that he needed to expand his knowledge in order to properly maintain his social status, for in this society, a planter's reputation hinged on not simply how much tobacco he raised, but on the crop's quality.<sup>134</sup> Shortly after his marriage Washington wrote to his new London agents, Robert Cary and Company, and ordered whatever was the latest and most up to date agricultural treatise, along with specifically requesting "A new System of Agriculture, or a Speedy way to grow Rich, Langley's Book of Gardening," and the latest edition of "Gibson, upon Horses."<sup>135</sup> Washington followed up this request several weeks later on 12 June 1759 with another letter to Robert Cary and Company which stated that since his previous order he "had been told that there is one

---

<sup>133</sup>Thompson, "In the Hands of a Good Providence," 40.

<sup>134</sup>T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 80.

<sup>135</sup>Invoice to Robert Cary and Company, Williamsburg, 1 May 1759, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

lately publishd & done by various hands & but chiefly collected from the Papers of Mr. Hale.ö Washington asked if his information was correct and the book öis known to be the best pray send it but not if there is any other in higher Esteem.ö<sup>136</sup> For Washington was so convinced that this latest multi-volume work by Hale was the best series of books on agriculture available that he felt the need to write again on 24 October 1760 requesting the series by specific name this time. As it turns out, Washington's information about the series's recent publication was correct. The first edition was published by T. Osborne and J. Shipton in London in 1756. The copies were received at Mount Vernon on 31 March 1761, to the relief of Washington's anticipation. These agricultural books each offered the latest information on planting experiments, which Washington hoped would be useful in his attempt to reverse the devastating effects of nutrient depletion in the soil from the over-cultivation of tobacco.<sup>137</sup>

This exchange of letters between Washington and his agents in London raises an important question: how did Washington learn about which agricultural books were just becoming available? Most likely he learned of new books by word of mouth. Neither his diaries nor his correspondence contain any details about book recommendations. Agriculture was one of the few areas that Washington would have engaged with in public conversation as it was expected of planters. Eighteenth-century Virginia was dominated by an agrarian culture in which tobacco shaped planter society and helped define a planter's place in it. In fact, it was so woven into the fabric of the daily life that it was

---

<sup>136</sup>Washington to Robert Cary and Company, Virginia, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1759 in *ibid*.

<sup>137</sup>Washington to Robert Cary and Company, Virginia, 24 October 1760; Invoice from Robert Cary and Cary and Company 31 March 1761 in *ibid*.

impossible to go anywhere in tidewater Virginia without hearing conversations about it.<sup>138</sup>

Engrossed in this world, Washington for years sought out the newest and most up to date treatises on agriculture, looking for the solution to the problem of enhancing his tobacco crop's quality. The evidence of Washington's unending search for solution to his agricultural questions based on his reading can be found in his diaries. His diaries from this period are rich with detail on his small scale experiments based on his reading, along with considerable information gleaned from his daily inspections of his farms.<sup>139</sup> These diaries reflect the seriousness with which he approached his new full time occupation of farming. Unlike many contemporary diarists who included details of their personal lives in daily entries, Washington wove weather reports, farming statistics, and summaries of his social engagements into a somewhat awkwardly structured narrative of his daily routine. Personal or emotional details are simply absent.

What is also interesting is that both before and after the Revolution when Washington was in residence at Mount Vernon and was fully engaged in the management of his plantations, he wrote his diary entries in interleaved copies of the *Virginia Almanack*.<sup>140</sup> Washington's choice to use an almanac as a diary instead of a blank notebook illustrates how important agriculture was to Washington. While critics have characterized Washington's diaries as uneven or erratic, I would argue instead that these

---

<sup>138</sup> T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 82-3; Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 68-72.

<sup>139</sup> George Washington, *Diaries*, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), I: 211-344.II: 49-172.

<sup>140</sup> Dorothy Twohig, "Introduction," in *George Washington's Diaries, An Abridgement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), xi.

diaries illustrate the degree to which he loved farming his land.<sup>141</sup> Increasing his plantations' efficiency became a lifelong passion for Washington.

As such, the diaries reveal that he recognized the special relationship that existed between his family and his land. For example, Washington went into detail about the sowing of wheat in his entries on August 3, 1771:

Began to Sow Wheat at the Mill, also steepd in Brine with alum put thereto. This day began to Sow the Brined wheat at Muddy hole. Before this the Wheat was not steepd in Brine at this place. Note. The Brine was made by the directions in the Farmer's guide, as the common method practiced by Farmers; but our Wheat was steepd only 24 hours instead of 35 which he recommends.<sup>142</sup>

In contrast, his entry for June 19, 1773 curtly states, "At home all day. About five o'clock poor Patcy Custis Died Suddenly."<sup>143</sup> The difference between the levels of detail in these two entries in the same diary does not indicate that Washington had no emotional reaction to his step-daughter's death. On the contrary, the differences underscore the fact that Washington intended his diaries to be an accurate record of his activities, nothing more. His writing was factual, entered into the blank pages of a practical publication.

Washington instead conveyed the emotions of his loss in a letter to his brother-in-law, Burwell Bassett:

Yesterday the Sweet Innocent Girl Entered into a more happy and peaceful abode than any she has met with in the afflicted Path she hitherto has trod. She rose from dinner about four o'clock in better health and spirits than she appeared to have been in for some time; soon after which she was seized with one of her usual Fits, and expired in it, in less than two minutes without uttering a word, a groan or scarce a sigh. This sudden and unexpected blow, I scarce need add has almost reduced my poor Wife to the lowest ebb of Misery. "ö<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., i.

<sup>142</sup> See Washington's diary entry, 3 August 1771 in John C. Fitzpatrick ed. *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 31.

<sup>143</sup> See Washington's diary entry for 18 June 1773 in *ibid.*, 115.

<sup>144</sup> Washington to Burwell Bassett, 20 June 1773, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

These examples demonstrate that Washington viewed farming as the livelihood around which the rest of his life revolved and to which his family's fortunes were tied. The diaries served a purpose in his farming enterprise. In them there was only room for sentiment, but not sentimentality.

In 1764 Washington obtained another European agricultural book that boasted a radical new approach to soil preparation, Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau's *A Practical Treatise of Husbandry*.<sup>145</sup> Duhamel's book flew in the face of eighteenth century Virginia's tobacco mentality. It argued that in order to preserve the soil's nutrients, farmers should rotate their crops. This advice struck a particular chord with Washington, for as the price of tobacco continued to drop, he was beginning to see that it was going to be necessary to diversify in order to survive. The shift away from tobacco was an enormous risk, and the pages of Washington's copy of Duhamel's *Husbandry* reflect the intensity with which he debated the potential risks versus rewards of this transition in his mind. In part two of the book that addressed experiments with wheat, Washington covered more than fifty pages with extensive marginalia. In this section, Duhamel compared planting wheat in a field the "common way" as opposed to "deep plowing" and worked out the difference between the yields. By utilizing "deep plowing" in which seeds were planted in only two or three rows that were separated from the next group by "alleys" twice their width. The purpose of the alleys was to allow the roots of the plant to expand to collect more nourishment. The benefit of this system was that beds and alleys could be rotated yearly and a field kept in continuous production of wheat.<sup>146</sup> It is almost possible to imagine Washington bent over his desk with the book in front of

---

<sup>145</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 544.

<sup>146</sup> Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau, *A Practical Treatise of Husbandry* (London: 1762), 110.

him, quill in his ink stained fingers, reading this passage and suddenly realizing the keys to the future – rotate crops and diversify. Tobacco alone would not work in the long run, so why not transform Mount Vernon from a plantation into a farm?

The fact that Washington made such extensive, exact marginal notes in this one book raises the obvious question, why? Washington did not have a habit of writing in his books, so why write in this volume, especially so prolifically? The answer lies in the circumstances. As a planter, Washington was tied to the seasons, so no matter how fast he devoured the agricultural books he got his hands on, he could still only experiment in accordance with the seasons. In other words, the nature of the seasons allowed him to study his books slowly and deliberately. Also, here Washington alone was responsible for the production of not just Mount Vernon, but also for the estates belonging to his two stepchildren and those that his wife brought into the marriage. Additionally, since he and his peers believed that their respectability was tied together with their profit margins, he stood to lose much more than money if his plantations were not productive enough. He was keenly aware of the fact that the stakes were high and the conventional wisdom that his fellow Virginians lived by for so long was no longer sufficient. Concentration and exactness were integral to future productivity.

Besides learning the best way to plant wheat, Washington learned other important lessons from Duhamel about soil preparation and record keeping. Above all, the most important lesson Washington internalized from his reading was that in order to be a truly successful farmer, one had to be innovative, for “the common farmer is perhaps the least inquisitive of any man.”<sup>147</sup> Washington learned this lesson well, for he became an agricultural innovator ahead of most of his peers. He was among the first in Virginia to

---

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., iii.

turn away from tobacco in favor of wheat and corn. That decision, although agriculturally prudent, did not immediately pay off as Washington had a difficult time finding a good market for his Virginia grain. This setback did not cause Washington to abandon this diversification experiment in favor of a return to old ways. He instead expanded his operations to include a fishery and gristmill.

All of this ingenuity was necessary, because try as he might in the first years of his marriage, Washington was falling ever more deeply into debt to Robert Cary and Company. Here, Washington is the classic Virginia aristocrat ó land rich and cash poor. His marriage to Martha brought him substantial wealth, an increase in social status, and an obligation to live and entertain lavishly. The newlyweds went on a spending spree, ordering everything from luxury furnishings, table settings, clothing, shoes, hair accessories, fine wines by the cask, and medicines not available in the colonies.<sup>148</sup> After two years of marriage, he owed Cary and Company the princely sum of two thousand pounds sterling.<sup>149</sup> Before he knew it, he had burned through the money he received through his marriage and then some in the course of expanding Mount Vernon.<sup>150</sup> This profligate spending reveals one of Washington's contradictions. In some ways, he was an innovative thinker, more willing than some of his contemporaries to abandon an English mindset; in other ways, he was totally trapped in the social mores of his day, spending funds he did not have in order to keep up appearances as required for someone

---

<sup>148</sup>Washington to Robert Cary and Company, Williamsburg, 1 May 1759 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. This is but one example of Washington's excessive spending that began shortly after his marriage. An examination of most of his orders with Cary and Company reveals that sinking deeper into debt irritated Washington greatly, but did not curtail his shopping sprees. He was too much a man of his social world to abandon the consumption of luxury goods on a grand scale. Instead, like a typical Virginian, he blamed Cary and Company along with British taxation policies for his mounting bills.

<sup>149</sup>In today's money, £2,000 would be equivalent to \$323,043.02.

<sup>150</sup>Washington to Robert Stewart, 27 April 1763, in *ibid*.

of his standing. The mounting problem of debt robbed him of his sleep, yet the orders kept flowing from his desk, even as his tobacco prices kept dropping and his profit margin eroded. He vented some of his frustrations in terse letters to Robert Cary and others, but mostly his frustration manifested itself in the intensity with which he worked to master the science of agriculture in order to revolutionize his plantations into money making enterprises.

When considering the significance of Washington's agricultural studies during this period of his first retirement from military service, it is also important to bear in mind that he was not just a planter. He was also a member of the House of Burgesses and a vestryman of Truro Parish. He was first elected to a seat in the Burgesses before he even left the Virginia Regiment, but now that his military career was over, he was expected to take more of a direct interest in the running of the colony. As with his militia service, Washington's tenure in the House of Burgesses marks another situation in which he found himself surrounded by men who were more qualified than he was. He had fame and fortune, but little else to recommend him for a career in politics. Many of his fellow members were men with at least some college education, and more than a few were educated abroad in British universities and the Inns of Court.<sup>151</sup> Whatever Washington may have felt about his preparedness for office, duty demanded that he served to the best of his ability.

#### Washington's Politically Oriented Reading and Service in the House of Burgesses

---

<sup>151</sup> Charles S. Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 3-9.

Once more, Washington turned to his books to help him. The list that Washington made of his books in 1764 reveals that in addition to his growing agricultural collection, history, law, and religious books also lined his shelves. On both a societal and personal level, it makes perfect sense that books such as these would grace Washington's expanding shelves. Religious books were the first brought into Virginia in the earliest days of settlement. Although provincial Virginians were traditionally not as pious as their Puritan counterparts in New England, religious books were present in most private libraries from the seventeenth century onward. It was deemed essential for planters and gentlemen in Virginia to have a basic working understanding of the law as they were expected to serve as members of the governor's council, Burgesses, and justices of the peace. Furthermore, management of extensive land holdings also required an understanding of the law, specifically with regard to contracts. History, English history in particular, was also a cornerstone of libraries in colonial Virginia. The reason for this is twofold. First, service in government demanded an understanding of the English constitution. Second, there was the matter of pride – British pride. Eighteenth century Virginians were full of patriotic fervor and Washington was no exception.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup>Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1964), 152-3; for a more complete treatment of the preponderance of books by genre in private colonial libraries see Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*, 3 vols. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 579-584. Concentrating on the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Wright argues that Virginians at that time placed a greater premium on utilitarian books than belles lettres. Typically, Virginians preferred books on religion, law, and books on statecraft. Wright also highlights that Virginians relied on older books that had already been tested by time. As the eighteenth-century dawned and the elite planters were established on profitable estates with inherited wealth, they were able to devote more of their time and attention to education and refining their reading tastes. The result was a much greater emphasis in the eighteenth-century on the classics, languages, history, the study of English common law, natural philosophy and belles lettres. Davis picks up on Wright's argument and examines the contents of private libraries and the developing trends in education in the South much more thoroughly. The larger private libraries belonged to such men as William Fitzhugh, Richard Lee II, and Richard Wormley II, each of whom owned over three hundred volumes. The largest library in Virginia belonged to William Byrd II of Westover who amassed a library of over three thousand volumes.

With all of this in mind, Washington's library in 1764 seems to be on par with that of his peers in terms of the types of utilitarian books he owned. However, there is a distinction albeit a slight one. Unlike his wife's first husband, Daniel Parke Custis, Thomas Jefferson, and Landon Carter who were all wealthy enough to acquire large collections and assembled very broad based ones, Washington's library was quite limited in scope. There was almost no philosophy, and little in the way of belles lettres; there were also only a couple of travel narratives and a few periodicals. In this way, Washington's narrowly based collection places him more in line with his seventeenth-century forbearers who were focused on forging a living in a young colony and thus had no time for leisure reading than with his Enlightenment contemporaries who had reaped the benefit of their forefathers' efforts and embraced classical education in the more refined eighteenth-century.

The colonists who came to Virginia in the first migratory waves from England almost certainly brought no literature or other books for pleasure with them as freight costs were high and there was little room for excess baggage on board ships. Instead, the evidence suggests that they brought Bibles and other books that could have a practical application. Moreover, the high cost of imports precluded many colonists from being able to purchase books from England. Furthermore, since Virginia did not have a permanent printing press until 1730, there was no alternative to imports.<sup>153</sup> Besides the high cost of books, the early colonists were focused on establishing themselves and making the colony profitable. They therefore had little time to devote to reading for personal gratification. In this sense, Washington's preference for practical books

---

<sup>153</sup>Wright, *First Gentlemen of Virginia*, 117; Douglas C. McMurtrie, *The Beginnings of the Printing Press in Virginia* (Lexington, VA: 1935), 7-9.

parallels decisions of an earlier generation when placed in context with his fellow elite planters.

Washington's religious books are significant not because they yield any insight into his opinions on God and everlasting life; they do not. Rather, they are significant because they illustrate one way that Washington approached the issues that confronted the House of Burgesses during his years as a member. The religious works Washington acquired during this period contained valuable information relevant to the political issues swirling around both church and state. These choices of reading material make greater sense when placed in context with his initial foray into the House of Burgesses. All Washington had to rely on in the House of Burgesses was his military experience. Nothing else in his background prepared him for playing a role in politics. As a result, he was mostly a backbencher, saying little to nothing to the assembly. When he did try to speak publically, it went badly. During the first session he attended shortly after his marriage in 1759, his colleagues voted on a resolution thanking "the late Colonel of the first Virginia Regiment, for his faithful services to his Majesty, and his Colony, and for his brave and steady Behaviour." Washington rose, choked, panic flushed over his usually pale cheeks, and saying nothing, quickly bowed and sat back down.<sup>154</sup>

Washington did not have this problem when he was in command of troops, so what was different about the House of Burgesses? He had a talent and a naturally authoritative air for leading soldiers; he had no such talent for political performances. Those few fleeting

---

<sup>154</sup>Resolution of the House of Burgesses, February 26, 1759, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*; Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience*, 227; John Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 51.

moments of humiliation in front of his fellow Burgesses must have been agony for a man so accustomed to maintaining perfect self-control.

As was the case with everything else he did, Washington was driven to succeed in politics. His sense of duty and his social status demanded it.<sup>155</sup> Not wanting to repeat his humiliation, Washington slowly worked his way up through the organizational structure of the House of Burgesses, involving himself in matters he understood, studying for the rest, all the while preparing to take on a more overt leadership role. It is no surprise that the first issues he expressed interest in were the preservation of the Virginia regiment and the maintenance of the colony's defenses. In his first session, Washington lent his support for local bills respecting Frederick County and sat on several committees charged with responding to the accusations and petitions that came in regarding provincial soldiers and officers. He made sure to be available for his fellow Burgesses to consult on the legislation that would provide for the continuation of the Virginia Regiment as well as additional defensive measures for the colony. During the Assembly session of 1761, Washington was unmistakably the Virginia Regiment's most ardent proponent. His correspondence with Captain Robert Stewart reveals the degree of Washington's involvement as the lobbyist in chief for the regiment that he once commanded. Stewart prepared a comprehensive analysis on the state of the regiment at Washington's request after they consulted together on March 12, and by March 27 Washington wrote to Stewart to inform him that he expected the appropriations bill to pass the House. By the beginning of April, the legislature authorized recruiting up to the level that Washington

---

<sup>155</sup> For a discussion of the expectation for members of Virginia's social and economic elite to serve in politics see, Evans, *A "Topping People,"* 23-89.

and Stewart wanted, and made provisions for the Virginia Regiment to be supplied and paid up to December 1, 1761 in the event that a war broke out with the Cherokee.<sup>156</sup>

Washington also worked assiduously for his own constituents during this session as he was soon to be facing reelection. There was a special session convened in November 1761 for the purpose of further provisioning the Regiment in case the Cherokee war persisted. Here, he was given the opportunity to chair a committee that examined the requests made on behalf of disabled veterans. He also introduced a bill to incorporate a new town, Strasburg, in the Shenandoah Valley. During the nine day meeting from March to April 1762, he participated in the vote to disband the old Regiment and establish a new one. Also during this brief session, Washington again sat on committees having to do with military affairs, chairing one of them.<sup>157</sup> Washington's activities during his first four years as a Burgess were of the minor variety; what they indicate is that Washington was doing his best to gain legislative experience while minimizing the opportunity of embarrassing himself in front of the full Assembly. As the former commander of the Virginia Regiment with years of combat experience, he could rest assured that his colleagues considered him an expert on the military. This gave him a certain degree of comfort as he learned the ropes as to how the House of Burgesses operated. Over the course of his thirteen years of service in the Burgesses, Washington

---

<sup>156</sup>Captain Robert Stewart to Washington, 12 March 1761 (two letters), in *Letters to Washington, (1752-1775)*, 3:203, 204-10. The first letter records Washington's request for information from Stewart on the status of the Virginia Regiment, the second letter contains that information. Stewart's letter on 6 April mentions the information that Washington sent him on 27 March regarding the expectation that the bill would pass. See also Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 62-3. Longmore points out that these letters above contradict Douglas Southall Freeman's argument that at this point, Washington was apathetic in military matters. Interestingly, Freeman makes no mention of these letters in his discussion of the 1761 legislative sessions, which is unusual as they would have been available to him at the time he was completing his biography.

<sup>157</sup>*Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, 13 vols. ed. John Pendleton Kennedy and H. R. McIlwaine, (Richmond: The Colonial Press, 1905-15), 1761-1765, 45, 92, 94, 97, 100-1, 111, 117, 140.

gradually became more influential. It must be kept in mind that this ascendancy was indeed gradual, as no matter how much experience Washington gained, he never was comfortable with political power. This is not to suggest that he was apathetic, rather it was the fact that no amount of legislative experience could make up for the fact that he was not university trained, nor was he a member of the bar. Since the majority of his colleagues did have at least one of these qualifications, the ever thin-skinned Washington was constantly in fear of embarrassment. Still, serve he must, so he would do the best he could. Knowing that increasing his participation in the proceedings of the House would require him to branch out into other issues beyond just that of his constituents and the militia, Washington did as he had always done, turned to reading for the answers.

Like all nearly all Virginians, Washington was raised with a healthy respect for his British heritage and history. Anyone who read *The Oceana of James Harrington, and His Other Works* would have been well aware of the fact that history was useful; knowledge of history was a prerequisite for a politician. The book is an exposition on an ideal constitution, written during the Interregnum. Harrington argues for an agrarian state where power is vested in landholders for limited amounts of time. While the book is utopian, Harrington makes a definite argument that political leaders need to be educated both in the past and on current events so that they may lead with understanding.<sup>158</sup> If Washington was not exposed to much history in the little formal schooling he did have, he would certainly have been introduced to it by his English educated half-brothers, Austin and Lawrence, his mentor William Fairfax, or any number of Virginians in his social circle. They would have encouraged Washington to read history, not simply listen to the conversations of those around him at the dinner table for books were the high road

---

<sup>158</sup>John Toland, ed. *The Oceana of James Harrington and His Other Works* (London, 1700), 183.

to knowledge. John Adams asked in his diary in 1761, "How can I judge how can any man judge, unless his mind had been opened and enlarged by reading."<sup>159</sup> This rhetorical question by an aspiring Massachusetts lawyer would have had just as much of a resonance in Virginia. English history permeated colonial Virginia life, never more than during this period after the Seven Years War and before the Stamp Act Crisis when royalism reached fever pitch up and down the eastern seaboard.

In the short term, Washington attempted to broaden his historical knowledge in order to better prepare him for the House of Burgesses through his purchase of Tobias Smollett's *History of England*.<sup>160</sup> This was a multivolume work, which was difficult to acquire in Virginia even in Williamsburg, which did not boast the number of booksellers and print shops that could be found in Philadelphia and Boston at the same time. Washington ordered the full series along with the *Annual Register* from Robert Cary and Company in 1762 and received them in 1763, shortly before he began compiling his list of books at Mount Vernon in 1764.<sup>161</sup>

This newest rendition of English history reflected the most up to date research at that time. David Hume began the series that chronicled English history since the Norman Conquest, but died before he completed the work. Although Hume's volumes were published in many editions, it was heavily criticized in England. Hume's generous treatment of the English monarchy would also become fodder for America's future

---

<sup>159</sup>John Adams, Diary, 1 August 1761, in *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856), II: 131.

<sup>160</sup>Although Washington was initially elected to the House of Burgesses before his resignation from the Virginia Regiment and his marriage to Martha Custis, he was not a very active member because his military duties mostly kept him away from Williamsburg during his final campaign in the Seven Years War. It was only after his resignation and marriage that he began attending sessions with greater frequency. His increased presence would no doubt have required him to develop a greater knowledge of the political issues of the day grounded in historical context.

<sup>161</sup>See the order from GW to Robert Cary and Co, 15 November 1762 and the invoice of goods shipped from Cary on 13 April 1763 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

revolutionaries. Reflecting back on the trend in historical reading during the 1760s, John Adams explained to Thomas Jefferson his dislike of Hume's elegant Liesö which öhad nearly laughed into contempt Rapin Sydney and even Lock[e].ö<sup>162</sup> Such criticism aside, it rendered other editions of English history obsolete, so some enterprising publishers in London commissioned Tobias Smollett to pick up where Hume left off. Smollett's volumes have a far less monarchical overtone, so much so that critics and historians often have a hard time deciding what Smollett's political leanings actually were.<sup>163</sup> As soon as they were published in London, they were immensely popular and soon they were being read on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>164</sup>

Smollett probably intended to obfuscate whether he was a Whig or a Tory, but there was no disguising his scathing critique of Britain's entry into the Seven Years War, as well as its prosecution by English officials. It is a frustrating fact that Washington left no record of his reaction to Smollett's treatment of the war in North America for Smollett paints a brief and unflattering picture of him as the inexperienced young man who started the whole thing. Washington is mentioned by name only for his haphazard construction of Fort Necessity and his subsequent surrender of it, along with the Jumonville massacre:

Colonel Washington was detached from Virginia with four hundred men, and occupied a post on the banks of the river Ohio, where he threw up some works, and erected a kind of occasional fort, in hope of being able to defend himself in that situation, until he should be joined by a reinforcement of New York, which however did not arrive. While he remained in this situation, De Viller, a French commander, at the head of nine hundred men, being on his march to dislodge Washington, detached one Jamonville, an inferior officer, with a small party, and a formal summons to Washington, requiring him to quit the fort, which he

---

<sup>162</sup> John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 December and 15 July 1813, in *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988) II: 410, 357.

<sup>163</sup> Fabel, öThe Patriotic Briton: Tobias Smollett and English Politics, 1756-1771,ö 100.

<sup>164</sup> H. Trevor Colburn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 205, 208, 210, 211, 216, 222, 229.

pretended was built on ground belonging to the French, or their allies. So little regard was paid to this intimation, that the English fell on this party, and, as the French affirm, without the least provocation, either slew or took the whole detachment. De Viller, incensed at these unprovoked hostilities, marched up to the attack, which Washington for some time sustained under manifold disadvantages. At length, however, he surrendered the fort upon capitulation<sup>165</sup>

Smollett also takes Braddock to task for his unbending arrogance and poor judgment that directly led to the catastrophic loss that would prove to be Great Britain's greatest defeat in the eighteenth century. It is worth mentioning that in his description of Braddock's defeat, Washington is not mentioned once as being the one officer left standing that had enough sense to organize the retreat in such a way as to prevent a total rout:

He [Braddock] marched on with so much expedition, that he seldom took any time to reconnoiter the woods or thickets that he was to pass through; as if the nearer he approached the enemy, the farther he was removed from danger. On the eighth of July he encamped within ten miles of Fort Duquesne; and though colonel Dunbar was then near forty miles behind him, and his officers, particularly Sir Peter Halket, earnestly entreated him to proceed with caution, and to employ the friendly Indians that were with him, by way of advanced guard, in case of ambuscades; yet he resumed his march the next day, without so much as endeavoring to get any intelligence of the situation or disposition of the enemy, or even sending out any scouts to visit the woods and thickets then on both sides of him, as well as in his front. With this carelessness he was advancing, when, about noon, he was saluted with a general fire upon his front, and all along his left flank the panic and confusion became general. As to Braddock himself, he discovered at once the greatest intrepidity, and the highest imprudence; for, instead of ordering a retreat till he could scour the thickets and bushes from whence the fire came, with grape shot from the ten pieces of cannon he had with him, or ordering flanking parties of his Indians to advance against the enemy, he obstinately continued upon the spot where he was. At last the general, whose obstinancy seemed to increase with the danger, after having five horses shot from under him, received himself a musket shot through the right arm and lungs, of which he died four days after, having been carried off the field by lieutenant colonel Gage, and another of his officers [Washington].<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> Tobias George Smollett, *A Continuation of the History of England* 11 vols. (London: 1758-59), I: 228.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-259.

Knowing what we do of Washington's personality, it is easy to imagine him seething privately in his chair as he was confronted with yet another reminder of how little the British valued his service to King and Empire. These, the earlier volumes of Smollett's contribution to the series, are what gave Washington and his contemporaries a healthy lesson in British patriotism of the parliamentary variety. These lessons would have been eminently useful to the inexperienced Burgess trying his best to learn the ropes of colonial government that was modeled on the English system.<sup>167</sup>

In order for Washington to develop his understanding of both colonial and British government more fully, he had to also acquire a working knowledge of the law. This was typical for eighteenth-century gentleman, for in that day English history was infused with a healthy veneration for the common law. The famous English common lawyer, Sir Edward Coke, made a name for himself as well as an indelible mark on British legal tradition with his argument that English law was purely English, and therefore the best in the world. This sentiment was similarly echoed by Fortescue who asserted that English laws were the best in the world because they were the most ancient and was never altered by the Romans or the Normans.<sup>168</sup> Now this explanation is not to suggest that Washington studied Coke in the manner that aspiring law students did in preparation for examination before the bar; on the contrary, it is simply intended to highlight the extreme degree to which history and law were intertwined in the minds of eighteenth century Britons.

In Washington's specific case, gaining an understanding of how the legal system operated on a day-to-day basis was crucial for he was not only a large landowner and

---

<sup>168</sup>J.G.A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 31, 33.

Burgess, but he was also a justice of the peace. To this end, prior to making the 1764 list Washington had obtained copies of Thomas Pearce's *The Justice of the Peace's Pocket Companion; or the Office and Duty of a Justice Epitomised*, and Henry Crouch's *A Compleat View of the British Customs*.<sup>169</sup> Sometime later during this period Washington obtained William Fairfax's copies of George Webb's *Virginia Justice* and Thomas Goodinge's *Law Against Bankrupts*. Washington also procured George Meriton's *The Landlord's Law* and the two volume *Attorney's Pocket Book*.<sup>170</sup> These are all practical legal guidebooks written for non-lawyers who needed a working knowledge of the law to facilitate their regular operations as landowners, landlords, and justices of the peace. These books addressed how to write deeds and wills and how to probate estates and conduct real estate transactions. This was the level of legal knowledge that Washington required, nothing more.

While the history and law books provided Washington with a rich appreciation for the British tradition he was a part of and how the mechanisms of government operated, they still would not have provided him with all of the tools he would need to fulfill his duties as a public servant. This gap that those books leave turns the analysis to the most tantalizing genre in Washington's collection: the religious works. It is true that the basis of Washington's religious collection was inherited from his parents as discussed earlier.

---

<sup>169</sup> A List of Books at Mount Vernon, 1764 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. See also the Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 527-531. After Washington's death, Washington's law books passed to his nephew, Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington. Although the copies of *The Landlord's Law* and the *Attorney's Pocket Book* do not bear Washington's autograph, Bushrod and Lawrence Washington certified that they did in fact belong to their uncle. Moreover, a comparison of Washington's 1764 list to the one he made of the Custis books in 1759 indicates that he obtained his copies of Pearce's and Meriton's books from the Custis estate. It is interesting to consider that Washington declined to keep the extensive Custis library in its entirety for himself; rather he selected two volumes that had immediate, practical use. It is possible that he began referring to them when he was entangled in the lengthy probate of Daniel Parke Custis's estate and therefore felt entitled to use them as opposed to the rest that he set aside for Jacky Custis's future education.

However, in the period following his marriage, Washington made several purchases of religious books that require a broader explanation in context.

It is possible to assert that Washington acquired these specific works for a non-spiritual purpose. It was during this period in which he was both a Burgess and an active vestryman in two parishes that Virginia's government was faced with profound issues in the church that had direct ramifications on the state.

After George Whitefield's momentous tour through the colonies that began in 1739, the ruling elite in Virginia unhappily found their world profoundly altered by the Great Awakening. Whitefield's emotional preaching style that reached out to all regardless of socio-economic status ushered in a wave of itinerant preachers that trooped through the colony, luring parishioners away from the Established Church. One such itinerant was Samuel Davies, an evangelical Presbyterian who came to Hanover, Virginia in 1748 and led the fight to preach freely. Davies envisioned an alternative parish system of Presbyterian churches that would have legal recognition in the colony. He tried to comply with the regulations of the Virginia establishment by obtaining licenses to preach at the various meeting houses in Hanover County. He reasoned that if people were free to choose their own doctors, they should be equally able to choose a physician for their souls. By trying to work within the established laws of the colony, Davies posed a new and arguably more dangerous challenge to both the Virginia elite and the Anglican clergy because he attempted to use the law to undermine the Established Church. Citing the freedom guaranteed by the 1689 Act of Toleration in England, Davies argued that this provided the grounds for evangelical rights in Virginia. This forced the ruling elite to confront a legal protest rather than a simple act of lawlessness by a traveling preacher.

Davies's activism in Virginia coincided with another crack in the foundation of the establishment that was growing at the same time. Some of the vestrymen (who were also members of the ruling elite) were beginning to clash with their priests. For years the clergy received their salaries in tobacco, but in 1758, the House of Burgesses passed the Two Penny Act which stipulated that cash payments replace tobacco at the rate of two cents per pound, well below the current market price of tobacco. Some of the clergy protested to the Privy Council in London, which then invalidated the Two Penny Act, after which several parsons filed suit to recoup back pay. The colonial officials retained a young lawyer, Patrick Henry, who railed against the Privy Council's interference in colonial affairs. In building his case against the clergy, Henry argued that in invalidating a colonial statute the King degenerated into a tyrant. As far as Henry was concerned the willingness of the King and his Privy Council to interfere in this case signaled their willingness to use the Church as a political weapon to deprive the colonists of their liberties.<sup>171</sup>

In the wake of Davies's challenge and the fallout from the Two Penny Act the Anglican clergy in Virginia grew vindictive toward the growing number of dissenters that poured into the colony in the 1760s. Although the Established Church grudgingly reconciled themselves to the permanence of Presbyterians, the encroachment of the Baptists was a different matter. Unlike the Presbyterians, the Baptists felt no need to comply with Virginia's licensing laws. Instead, the Baptists flourished because of the public's perception that they were being oppressed by an unfeeling establishment. The Baptist itinerants' reputation rose dramatically, even to the extent of having mystical

---

<sup>171</sup>Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 50-51.

powers. Over time they drew more congregants away from the Anglican parish churches. The colonial authorities, egged on by the disgruntled Anglican clerics physically abused and arrested the Baptist preachers at every opportunity from the 1760s and the 1770s.<sup>172</sup>

This was disconcerting to the colony's elite on several levels. First, Virginia law stipulated that attendance at the Established Church was mandatory, so the persistence of these competing denominations over a period of more than two decades constituted a challenge to colonial authority. The fact that the church was tied to the state gave the colonial elite another means of governing the people for the vestries ensured among other things that the obligatory tithes were collected and compulsory attendance was enforced. Therefore as lower class congregants began to drift away from the establishment in favor of the more egalitarian style of worship offered by the itinerant competitors, the elite's degree of control seemed to be eroding. Second, although the Archbishop of Canterbury never really had a firm grasp of the colonial churches, there was always the possibility that if church attendance continued to wane, while non-conformity continued to rise, the church officials in England might become interested in asserting more direct control, thus revoking a degree of colonial autonomy that had been enjoyed for more than a century and a half. After all, the King and his councilors already demonstrated their willingness to reach all the way down into colonial pews with their response to the Two Penny Act.<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>173</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, 148-150. In his analysis of the long term impact of the Great Awakening on Virginia, Isaac argues that the reactions of the ruling elite were more concerned with the social ramifications rather than the religious. This is a plausible argument given that Virginians, although devout Christians for the most part, are not associated with the same degree of piety that characterized New England life, where the Great Awakening had a profound effect.

This threat of interference seemed to appear more and more likely by the late 1760s when rumors began to circulate through Virginia that the Church of England was considering the appointment of a bishop to take control over colonial churches. This bishop controversy would be incorporated among the list of colonial grievances against the increasing tyranny of British rule. This seems like the obvious conclusion in light of the fact that the bishop threat was couched among the string of parliamentary measures aimed at tightening British authority over America. However, the idea of a bishop was not universally despised as just another example of tyranny. Some high church Anglicans welcomed the idea of more centralized control. In 1771 a group of Anglican ministers passed a resolution requesting a bishop from Canterbury. When the issue was first brought before the Burgesses, it highlighted deep divisions among the members. Some were convinced that the appointment of a bishop to oversee the colonial dioceses would simply be the beginning of the slippery slope that would bring a final end to autonomous rule in all matters, not just the spiritual. Still, despite the persuasiveness of that argument, there were others who were just as devoted to the Church of England as the clergy who made the request and saw that the appointment of a bishop could actually help revitalize the suffering establishment and relieve some of the duties of the vestries.<sup>174</sup>

Given the divisiveness of these religious issues facing the House of Burgesses while Washington was a member, his purchase of certain religious books during this period makes more sense. The fact that he added to his religious collection by ordering Gilbert Burnet's *Exposition of the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England* from Robert Cary and Company in 1766 had less to do with matters of faith than matters of

---

<sup>174</sup>Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 63-64; Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 198-204.

politics. While it is infused with theology, Burnet's *Exposition* provides a breakdown of how the Anglican Church's hierarchy operated, specifically how ecclesiastical power was delegated from the Crown to the bishops who exercised authority over the parishes. This was a book about church law, an understanding of which was to be crucial in the days ahead.<sup>175</sup> The timing of this purchase coincides with the growing numbers of dissenters in Virginia and the lead up to the bishop controversy. Washington was clearly trying to enhance his understanding of the scope of the Church of England's authority in both spiritual and temporal matters, or more specifically, how a bishop might be employed to exercise that power on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Privy Council, and the King. Such a foundational knowledge would have been vital to developing an understanding of exactly what the implications were for Virginia's government if a bishop was in fact appointed.

Washington also made use of the Custis library to assist him in this particular situation. Daniel Parke Custis owned a copy of *The Trial of the Seven Bishops* which Washington kept from the collection and did not turn over to Jacky Custis. This book chronicled the trial of Bishops Sancroft, Lake, White, Turner, Ken, Lloyd, and Trelawny who were committed to the Tower of London in June 1688 by James II because they opposed his Declaration of Indulgence that allowed a certain degree of religious toleration, primarily so Catholics could worship openly. James's government put pressure on the jury for a conviction, but they were acquitted anyway.<sup>176</sup> This volume encapsulated many of the issues that were facing Virginians in this the aftermath of the Great Awakening and the lead up to the American Revolution. Seven bishops of the

---

<sup>175</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection*, 39; see also the invoice of goods sent by Robert Cary and Company, March 1766, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>176</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection*, 501.

Church of England were put on trial for exceeding the limits of their authority by opposing a royal decree for religious toleration. Arrest and trial of these bishops demonstrated not only the degree to which politics and the church were intertwined, but also the willingness of kings to use the legal system to manipulate the church and vice versa to ensure their royal will was done. This case also showed the willingness of bishops to politicize their pulpits in order to speak out on the laws. In this case, it was the issue of religious toleration. There could not have been a better English resource for Washington to draw on.

Besides English resources, Washington also needed to understand how his fellow Virginians felt about these issues plaguing the religious and political establishments of his colony. To this end in 1764 he also purchased in Williamsburg copies of Peyton Randolph's "Letter to the Bishop of London," and Richard Bland's "Letter to the Clergy" that laid out the case against the clergy who brought suit for back pay in the wake of the Privy Council's handling of the Two Penny Act. Furthermore, in addition to these, Washington also purchased additional pamphlets on the bishop controversy written by John Camm, who was very active in opposing the Two Penny Act in 1758 (and was instrumental in getting the Privy Council to strike down the statute), and Landon Carter's angry response entitled, "The Rector Detected."<sup>177</sup> It is worth noting that in their

---

<sup>177</sup>See Washington's ledger for April 16, 1764, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. Washington had these pamphlets bound into the volume, "Poems on Several Occasions." Additional copies were also bound into a separate volume, "Poems, &c." Both of these are now in the Washington collection at the Boston Athenaeum. See also Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 73. Longmore argues that the controversy surrounding the Two Penny Act marked the beginning of Washington's active conversion to the emerging Patriot cause as it was taking place at the same time that Washington was sinking further into debt and feeling increasingly hamstrung in his dealings with Robert Cary and Company. According to Longmore, Washington saw his personal financial struggles in parallel vein to the emerging colonial struggle against the increasingly heavy handed British rule. I disagree with Longmore on this point, arguing again that Washington's intellectual break with Britain had begun several years earlier in the Seven Years' War.

respective pamphlets, Carter and Bland both claimed that royal instructions could only be issued to the governor of the colony as the only royally appointed official. As the legislators were elected by their fellow colonists, they did not fall under the direct jurisdiction of the King and his Privy Council. Moreover, they pressed the case that it was unconstitutional for the Crown to require the Assembly to follow instructions that would in fact be harmful to the Colony. These arguments would certainly have resonated with Washington who also had previously chafed under the control of stubborn British officials who dictated high-handed strategy without deferring to the colonial leaders who had sufficient experience to act independently and with authority.<sup>178</sup>

In addition to the internal threats from itinerant preachers and disgruntled parish priests and the annoyance of external interference from the Privy Council over the Two-Penny Act, there were other substantial issues facing Washington and his fellow Burgesses in the late 1760s and early 1770s. In April 1764, shortly before Washington delivered his report of his chairmanship of the commission charged with certifying for payment the accounts of the militia forces that had fought under Pontiac's warriors, Parliament adopted the Currency Act of 1764. It was a comprehensive policy aimed at imposing order on the colonies which among other things included a prohibition of the issuance of paper bills as legal tender currency. This was followed in short succession by the Stamp Act in March 1765. In the time between the announcements of these new fiscal policies, the Burgesses in anticipating the Stamp Act made sure to claim that they had sole jurisdiction in matters of internal polity and taxation. Here, Washington was actively taking part in the development of the revolutionary ideology that Americans had the right to political self-determination.

---

<sup>178</sup>Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, 73.

### Washington Becomes a Revolutionary

Washington's personal political views at this stage were evolving steadily in the direction of becoming a revolutionary, although he did not yet share in the militancy of his friend and neighbor George Mason. Washington was outraged over the Stamp Act, but remained convinced that it would be repealed in the wake of continued colonial protests. He was right. By September 1765, however, he was seeing more of a direct correlation between his personal indebtedness and increasingly strained relationship with Robert Cary and Company and the increasing level of hostility between mother country and colonies. In an extraordinary letter to Cary, Washington argued that in light of the fact that Cary was responsible for keeping prices low for his tobacco in order to ensure he would remain in debt, Washington was considering alternative means of increasing his personal independence. He was also considering different ways for the colonies to obtain greater self-determination.<sup>179</sup> Interestingly, it was at this point when Washington finally shifted away from growing tobacco. He began aggressively pursuing alternative cash crops and money making ventures on a significantly larger scale than before on his plantations, and he began exploring other markets, so his studies on agriculture took on a renewed importance. He was determined to rid himself of debt. Washington also became more vocal in his opposition to the Stamp Act, the Currency Act, and the Sugar Act. He called the Stamp Act an "unconstitutional method of Taxation [.] and a direful attack upon their Liberties" imposed by the Parliament of Great Britain. He would later call it an "Act of Oppression."<sup>180</sup> Washington also predicted that the Stamp Act itself would cause colonial judicial proceedings to grind to a halt because even if the

---

<sup>179</sup> Washington to Robert Cary and Company, 20 September 1765, in *The Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols. ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C: 1931-9), 2:427-31.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. See also Washington's letter to Francis Dandridge, 20 September 1765 in *ibid.*, 425-6.

colonists were willing to pay the tax, they lacked the hard currency by which to do so thanks to the Currency Act. The closing of the courts would therefore prevent debts from being collected on behalf of British creditors. Thus the British merchants would feel the pain of the Stamp Act even more than the colonists would.<sup>181</sup>

Additionally, Washington became one of the most outspoken advocates for adopting a non-importation agreement in the wake of Parliament's passage of the Townsend Acts. On the whole, he thought that repeated petitions to the Parliament and even the King were useless. This opinion was likely based on his own futile pursuit of a royal commission years earlier. Instead, he was in favor of increasing colonial opposition through economic coercion. Washington and George Mason worked together to delineate the details of how a non-importation association could work for Virginia. Washington's advocacy and his proposal of the association reflected his growing standing within the House of Burgesses. He was now a regular dinner guest of the governor, Speaker of the House, and other members of the council. He was also appointed to more high profile, powerful committees including Propositions and Grievances, Privileges and Elections, and the newly constituted standing Committee for Religion.<sup>182</sup>

Washington's appointment to the Committee for Religion likely had little to do with his faith and more to do with his ability to solve problems. The committee was created to address the still increasing numbers of dissenters who were contributing to the declining influence of the Established Church, as well as address charges of corruption and immorality against the Anglican clergy, the Robinson scandal, and the perceived

---

<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

<sup>182</sup>*Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1766-1769*: 211, 228.

corruption in the sensationalized Chiswell murder case. The committee responded by increasing their regulation of the Established Church by enhancing their oversight of the parish vestries. It composed a plan to block renewed calls for an Anglican episcopate in order to keep the church under colonial control. The committee further sought finally to diffuse the long simmering tensions over dissenters by extending religious toleration to the Baptists. In his work on this committee, Washington undoubtedly relied on his religious reading and his belief in the public virtues of organized religion.<sup>183</sup>

Out of this evidence of Washington's increasingly public political activity in opposition to Great Britain, the 1765 letters to Cary and Dandridge along with his co-authorship of the non-importation measures reveal a coming together of Washington's studies with his personal experience to form his political philosophy. His reading of British history and law led him to the conclusion that Parliament had no authority outside of Great Britain. His frustrating experience with the degree of increasing indebtedness to Robert Cary and Company within the constraints of the stilted tobacco markets combined with his agricultural reading convinced him that it was both possible and necessary to turn away from tobacco in favor of a new system of industries and markets that together would help him become more self-sufficient. If he could do it, than the rest of the colonists could too. His increasing militancy earned the respect of his peers, so much so that by 1774 he was one of Virginia's delegates to the Continental Congress and by 1775

---

<sup>183</sup>For the significance of the Chiswell murder case and the Robinson scandal see Jack P. Greene, "Virtus et Libertas: Political Culture, Social Change, and the Origins of the American Revolution in Virginia, 1763-1776" in *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution* ed. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 55-108. For an analysis of the continued rise of dissenters see Richard Beeman and Rhys Isaac, "Cultural Conflict and Social Change in the Revolutionary South: Lunenburg County, Virginia," in *Journal of Southern History*, 46 (1980), 525-50; Rhys Isaac, "Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1774-1776," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 31(1974), 348-65; and Rhys Isaac, "Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia in the Era of the Great Awakening and the Parsons Cause," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 30 (1973), 3-36.

he would be given command of the newly formed Continental Army forming in Cambridge.

Practical reading in conjunction with personal experience led Washington to logical conclusions to the real problems facing his world. From boyhood, he applied himself to the study of subjects that would help advance him up through Virginia's social ranks. Once his father died, Washington pursued his studies as never before. He combined reading with a sustained effort to learn from his experiences, both positive and negative. This method is how he achieved success in building the Virginia Regiment, and it would also be the method he would use in the future to build the Continental Army and serve as the nation's first President. During this Virginia phase of his life, Washington's rise was surprising given where he began. Born the third son of a middling planter in 1732, by 1774 he achieved wealth, property, military fame, political influence, and moved within the uppermost circles of Virginia society. He may not have been a bibliophile in the same vein as Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams, purchasing and treasuring as many books as they could acquire, but Washington's actions indicate that he understood that much of his success was due to the useful knowledge he acquired through deliberate reading. This, combined with his natural maturation over time, provided the necessary confidence that enabled him to become the leader of a resistance movement. It was this conjoining of practical knowledge with life experience that would prove to be the key to Washington's success throughout the rest of his public life.

### Chapter 3 6 Revolutionary Reading

As spring was giving way to another sultry summer in Philadelphia in 1775, the city was buzzing with activity and rumors were swirling around the Second Continental Congress that was in session. All the talk was about what the American response would be to the latest developments in the ever increasing hostility between Great Britain and the colonies. Shortly before the Congress convened on May 10, the rapidly increasing tensions centered upon the British occupation of Boston finally sparked a war. In the early morning hours of April 19, the British sent troops from their base in Boston to seize the stores of arms and ammunition in nearby Concord along with two of the leaders of the Sons of Liberty, Samuel Adams and John Hancock. The British commander General Thomas Gage did not yet know that his operation had already been compromised even before the first troops embarked on their short trip across the Charles River. The Sons of Liberty had an effective intelligence network that knew many of the details of the British orders in advance. They used express riders, most notably, Paul Revere, to spread the word throughout the area between Boston and Concord that the British were on the move. In response to the warnings, local militias mustered in the pre-dawn hours and waited. The British had to pass through Lexington first, and it was there that they came face to face with the armed minutemen. At some point during the short, tense exchange, the shot heard 'round the world<sup>184</sup> was fired and the war that seemed to be looming over the colonies for years had finally begun. After a second deadly encounter, the British Army retreated to Boston, the swelling militia units began a hasty occupation of the heights overlooking the city.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup>The best description of the events surrounding the battles of Lexington and Concord is David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Fischer re-traced the

When this explosive news reached the delegates who were about to travel to Philadelphia, reactions were mixed. For his part, George Washington was apprehensive of what lay ahead. He foresaw that the killing of British soldiers would bring the full force of imperial retribution down on the colonies. Yet despite the sense of foreboding, he felt the familiar sensation of duty calling. He wrote to George William Fairfax, "Unhappy it is though to reflect, that a Brother's Sword has been sheathed in a Brother's breast, and that, the once happy and peaceful plains of America are either to be drenched with Blood, or Inhabited by Slaves. Sad alternative! But can a virtuous Man hesitate in his choice?"<sup>185</sup> However uneasy Washington was about what lay ahead in the colonies' future, his fellow Virginians had been preparing for war. Over the previous months, county militias began to organize, calling themselves "independent companies." Washington seemed like the obvious choice to lead them, and by March, five of them had formally requested him to take command. Also in March, the Virginia Convention voted to put the colony on a military footing. From this point forward, Washington was rapidly becoming one of the foremost leaders of the colonial resistance movement. This was a fact that he recognized and accepted, if not relished. Upon arriving in Philadelphia as a member of Virginia's delegation to the Continental Congress, Washington made a habit of attending the sessions in uniform as a physical demonstration of his willingness to serve if called upon.<sup>186</sup>

---

steps of both the British and American key players in the days leading up to the battles and the conduct of the battles themselves to such a painstaking degree that the old familiar mythologies are set aside leaving behind an unbiased depiction of the outbreak of the war.

<sup>185</sup>Washington to George William Fairfax, 31 May 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>186</sup>Washington's motive for wearing his uniform to the daily congressional sessions has been a matter of heated debate among historians. Those sympathetic to Washington highlight these examples of his extreme patriotism; while those with a more suspicious nature argue that these actions were a rather artless effort on Washington's part to secure the command of the Continental Army for himself. This

Washington stood out from the crowd of delegates assembled in the Continental Congress. He stood a full head taller than anyone else in the room and he was the only one there in uniform. He was also the only native-born American with any real military experience, which made him the obvious choice to command an American army. Moreover, the fact that Washington was a Virginian implied that he would marshal the support of the southern colonies to what had previously been a Massachusetts effort. The only other possible candidates with significant active military experience were Charles Lee and Horatio Gates, both professionally trained officers who served in European armies; however, both were British by birth. The image of a British expatriate at the head of America's brave volunteers would have sent the wrong message. Washington was the natural choice.

After John Adams's motion naming Washington as the commander of the still yet to be formed American army was unanimously approved, the overwrought new general made a short speech that made a key point intended to be ingrained in the collective American memory, "but lest some unlucky event should happen unfavourable to my reputation, I beg it may be remembered by every Gentl in the room, that I this day declare with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the Command I [am] honored with."<sup>187</sup> The case for the sincerity of his self-doubt is bolstered by the fact that to both Martha and his favorite younger brother he described his appointment as "a trust

---

argument of patriotism vs. naked ambition lives on in scholarship; however, what is beyond dispute is that whether he wanted it or not, Washington almost certainly felt overwhelmed and unequal to the task once saddled with it. See Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency George Washington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 66-70; James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington in the American Revolution (1775-1783)* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), 9-14.

<sup>187</sup> Address to the Continental Congress, 16 June 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

too great for my capacity.<sup>188</sup> Interestingly, he was even more descriptive to his brother-in-law, Burwell Bassett:

I am now Imbarked on a tempestuous Ocean from whence, perhaps, no friendly harbor is to be found. It is an honour I wished to avoid. I can answer for three things, a firm belief in the justice of our Cause & close attention to the prosecution of it & the strictest Integrity & If these cannot supply the places of Ability & Experience, the cause will suffer & more than probably my character along with it, as reputation derives its principal support from success.<sup>189</sup>

Even if Washington was trying to delude himself into believing that he really did not have any ambitions for this high command despite the fact that he did nothing to discourage the buzz about his uniformed appearance and his military fame, these letters reveal that he was being strikingly honest about his deep apprehension regarding his ability to meet the challenge he was now charged with. This ambivalence further reflects his attempts to balance his pride with the sense of honor that he learned from his reading, particularly the courtesy manuals and histories that documented the conduct of the great men and women of the past.

Although his diary entries for the date of his appointment are unhelpful in that they provide no insight into Washington's state of mind, one can only imagine how heavily Washington felt the weight of the task that was bearing down upon him. The days of his unbridled martial enthusiasm and over brimming self-confidence were long since behind him. He was supremely responsible for the conduct of a war against the most powerful military force on earth and there was little margin for error. He never led an entire army before, and now he did not just have to lead one, he had to build it first. How was he ever going to do this? Washington had to compensate for his lack of

---

<sup>188</sup> Washington to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, Washington to John Augustine Washington, 1775 in *ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Washington to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775, in *ibid.*

experience quickly, for the war had already begun and the beginnings of his army were taking shape in Cambridge. As had become his habit when faced with a new challenge, Washington turned inward to private study. As he prepared to leave Philadelphia to go off to war, he began to purchase books on the military art.<sup>190</sup>

The previous chapter explored Washington's reading during the first phase of his life when he was a Virginia provincial. Building on the themes established in that chapter regarding his selection of reading material based on whether or not it offered immediately applicable knowledge, this chapter will examine Washington's reading during the period of his life when he transcended his colonial status to become an internationally recognized leader during the years 1774 through 1783. Washington's collection as a whole grew tremendously over the course of these nine years. As such, this aspect of the collection presents interesting possibilities for analysis, but also several potential pitfalls.

### Washington Takes Command

The pressure on Washington was staggering. As the military leader of a revolution, the stakes were infinitely high. He needed to read, but had little time to do so. Therefore, it can safely be assumed that if he sought to purchase a particular work, he intended to read it. Conversely, the demands on Washington's time during this period require a greater scrutiny be placed on the analysis of the numerous works he received as gifts. As will be demonstrated throughout the chapter, some of the gifts were sent by well-intentioned friends who thought they were sending works that would be helpful. The vast majority of these gifts, however, were sent by authors that were hoping to either

---

<sup>190</sup> See Washington's expense accounts for June 1775 in *ibid.*

curry favor with Washington, or were seeking an endorsement that would potentially help boost their sales. It would be too simplistic to assume that since Washington had little leisure time at this point, he would have disregarded the printed gifts sent to him. It would likewise be too sweeping to assume that just because Washington kept these gifts, he must have read them. The truth, I think, lies somewhere in between. Based on what is known about Washington's preference for reading things which offered practical knowledge, a reasonable case for which of the presentation copies he did read can be made by aligning his previous preferences with the situations he faced during the Revolution and with the gifts themselves in the order that they were received. While there is still a certain amount of ambiguity that is inherent to this method of analysis, there is unfortunately no more clear way of narrowing Washington's reading down because his writings yield few direct connections.

What emerges from this analysis is that Washington's focus remained largely centered on the same genres that he read before becoming a national figure. His collection during this period is dominated by works on the military art, politics, and religion. As will be illustrated throughout this chapter, the works on politics and religion are intertwined due to the politicization of the pulpits during both the revolutionary and early national periods.

What also emerges from this analysis is a picture of a very fragile Washington. As stated earlier, the evidence indicates that he was deeply pessimistic about his ability to carry out his commission successfully. Indeed, the year 1776 would very nearly prove him right as he and his fledgling army would suffer a series of humiliating losses at the hands of the British, until a small surprise attack on the sleepy Hessian garrison at

Trenton gave the Americans a surge of momentum. Washington emerged victorious from the Revolution having lost more battles than he won, with his pride having taken the heaviest beating over the course of the long war. He had to weather storms of criticism and conspiracies to replace him. The problems associated with the sometimes fractious civil-military relations and the in-fighting within the general staff during the Revolution were immense burdens on the commanding general who was himself in the process of learning how to lead on such an immense scale. In short, for Washington, the Revolutionary era was filled with as much strife as triumph. This must be carefully remembered when considering how susceptible he was to criticism and the degree to which he was driven to succeed. In order to sustain him in these high profile positions while presenting a public image of the quintessential leader with masterful self-control, Washington would need both knowledge and a healthy reassurance that what he was doing was right, and this is what his reading provided during this phase of his life.

### Military Reading: Preparing for Generalship

Even before the Continental Army was an idea, Washington understood that the die seemed to be cast for war, and duty would demand his service.<sup>191</sup> As Virginians began to ready themselves for war, Washington also turned his attention back to military matters. In November 1774 he ordered a copy of Thomas Webb's *Treatise on the*

---

<sup>191</sup>See footnote 235. See also the letter from the Richmond County Independent Company to Washington, 17 March 1775; the letter from the Prince William Independent Company to Washington, 26 April 1775; the letter from the Fairfax Independent Company to Washington, 25 April 1775; the letter from the Spotsylvania Independent Company to Washington, 26 April 1775; and the letter from the Ablemarle Independent Company, 29 April 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. The letters sent from the independent companies to Washington in April all center on Lord Dunmore's seizure of the colony's gunpowder in Williamsburg. In these letters, the companies pledged their willingness to march on Williamsburg in opposition to Dunmore upon Washington's orders.

*Appointments of the Army*, originally published in Philadelphia in 1759.<sup>192</sup> Thomas Webb was a lieutenant in the British army who wrote this book to offer his observations on the current state of the army's level of training and organization, and what changes he thought needed to be made in the event that war did break out in North America. Webb premised that "it is the Duty of every Military Man, to endeavor to make himself Master of his Profession, and freely to impart any Knowledge he may have acquired, which can be of the least Advantage to the Service."<sup>193</sup> As a lieutenant, Webb wrote from the standpoint of an officer who commanded ordinary soldiers in battle, and thus he implemented the policies he was commenting on, so he was in an excellent position to offer an opinion on their effectiveness. Such a commentary would have been potentially useful to Washington if he had to constitute an army. Also in 1774, Washington ordered six copies of *The Manual Exercise as Ordered by His Majesty in 1764*. Shortly thereafter in May 1775, Washington ordered eight copies of Thomas Hanson's, *The Prussian Evolutions in Actual Engagements*.<sup>194</sup> These works would be most useful to teach new sergeants and company officers how to train their soldiers for they each broke down into simple steps how to perform the manual of arms. Additionally, during this period just prior to the outbreak of the Revolution, Washington acquired a copy of *Manoevers, or Practical Observations on the Art of War*. This book is of particular interest because it offers another example of Washington making marginal notes. These notes reveal Washington's self-education in the art of command. Washington paid

---

<sup>192</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 541. See also Washington's expense account for November 1774 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>193</sup>Thomas Webb, *A Military Treatise on the Appointments of the Army. Containing Many Useful Hints, Not Touched Upon Before By Any Author: and Proposing Some New Regulations in the Army, Which Will Be Particularly Useful in Carrying on the War in North-America. Together With a Short Treatise on Military Honors* (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1759), 1-110.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

attention to the size of the different formations referenced throughout the book and that he was trying to determine how those numbers would need to be proportionally scaled given the number of soldiers he had in order to be able to maneuver units on the battlefield in accordance with the manual's instructions. To fully appreciate the significance of this book and Washington's notes, it must be remembered that while Washington had the experience of building a regiment from the ground up, he had never led anything larger than that.

With these military treatises and drill manuals that he acquired during the first two years of the Revolution, we see Washington applying the same diligent study method as he had done previously with Duhamel's *Husbandry* when he was trying to figure out how to make his plantations profitable. In other words, these military books represent reading for the sake of immediate practical problem solving. There is nothing philosophical or reflective about them. These are tactical field manuals, not massive theoretical tomes on the art of command as it evolved over the centuries.

Washington also acquired twenty four other works on military science. These twenty four works gave Washington an overview of the latest European battlefield tactics and plans for military administration. What is interesting to note is that the target audience for most of these books were company and field grade officers ó not generals. For example, *A New Manual, and Platoon Exercise: With an Explanation* was written for infantry lieutenants. It instructed them how to get their soldiers into a formation, how to issue battlefield commands, and how to march a platoon in formation. In the plainest terms, the book taught new officers to "seize the Firelock with the right Hand, and turn

the Lock outward, keeping the Firelock in the same position as before.<sup>195</sup> When considering the importance of this and the other military books Washington read during this period, it is indeed critical to remember the scale and complexity of the task facing him. Washington was quite literally learning how to build an army as he went along. While his experience from his command of the Virginia Regiment provided a useful foundation in the basics of military administration, it was not sufficient solitary resource on which to rely when constituting a much larger, more complex army. As such, *A New Manual, and Platoon Exercise: With an Explanation and A System of Camp-Discipline, Military Honours, Garrison-Duty, and Other Regulations for the Land Forces*, which described how the army operates on a daily basis were useful, but only to a point. He was rapidly trying to educate himself about how to raise, administer, and maneuver armies in European style battles, and these manuals gave him a place to start. Moreover, these manuals would also provide an approach to training junior officers. That, however, was the limit of knowledge that Washington could gain from such books; these works would not teach him how to be a commanding general.

The only other assets that Washington had coming into command were his experience in the Seven Years War, his reputation, and an ability to see the overall strategic picture very well. He had to use those assets to forge a coherent fighting force made up of men from across the colonies that represented a broad spectrum of different cultures and traditions. He had literally no experience in maneuvering troops on an open battlefield, and neither did the majority of his subordinate officers. Moreover, many people expected him to fail. Of course his British adversaries expected to defeat him handily, but additionally there were Americans who also did not want to see him succeed:

---

<sup>195</sup>Edward Harvey, *A New Manual, and Platoon Exercise: With an Explanation* (London: 1764), 3.

the staunch loyalists, and even some members of his own staff who coveted his position and were jealous of his fame. Naysayers were not the only source of stress for Washington. Those who supported his nomination and those devoted to the patriot cause expected him to rise to the occasion and secure victory ó no matter the odds. No less significant was the stress he placed on himself. As with every other endeavor, his reputation was linked to the outcome of this war and this would have been a nagging worry.

With all this in mind, it is no wonder that he devoted what little time he had for reading to straightforward manuals like *A New Manual on Platoon Exercise*, *A New System of Military Discipline Founded on Principle*, and *An Essay on the Art of War: Principles of All Operations in the Field*.<sup>196</sup> In particular, *An Essay on the Art of War* is a collection of essays by an unknown author that defined what honor and valor should mean to officers, and explained the duties and responsibilities of senior army leaders, and delineated how an army staff operated, how to administer military justice, and how to

---

<sup>196</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 539. The subject of Washington's preparedness for command has been the subject of considerable debate among biographers and military historians. See Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*, 43. Higginbotham argues that "too much has been made of Washington's military limitations," and that "Caesar and Cromwell, like Washington, were in their forties when they began their most serious soldiering. The duties of Grant and Lee as aides to Mexican War generals scarcely qualified them to direct hosts in the Civil War. Dwight Eisenhower, supreme allied commander in Europe during World War II, had never seen combat in a career that extended back to 1915." I disagree with Higginbotham's argument at several points. Although I understand and sympathize with Higginbotham's advocacy for Washington's natural talent for leadership, he ignores Washington's lack of a military education as a limiting factor at the outset of the Revolution. Washington's comparative age with Caesar and Cromwell is an irrelevance. However, the really problematic aspect of Higginbotham's argument is his comparison of Washington's lack of high command experience at the outset of the Revolution to that of Grant, Lee, and Eisenhower. Although it's true that all three had not previously worn stars on their collars prior to the outbreak of the Civil War and World War II, all three had the benefit of a West Point education and had served for years as regular army officers. They were well schooled in the military profession and were therefore more academically equipped for the exalted positions they would occupy. Washington had no such training to lean on. Washington had raw talent, a drive to succeed, and a brilliant strategic vision, and those were the tools he used to succeed. He understood the Revolution and the army's role in it perfectly, so much so that he eventually became the very personification of the Revolution in the wake of his small victories at Trenton and Princeton.

conduct battlefield maneuvers. The author wrote that his wish was that "every young Officer will here find Lights sufficient to conduct him on the most difficult

Occasions."<sup>197</sup> With regard to discipline, the author argued,

Military Discipline consists properly in maintaining good Order and Policy, without which the most beautiful Body of Troops would become a Band of Robbers and Assassins. Military Discipline comprehends, 1<sup>st</sup>, The regularity of Manners of those who follow the Profession of War. 2<sup>nd</sup>ly, The perfect Obedience of the Inferior to the Superior, relatively to each Rank. 3<sup>rd</sup>ly, the Vigilance of the Chiefs, in executing the Ordonnances of the Prince, against Military Crimes and Delicts. 4<sup>th</sup>ly, The chastisement with which those who are faulty are punished.<sup>198</sup>

This single volume was a succinct reference that addressed all aspects of army life. The author stated his intent to reach an audience of new officers made this another logical choice for Washington if he was looking for a basic text that he could possibly put to use in training his army. He also purchased the order of merit list of all general and field officers in the British army for the years 1772, 1777, and 1778 presumably so he would know which of these adversaries he would be facing. With these purchases he was attempting gain a complete understanding of his situation and determine how to best move forward.

#### Washington's Military Reading Put to Use

The evidence of how Washington utilized this reading is best illustrated by looking at the earliest days of his command when the newly constituted Continental Army was encamped around Boston. Washington arrived shortly after the Battle of Bunker Hill and discovered that the information he had been given regarding the number

---

<sup>197</sup>*Essay on the Art of War: In Which the General Principles of All the Operations of War in the Field Are Fully Explained. The Whole Collected from the Opinions of the Best Authors* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1761), vi.

<sup>198</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

of able soldiers was incorrect. Although he was told that there were 20,000 volunteers, there were only 14,000 men who were actually fit for duty. Almost every regiment was incomplete. Most of the soldiers were old men or young boys, and even more shocking to the new Virginian general there were a surprising number of free blacks. The men were filthy in their threadbare clothing, and they did not know the first thing about how to present their rusty arms for inspection. They slept in an odd conglomeration of rude huts and half tents scattered about the muddy open fields. Horses and other animals wandered throughout the cantonment eating whatever spare garbage was strewn about. Latrines were open, everywhere, and were highly unsanitary. The smell of human waste forever hung heavy in the humidity of the summer air.<sup>199</sup>

What was worse than the appearance of the encampment was the behavior of the men. The authority of the officers was very limited indeed because they were elected by the very men that they commanded. Men came and went as they pleased. They looted and destroyed property, felt free to leave their posts, and fell asleep on duty. Before long Washington was being inundated with complaints from the locals that Connecticut soldiers were skinny dipping in the river in full view of the respectable ladies. Washington remarked that the New Englanders especially were "an exceeding dirty and nasty people."<sup>200</sup> Washington set to work to infuse discipline and order into his camp. His first general orders specify what the duties of his officers were, based on what he read in his British manuals. For example, his general orders for July 4, 1775 stated that:

Exact returns to be made by the proper Officers of all the Provisions, Ordnance, Ordnance stores, Powder, Lead, working Tools of all kinds, Tents, Camp Kettles,

---

<sup>199</sup>Edward G. Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life*, 106.

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid.*, 106-108. See also Washington to Lund Washington, 20 August 1775 in *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, 20 vols. ed. Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985-) 1: 336.

and all Other Stores under their respective care, belonging to the Armies at Roxbury and Cambridge. The commanding Officer of each Regiment to make a return of the number of blankets wanted to compleat every Man with one at least. It is required and expected that exact discipline be observed, and due Subordination prevail thro' the whole Army, as a Failure in these most essential points must necessarily produce extreme Hazard, Disorder and Confusion; and in the end in shameful disappointment and disgrace.

The General most earnestly requires, and expects, a due observance of those articles of war, established for the Government of the army, which forbid profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness; And in like manner requires and expects, of all Officers, and Soldiers, not engaged on actual duty, a punctual attendance on divine service, to implore the blessings of heaven upon the means used for our safety and defence.

All Officers are required and expected to pay diligent Attention, to keep their Men neat and clean & to visit them often at their quarters, and inculcate upon them the necessity of cleanliness, as essential to their health and service. They are particularly to see, that they have Straw to lay on, if to be had, and to make it known if they are destitute of this article. They are also to take care that Necessaries be provided in the Camps and frequently filled up to prevent their being offensive and unhealthy. Proper Notice will be taken of such Officers and Men, as distinguish themselves by their attention to these necessary duties.<sup>201</sup>

Washington clearly had his work cut out for him and there were precious few able and experienced minds to assist him. With him were Major Generals Charles Lee and Horatio Gates, the two British-born and educated officers who saw active service on the continent and North America during the Seven Years' War. Lee was experienced, but he was vain, spiteful, filthy, and vulgar. Gates, who would be known to the army as "Granny Gates" because of his age and his propensity to move too slowly, was a pudgy but capable administrator with more of a talent for instigating political intrigue than for battlefield command. These were the two voices of experience Washington had to rely on. Of course there were other generals and staff officers in Washington's military family. There were two other major generals from Massachusetts: Artemas Ward and

---

<sup>201</sup> Washington, General Orders, 4 July 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

Israel Putnam. Ward had no military talent and wasted no time in communicating his disapproval of the Congress's appointment of a Virginian to command an army made up largely of New England men; it would not take long for the dislike to become mutual. Israel Putnam was a local hero in Massachusetts thanks to his frontier exploits, but behind the myths he had limited military abilities and was hindered by his illiteracy. The Congress also commissioned Major General Philip Schuyler, a wealthy landowner from New York with little else besides wealth to recommend him. There was also Major General John Sullivan, a lawyer from Durham, New Hampshire who had less of a talent for command than getting himself into trouble. He knew nothing of the military art. Brigadier General Nathanael Greene would in time prove to be one of Washington's most capable lieutenants, but he came into the war with little more than a good mind, solid education, and physical bravery to recommend him. Washington made a surprising move and plucked the rotund but talented Boston bookseller turned self-educated artilleryman Henry Knox from the ranks. Washington had two primary aides-de-camp in the early days of the war Joseph Reed and Thomas Mifflin who were the first two of a large number of aides who would have to keep pace with the sheer volume of paper that circulated through the headquarters on a daily basis.<sup>202</sup>

This was the general staff that Washington had to assist him in raising an army that could face the British in open battle. Not only were the majority of his officers completely inexperienced, but the two with experience would prove to be critical, taciturn, and eventually conniving. Washington therefore had to do the bulk of the work himself, and since he believed that there was a "kind of stupidity" among many of the

---

<sup>202</sup> Lengel, *George Washington, A Military Life*, 108-111; Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency George Washington*, 81-82.

officers, he did not delegate the task of establishing the code of conduct to a subordinate.<sup>203</sup> This dearth of able staff officers and subordinate commanders therefore makes Washington's military reading more significant. It is also interesting to note that Washington's desire to manage personally the daily operations of the army stems from the fact that discipline was a subject about which Washington felt the most comfortable in his new role because it was here that he could couple the knowledge that he gained from his reading on the subject with his experience from the Virginia Regiment. His popularity increased among the local people of Cambridge as he cracked down on soldiers who roamed around the countryside looking for horses and chickens to steal, dismantling fences for firewood as they went.<sup>204</sup> He admonished his subordinate officers to be strict with their men and to:

[r]equire nothing unreasonable of your officers and men, but see that whatever is required be punctually complied with. Reward and punish every man according to his merit, without partiality or prejudice; hear his complaints; if well founded, redress them; if otherwise discourage them, in order to prevent frivolous ones. Discourage vice in every shape, and impress upon the mind of every man., from the first to the lowest, the importance of the cause, and what it is that they are

---

<sup>203</sup> Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 29 August 1775 in *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, 1: 372.

<sup>204</sup> Washington's many biographers have largely given him credit for imposing much needed discipline on the Continental Army. While it is true that it was Washington's commitment to imposing discipline above any other task, and it is to his credit that he maintained unceasing attention to detail that enabled his success in this endeavor, he was not the first to recognize the need to maintain respect for civilians and their property. An independent company of volunteers under Benedict Arnold from New Haven, Connecticut adopted a code of conduct on 24 April 1775 that echoed the same sentiment that Washington would impart to the Continental Army en masse less than three months later. For this see Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 286. Maier calls this and further orders regarding the humane treatment of prisoners "notions of enlightened war." Evidently not everyone in the mobilizing army shared a respect for this restrained conduct of military affairs, because Washington had to go to considerable effort to establish command and control. His success on this front is a testament to his natural talent for leadership that Don Higginbotham argues has been largely overshadowed by placing too much emphasis on Washington's overall inexperience with command at such a high level. What is especially noteworthy about the state of discipline in these the earliest days of the Continental army is that they illustrate a clash of colonial cultures; these examples underscore the degree of disunity that actually existed within the Continental Army's ranks. This is important to bear in mind when considering the overall scale of the task that faced Washington as the commanding general who was responsible to both the Continental Congress and the American people for the outcome of the war.

contending forí .Be plain and precise in your orders, and keep copies of them to refer to, that no mistakes may happen. Be easy and condescending in your deportment to your officers, but not too familiar, lest you subject yourself to a want of that respect, which is necessary to support a proper command.<sup>205</sup>

This advice from Washington to his officers reflects exactly how Washington put his reading to use. His books including Blandø's *Treatise, A New Manual on Platoon Exercise, A New System of Military Discipline Founded on Principle*, and *An Essay on the Art of War: Principles of All Operations in the Field* all provided in similar terms the foundation of Washingtonø's advice to his officers.

As he was organizing the army, Washingtonø's mind was simultaneously racing ahead to what he would do with it. The British were entrenched in Boston, and the long suffering citizenry along with the Congress expected Washington to eject them.

Washington was an aggressive commander by nature and this instinct caused him to devise an amphibious attack to force the British out of the city. The harsh reality was that he could not do it. His army was yet untrained and ill-equipped. The siege of Boston that had been underway even before Washington arrived to take command yielded no progress. Washington was plagued by inaccurate reports of both the British strength as well as his own, but the intelligence that he could verify about the British position was not encouraging. The American forces were too small and did not command all the key terrain necessary to dislodge the British from the city. Another problem was that he did not have sufficient artillery to cover the river crossing, until Henry Knox pulled off the seemingly impossible task of retrieving the guns from distant Fort Ticonderoga.

---

<sup>205</sup> Washington to William Woodford, 10 November 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, 2: 346-7.

With this sudden, improbable infusion of artillery, Washington put the knowledge he gained from reading his copy of John Muller's, *A Treatise of Artillery*, and, much to British surprise, fortified the Dorchester Heights over the course of one feverish night of hard labor. Muller's book is similar to the infantry manuals that Washington read in that it is a basic text intended for entry level artillery officers. The entire introduction for example, was devoted to a technical description of the different types of land cannons in use in the British Army, with simple charts that break down the different maximum ranges that each type of cannon could hit. Muller also took it a step further and explained how to read the charts and put the information to use. Parts VII and VIII explain in great detail how to use artillery on the battlefield to the greatest effect. Muller further described how to properly construct gun emplacements and artillery batteries both for sieges and for the construction of defensive fortifications.<sup>206</sup> This would have been a highly useful reference for Washington, as he did not have much experience with artillery on which to rely.

The plan of attack for Boston offers an example of how Washington attempted to put his tactical reading to use. Although he was a strategic thinker who maintained a clearer vision of the Revolution than any of his fellow revolutionaries (both military and civilian), that vision was sometimes clouded by a curious hybrid of boredom, frustration, inexperience, and the ill effects of his lack of a formal military education. Washington wanted a fast, decisive end to the war because he knew that a protracted struggle was fraught with uncertainties for the Americans. His experience in Cambridge thus far taught him that his army was in a precarious situation. The number of capable soldiers

---

<sup>206</sup>John Muller, *A Treatise of Artillery...To Which is Prefixed, an Introduction, with a Theory of Powder Applied to Fire-Arms* (London: John Millan, Whitehall, 1768), xxxviii, 148-214.

fluctuated, and the Continental Congress had yet to determine how the soldiers would be paid or resupplied. A quick engagement and decisive victory was therefore in the Americans' best interests. Annoyed by the problems associated with an ineffective siege that produced a stalemate, Washington proposed hurling his army across the Charles River into the main British position in Boston. At the same time, he planned to bombard the city from heavy guns mounted on Dorchester Heights. Yes, Boston might be burned to the ground in the process, but if successful, the British would be forced to surrender or risk being consumed in the flames.<sup>207</sup> Washington was correct in his assessment that in order to achieve a quick victory he would have to destroy or force the surrender of the British garrison in Boston; however, his aggressive instincts combined with his lack of real knowledge of the level of proficiency and overall size of a force required to conduct such an amphibious attack successfully made the plan unfeasible from the beginning. His military reading taught him the fundamentals of army administration and tactical field maneuvers, but it was not enough to keep him grounded in reality when he was facing an anxious citizenry that demanded action combined with an endless litany of complaints and issues that arose each day from his un-trained, ill-disciplined army. Consequently, he either downplayed or ignored the fact that many of the soldiers in his army were either from or had family in Boston. When he proposed his plan to his staff, Lee scoffed at him. When the plan was proposed to the visiting Congressional delegation, Benjamin Franklin put him off.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> See Lengel, *General George Washington, A Military Life*, 115; Samuel B. Griffith II, *The War for American Independence From 1760 to the Surrender at Yorktown in 1781* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 212-213; Ellis, *His Excellency George Washington*, 84-85.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

Even though Washington's force did not mount an attack on Boston, the increasingly desperate British, holed up with dwindling supplies and increasingly hostile hosts, evacuated. Americans rejoiced as the last British ship slipped away into the horizon, but Washington knew the war was not yet over. Both adversaries would face off again seeking that elusive defining victory, and this next episode would again show that Washington's rudimentary self-education on military matters was not sufficient to make him a successful commanding general. Time would prove that he would only prevail when he put his reading knowledge to use in developing a different strategy from that of European commanders. He was building an army that operated on a completely different set of principles from that of the British, so he had to come to terms with the fact that his army would have to be employed differently if he was to win the war. This process resulted from a combination of his reading of European manuals and his developing experience. As the summer and fall of 1776 would prove, this intellectual leap was difficult for Washington. What follows is a case study of the campaign of 1776 for it provides the best insight into this formative stage of the development of Washington's military thinking.

When the British evacuated Boston, no one in the American camps knew where they were going, or if they were coming back at all. Some deluded themselves into believing that the British had simply given up and returned to England. Washington, however, assumed correctly that they would be coming back and their destination would be New York City and that would provide an opportunity for an American victory. This would, however, prove to be a fleeting hope. From the British perspective, New York offered several key advantages. To be sure, New York had a large, deep natural seaport

perfectly suited to serve as the headquarters for the Royal Navy. Additionally, any attack on New York City would require an amphibious assault, a task made difficult by the tidal rivers swirling around Manhattan. Finally, New York City situated at the point where the Hudson River connects to the harbor and Atlantic beyond was an ideal position from which the British could isolate New England from the rest of the colonies and thus pursue a divide and conquer strategy to regain the colonies one by one. Upon concluding his analysis, Washington hurried his army south from Cambridge to take up new positions on Manhattan and Long Island.

Although Washington was right about the British selecting New York as their destination, neither he nor any of his staff were prepared for what the British were about to hurl at them. Furious that they lost Boston to the rebels the ministry deployed the largest expeditionary force the world had ever seen. To make matters worse, Washington realized that New York was virtually indefensible given the forces he had at his disposal. He had no naval support and he was on an island surrounded by two navigable rivers and a harbor. He had no idea how large the combined British force would be or when it would land.<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless he had to do something.

From the outset, Washington's defense of New York was plagued with problems. Major General Charles Lee was in command prior to Washington's arrival and he struggled to erect effective defenses of this complex and critical terrain. When Washington arrived, he began to consult widely with others and as he did so, Lee's plan began to change. The most likely reason why Washington struggled was because the military reading he had done to this point was insufficient for the task of defending this

---

<sup>209</sup> Washington to John A. Washington, 22 July 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

particular terrain. Muller's artillery treatise was a basic text which did not offer Washington any possible solution as to how to employ his limited number of cannon in such a complex defense. Nor did Washington's other book by Muller, *A Treatise Containing the Practical Part of Fortification in Four Parts*, which offered a technical guide to constructing adequate defenses, but not how to select where to place them on a battlefield.<sup>210</sup> Washington also could not use the knowledge he gained from his infantry manuals because he lacked the soldiers and resources to carry out the tasks that the authors proscribed. For instance, in *Manoevers or Practical Observations on the Art of War*, the author, Sir William Young, instructed that when occupying a new area, an officer should:

ride forward with his Cavalry, observing the proper precautions; he will send out Patroles, to find out the Enemy's nearest Posts; examine all Roads, and even foot paths, leading from the Enemy, to the Army he belongs to; he will endeavor to learn from the Peasants, everything the Enemy has been doing, and form conjectures, upon what their intentions may be; and think nothing but his profession, till relieved.<sup>211</sup>

Washington was unable to gather much intelligence before the attack began. He therefore was unable to deploy his troops to the best possible advantage. This lack of situational awareness led to chaos throughout the American lines. The result was a series of major defeats that ultimately led to the loss of Long Island when Howe's army flanked around to the rear of the Washington's position and took the Americans by surprise.<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup>John Muller, *A Treatise Containing the Practical Part of Fortification in Four Parts For the Use of the Royal Academy of Artillery at Woolwich* (London: Printed for A. Millar in the Strand, 1764).

<sup>211</sup>William Young, *Manoevers, or Practical Observations on the Art of War* (London: Printed for J. Millan, 1771), 26.

<sup>212</sup>Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 90-8; Lengel, *General George Washington, A Military Life*, 140-7. Fischer and Lengel differ somewhat on their willingness to place the majority of the blame on Washington for the defeat on Long Island. Fischer places nearly all of it on Washington, even those mistakes made by subordinate commanders because Washington replaced them so many times that none of them had any real situational awareness going into the battle. Lengel is a bit gentler on Washington, conceding that he "stumbled a bit" but really the mistake was giving Putnam too much latitude. Sullivan

In the immediate aftermath of the defeats on Long Island, the Americans had fallen back to strong defensive positions on Brooklyn Heights. They occupied the high ground and had clear fields of fire, trenches, redoubts, star forts at intervals along the line, double palisades, and small fortresses at critical positions. Additionally, they had plenty of supplies, ammunition, and guns. Some British officers wanted to storm the American lines in an attempt to complete the victory begun on Long Island. General Howe would hear nothing of it. He did not want another costly victory similar to Bunker Hill when the British eventually drove the Americans out of their fortified positions after sustaining a ghastly number of casualties. Instead, Howe opted for a conventional siege of Brooklyn Heights, and ordered his engineers to proceed methodically, being careful to find the weaknesses in the American lines. As that happened, Admiral Howe was preparing to send his fleet into the East River. The Americans were quickly about to be surrounded. The weather shifted and driving rains began to fall. Washington observed how close the British engineers were through the storm and decided to convene a council of war to discuss the possibility of evacuating the entire army across the river back to Manhattan.

After outlining his many reasons in favor of such a plan, he asked for the opinions of his senior commanders present: Putnam, Spencer, Mifflin, McDougall, Parsons, J.M. Scott, and Wadsworth. Immediately, there were doubts and questions. Some thought evacuating the army before the British detected what was going on was impossible. The river was nearly a mile wide with strong currents, the Americans had too few boats, the

---

and Stirling clearly had no idea what they were doing, nor did they have control over their men. See also William Smallwood to Maryland Convention, 12 October 1776, in *American Archives*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., 3 vols., May 3, 1776, to December 31, 1776, ed. Peter Force, (Washington: M. St. Claire and Peter Force, 1837-53), 2:1011; Washington, General Orders, 25 October 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

British army could attack at any moment during the evacuation and slaughter the entire army in the open, or the British navy could catch the army in the water and likewise destroy it. Putnam argued that the fortifications were strong and he was confident that the Americans would be better at fighting from behind defensive works. After hearing all opinions, Washington weighed in again, this time with a decision. The army would evacuate to Manhattan. The boats were already being gathered, and the operation would begin immediately in the strictest secrecy. The soldiers were to be kept deliberately in the dark; they were told only to pack up in preparation for a shift in positions. At 10 o'clock at night in a driving rain, the Americans began making their escape.<sup>213</sup>

Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge would later recall that "It was one of the most anxious, busiest nights that I ever recollect, and being the third in which hardly any of us had closed our eyes to sleep, we were all greatly fatigued." Besides exhaustion, the Americans had other things working against them. The rain reduced the ground to a sea of mud, making mobility difficult and sinking the gun carriages down to the hubs. Small cannon were dragged out; the larger ones were left behind. The bad weather was both a blessing and a curse for the Americans. The Nor'easter masked their movements from the British, but it slowed them down. The mariners from John Glover's Fourteenth Massachusetts and the fishermen in Israel Hutchinson's Twenty-seventh Massachusetts did their best to keep the boats moving against the wind and the currents in the darkness, but the operation was still slow going. At first light, many of the best American troops were still holding their positions as rear guard security and were in real danger of being

---

<sup>213</sup>John Morin Scott, Brigadier General from New York, to John Jay, Member of the Congress from New York, 6 September 1776, and Account by Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge of Connecticut in *The Spirit of Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution As Told By Its Participants*, ed. Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 444-46.

discovered and captured by British and Hessian patrols. Then, as if by divine intervention, a dense fog began to rise and settled over both the British position and the American point of embarkation. Even as the sun rose, the fog persisted and shrouded the Americans in an unusual yellow light as they slipped further away from the Brooklyn shoreline. A separate evacuation rescued the American troops on Governor's Island. Only one boat was sunk by British cannon fire, but nearly all the soldiers on board survived.<sup>214</sup>

The exhausted Americans were not to get a decent respite in the wake of their hairbreadth escape from the British. Washington reported the loss of Long Island to Congress on September 6<sup>th</sup> and called another council of war in order to figure out what to do next. Washington realized that given the strengths and weaknesses of his army, it made no sense to risk them again against the British in the open field. Further, he reported that he did not have the capability to defend even strong positions at all costs because his troops were not willing to die for either honor or duty. In his report to Congress on September 8, 1776, Washington wrote, "that we should on all occasions avoid a general action, or put anything at risk, unless compelled by a necessity into which we ought never be drawn when the fate of America may be at stake on the issue. I cannot think it safe or wise to adopt a different system." <sup>215</sup> He resolved to keep his army alive by means of retreat, defending what it could, yielding what it must,

---

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. See also Washington, General Orders, 31 August 1776, in *The Glorious Struggle*, 60-62.

<sup>215</sup> Washington to the Continental Congress, 8 September 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. Military historians have repeatedly praised Washington's strategic thinking. One of the most recent is Dave R. Palmer in his book, *George Washington's Military Genius*. In this, Palmer's most recent book on Washington, he characterizes the 1776 strategy as "masterpiece of strategic thought, a brilliant blueprint permitting a weak force to combat a powerful opponent." Dave R. Palmer, *George Washington's Military Genius* (Washington, D.C.: Regenery Publishing, 2012), 136.

and watching for an opportunity to strike the enemy whenever there was any probability of success.

Interestingly, Washington's decision to evacuate Long Island in the middle of the night rather than wait until daylight ran counter to the conventions of eighteenth-century warfare. A commander who ordered his troops to abandon the field under cover of darkness in order to escape rather than risk having to surrender did not behave with honor. It was one thing to undertake a night operation for the purpose of going on the offensive; it was quite another to simply run away. However, with the full weight of the war on his shoulders, Washington wanted not only to win, but to do so decisively. With that not really being possible, he had to resort to running the British ragged, stinging them where and when he could resulting in enough small victories to keep the American people vested in the cause and the army, risking as little as possible in the meantime. Building on the lessons he learned from his humiliation in New York, Washington would make an even better use of surprise as an unconventional weapon.

After Americans had evaded the British in Harlem, escaped from the losses of Forts Mifflin, Red Bank and a separate engagement at Red Bank, and made it all the way to safety on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River, doubt spread both through Washington's army and through the American people. The presence of the British force in Trenton, just a day's march from Philadelphia sent the residents of that city into a panic. More bad news came from New England when it was reported that the British had in fact taken Rhode Island without much resistance. The members of the Continental Congress muttered about Washington's fitness to command. Loyalists became more outspoken, and pessimism began to spread through Patriot strongholds throughout the

colonies. People seemed increasingly inclined to believe that the cause was lost. These pressures weighed heavily on Washington who had yet another massive problem – the majority of the soldiers' enlistments would be up at the end of December 1776 and if they did not reenlist, the Continental Army would cease to exist.

The enlistment problem reached a crisis level quickly. The autumn days were slipping rapidly toward December and Washington's army was shrinking by the day. Some help came from British pamphleteer Thomas Paine who previously caused a sensation with a forty-six page pamphlet titled, *Common Sense*.<sup>216</sup> Although Paine was not the sort of man that Washington would have ordinarily befriended with his poor habits, sloppy appearance, and hatred for both authority and orthodoxy, Washington recognized that Paine possessed a talent for reaching the emotions of the people through the written word, a skill which was sorely needed in order to keep the cause alive at this critical juncture. Paine had been traveling with Washington's army and had written a new essay, *The American Crisis*. It began, "These are the times that try men's souls. 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 both man and woman."<sup>217</sup> Paine arranged to have it printed in Philadelphia and sold for just two cents –

---

<sup>216</sup> Washington owned a copy of *Common Sense*, which is now in the collection at the Boston Athenaeum. He obtained a copy as soon as it was released in print and thought highly of the pamphlet as being the catalyst that pushed many reluctant Americans toward embracing independence. See Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection at the Boston Athenaeum*, 156-57. See also Washington to Reed, 1 April 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>217</sup> Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis* (Philadelphia: 1776), 1. The publication of this latest pamphlet marked the period in which Washington and Paine's relationship was the closest. Although some of Washington's writing would later become immortalized in the American political lexicon, his real talents were for reaching the people through his physical presence and personal leadership. Paine's simple, yet passionate appeal in the *American Crisis* struck the right patriotic note with Washington and made the two men unlikely friends. The bonds of friendship would eventually sever later during Washington's presidency when Paine took up his pen in defense of the excesses of the French Revolution in *The Rights of Man*, and later going so far as to attack the existence of God in *The Age of Reason*. Washington read *The Rights of Man* after Paine sent him fifty copies on May 6, 1792. Washington was also sent copies of *The*

enough to meet the printer's costs and nothing more. Upon reading Paine's work, Washington ordered this to be read to his troops as an inducement to reenlist. It circulated widely, both in the camps and among the people, and it had a limited but positive impact. Some of the soldiers returned, but the larger problem of their enlistment contracts still loomed.

As it got closer to Christmas Eve, Washington began mulling over a plan to strike a blow at the Hessian garrison at Trenton in order to galvanize his soldiers to stay in the army.<sup>218</sup> His decision to launch a surprise attack in winter - on Christmas night no less - was inherently risky as it hinged on both secrecy and precision timing. Moreover, Washington's planning ran counter to the lessons taught in his military reading. Because of the dangers associated with winter travel and the logistical difficulties of keeping an army supplied, healthy, and fed over snow covered terrain, all eighteenth-century military books advised against undertaking offensive campaigns during those months. This is what all British commanders believed, and why the Hessians calculated that the rumored American attack would be unsuccessful. Washington's choice to defy such conventions

---

*Age of Reason*, and he subsequently came to possess Ogden Uzal's two volume work, *Antidote to Deism*. See Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 499. As Paine's writing came to reflect his more radical leanings, Washington began to change his opinion of his former friend and associate who seemed intent on making a career of being a revolutionary. Paine eventually traveled to France where he was imprisoned by Robespierre during the Terror. Washington rejected Paine's appeals for intercession, for such an action would jeopardize American neutrality. Paine turned on Washington, composing bitter character attacks on Washington later, whilst living with James Monroe in Paris. Washington reacted in a fury to such a savage, personal attack, immediately dispatching letters to his closest supporters in order to vindicate his behavior and discredit Paine at the same time. See Washington to David Stuart, 8 June 1797 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*, and Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 158.

<sup>218</sup> Washington was actively contemplating a major action at least a week before Christmas. The first indication of his planning was that he wrote to John Hancock and specifically asked for an extension of his decision making authority. He normally maintained a great respect for civilian authority and remained committed to the notion of civil control over the military; however, with his soldiers' enlistments due to expire at the end of the year, he did not have the time to devise a plan, call a council of war to deliberate, and then petition the Congress for a final decision. See Washington to John Hancock, 20 December 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

reflected the extreme circumstances he was in and the need to produce victories to keep soldiers in his ranks and sustain the war.

The operation commenced at midnight on Christmas night with the army attempting to cross the Delaware at three different points. 1,000 Pennsylvania militia and 500 veteran troops under the command of John Cadwalader and Joseph Reed were to cross the river at Bristol and advance toward Burlington. A second force of 700 Pennsylvania militia were to attack directly across the river at Trenton and hold the bridge over Assunpink Creek at the foot of Queen Street to cut off a possible escape route. The third and largest force of 2,400 Continental troops under the command of Washington, Greene, Sullivan, and Stirling would cross the river nine miles up from Trenton at McKonkey's Ferry. Halfway to Trenton, this force would divide into two columns, one led by Sullivan taking River Road, and the other led by Greene on Pennington Road. Washington would ride with Greene. Four cannon were to be at the advance of each column. The two columns had to arrive at Trenton no later than five o'clock, with the attack to commence at six, an hour before daylight. Officers were to wear white paper in their hats to distinguish them. Absolute secrecy was required, and no man would quit his ranks on pain of death. The password for the night was to be "Victory or Death." The latest intelligence estimates were that there were between 2,500 and 3,000 enemy troops in Trenton.<sup>219</sup>

From the outset, the weather took a severe toll on Washington's complex plan. The driving snow combined with ice that choked the river caused such delays that only Greene's column went forward. Once across the river, the increasingly severe conditions

---

<sup>219</sup> Washington to Joseph Reed, 23 December 1776; General Orders, 25 December 1776 in *ibid.* See also *Memoirs of Elisha Bostwick* partially reprinted in *The Spirit of 1776*, 511-12. See also Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 206-62; Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 173-186.

significantly slowed the troops' progress. They did, however, finally reach Trenton. The attack began just after eight o'clock with Greene's men charging across an open field toward a Hessian patrol that fell back to the town once they could make out the size of the force bearing down on them through the driving snow. Hessian soldiers came pouring out of their barracks, falling into formation at their officers' commands, only to be scattered with devastating rounds from Henry Knox's cannons. As the stunned Hessians fled to the side streets, they ran headlong into Sullivan's men where savage house to house fighting raged for a brief time. The Hessian commander, Colonel Johann Rall was roused from bed and was up on his horse, ordering his panic stricken men into a nearby orchard to regroup. Hessians were falling all around him, and soon Rall fell, mortally wounded. The Hessians in the orchard surrendered. It was over in less than forty five minutes. Twenty one Hessians were killed, ninety wounded, and nine hundred taken prisoner. Another five hundred Hessians escaped over the Assunpink Bridge that should have been guarded by Americans. Only four Americans were wounded, and two died from exposure. Almost as soon as it was over, Washington ordered his exhausted troops to march the nine miles back to McKonkey's ferry to cross back to Pennsylvania, for he knew that once word of the defeat spread, it would not be safe for his tired army to remain in New Jersey.<sup>220</sup>

Washington heaped praise on his soldiers in his general orders on December 27<sup>th</sup> for their performance and assured them that they would receive a proportionate amount of the value of what was captured at Trenton in cash.<sup>221</sup> The victory at Trenton breathed new life into the American cause. It was celebrated throughout the colonies; the

---

<sup>220</sup>Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> General Orders, 27 December 1776; Washington to John Hancock, 27 December 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

improbable story of crossing the river in the snow to overwhelm the Hessians with such a surprising result was repeated in nearly every newspaper, church, tavern, and home in America. Bolstered by the success of Trenton but still mindful that his army's enlistments were within days of expiration Washington decided to keep up the momentum and go after the British again. On December 29<sup>th</sup>, Washington, Greene, Sullivan, and Knox crossed the Delaware at McKonkey's ferry again, in an operation just as dangerous as the previous one had been. In Trenton, Washington made a personal appeal to his troops to reenlist. He offered a bounty of ten dollars to anyone who would stay for six more months, thanks to the money Robert Morris sent from Philadelphia. Those willing were asked to step forward. The drums rolled, but no one moved. Then, riding before them, Washington change his approach and spoke to them in the most affectionate terms, "My brave fellows, you have done all I asked you to do, and more than can reasonably can be expected, but your country is at stake, your wives, your houses, and all that you hold dear. You have worn yourself out with fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you will consent to stay just one month longer, you will render that service to the cause of liberty, and to your country, which you can probably never do under any other circumstance." The drums rolled again, and nearly every one of the soldiers in the formation stepped forward.<sup>222</sup> This example of Washington's speech to his troops offers an example of how he could put rhetoric to practical use. The rhetorical flourishes of this speech echoes that of Paine's pamphlets, which had previously proven to be an effective bolster to the American cause.

---

<sup>222</sup> "Account of Princeton," and "An account of the Battle of Princeton completed on April 18, 1777, by an eighty-five year old resident, name unknown," and the "Journal of Captain Thomas Rodney, 3 January 1777" in *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*, 519-23.

By January 1, 1777, Cornwallis arrived in Princeton with his 8,000 men. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, Cornwallis took 5,500 of those troops and set off after Washington at Trenton. By dusk, the Americans retreated back through Trenton and thanks to Knox's cannon were able to hold the British advance at the Assunpink Bridge. As the sun set, Cornwallis convened his officers to decide whether or not it made sense to try one last attack on the bridge to destroy Washington. Even though some at the meeting including Sir William Erskine predicted that if they did not press the attack immediately, they would not find Washington in the morning, Cornwallis decided to not risk a night attack and instead decided to "bag him in the morning."<sup>223</sup> True to the predictions, Washington's army was nowhere to be found in the morning. Leaving enough men behind to create the illusion that the army was encamped for the night, Washington pulled out of Trenton on a large, daring northward movement around to Cornwallis's rear in Princeton. Washington planned to divide his force once again, Sullivan's column would go to the right; Greene's would go to the left. The fighting broke out at daybreak on January 3<sup>rd</sup> as Greene's column ran into some British forces a couple of miles outside of Princeton. At the end of the battle, the Americans lost twenty three men; the British lost considerably more. It was another stunning, improbable success for the Americans. Washington was sorely pressed to push on to Brunswick to capture the British supplies there, but the army was too exhausted. Any such operation was way too risky, so Knox talked Washington out of it. Instead, the bedraggled yet victorious Americans slipped back into the hills near Morristown to spend the rest of the winter there, tucked safely out of reach of the British in the rugged New Jersey hills.<sup>224</sup>

---

<sup>223</sup>Lieutenant Colonel Allan Maclean to Alexander Cummings, 19 February 1777 in *ibid*.

<sup>224</sup>Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 206-62; Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 173-186.

The victories at Trenton and Princeton were of small tactical consequence to the Americans in the short term. The British were dealt two surprise blows that took a toll on the officers, yet in the broader context of the overall size of their force during the entire war, the losses were relatively minor. However, in the long term, the victories at Trenton and Princeton forced Howe to fixate on holding New Jersey and taking Philadelphia in the face of Washington's army that had not simply disappeared as he had hoped. Washington's army survived and was holding out in New Jersey; therefore Howe had to re-array his forces to counter Washington's presence. Furthermore, in order to take Philadelphia, Howe was obliged to sail around to the city's port.

#### Washington's Reading and the Development of His Strategy

The significance of these battles for the Americans is hard to overstate. After the dismal performance of both Washington and his army in New York that very nearly ended the Revolution in the late summer of 1776, Washington turned everything around by the end of the year and kept the cause alive by delivering two stunning victories that had a tremendous psychological impact on both the army and the people. He adapted his strategic thinking to embrace a defensive strategy designed at wearing away the British will to fight while keeping the survival of his own army paramount. He was learning the art of high command.<sup>225</sup> His reading was a critical component of Washington's evolving generalship because it failed him in 1776. His lack of a military education caused him to

---

<sup>225</sup>Dave R. Palmer, *George Washington: First in War* (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2000), 43. Palmer argues that the campaigns of 1776 were the culminating events in Washington's military education. This argument fits nicely with mine in that Palmer suggests that Washington's tactical knowledge gained from his limited reading in the subject was put to the test in these campaigns. Just as he had with every other endeavor in his life, Washington brought knowledge to bear with experience, learning as he went along.

make costly mistakes which resulted in defeat after defeat. Washington's eventual shift toward a defensive strategy was largely due instead to his experience. This strategic transition, however, would have been more difficult if he had extensive military education, for that combined with his aggressive nature and desire for victory likely would have inhibited his ability to see clearly the weaknesses in his army which could not be ignored.

In this way, Washington in 1776 was going through the same type of intellectual shift that he had nearly twenty years earlier when he lost his fight for a British commission. At that point when he realized he could not become British, he readily abandoned the idea of cultivating a European style intellect in favor of pursuing the ideal Virginia gentry living off turning profits as a planter while dedicating the rest of his time to public service. In 1776, he had to become a leader whose abilities would be recognized not just by his countrymen, but by the British as well. As such, he was initially less willing to see that he once again needed to take the lessons learned from his practical reading on military tactics and adapt it to his unique situation. Once he was forced to recognize that after suffering staggering defeats in New York, Washington began to evolve into the leader that history remembers him for.

It goes without saying that these early years of the Revolution were the most trying in Washington's life. He shouldered an immense burden and had few people he could confide in. Over time, the whispers of criticism of his performance in 1776 and 1777 grew louder. For all the criticism, however, Washington carried the hopes of many of his countrymen, and grateful admirers inundated Washington with printed sermons, political tracts, and newspaper articles that celebrated the cause, the army, and

the commander-in-chief himself. That said, although the business of the headquarters was unceasing, Washington added to his reading collection throughout the war besides the military books he already owned. In attempting to assess which of these texts Washington actually made the time to read, it is important to remember the extreme circumstances he faced on a daily basis. Washington was often despondent during the long campaign months that were filled with defeat and disheartening news and there was no one there to cheer him. Things improved when Martha joined him in his winter quarters, but there were long periods in between when he was most certainly alone with his dark thoughts. For all of his strength, Washington was someone who needed security and reassurance. He mentally escaped to Mount Vernon whenever possible, sending pages of instructions to his overseer in order to enjoy a bit of a distraction in making plans for the home he loved, but also to regain some sense of control over something. With the war going badly and ultimate success anything but a foregone conclusion, it is possible that he made time to read some of the sermons and periodicals sent to him in order to regain some positive perspective on his task. This assumption makes sense especially if these printed works were either written or sent by someone he knew.

Besides the matter of ego, Washington had a practical need as commander-in-chief to keep his finger on the pulse of the Revolution as it intensified. Although he maintained his belief in subordinating his role as a general to civilian authority, in the eyes of many Americans Washington was the Revolution, and he knew that. The things he read and the news he received constantly reinforced the knowledge that the people were more focused on him than they were on John Hancock as the president of the Congress, so it was necessary that he stay abreast of just how his countrymen thought

about the Revolution. As such, both his position and his reputation demanded that he maintain at least a cursory knowledge of the latest expositions on current affairs as they became available through the presses across the states.

### The Rhetoric of the American Revolution

Any analysis of Revolutionary era writings must be conducted with a thorough understanding of how language was both used and understood to describe the evolving American mentalité. The writers during this period went to extreme lengths to lay the discursive foundation of national legitimacy by careful use of both the spoken and the written word.<sup>226</sup> This effort to establish national credence would certainly have been recognized by Washington, who was likewise striving for legitimacy both for himself and for the army that he led. He was not the only one to appreciate that language was one of the Revolution's most effective weapons. John Adams correctly asserted that the American Revolution had taken place in the consciousness of the American people:

What do We Mean by the Revolution? The War? That was no part of the Revolution. It was only an Effect and Consequence of it. The Revolution was in the Minds of the People, and this was effected, from 1760-1775, in the course of fifteen Years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington.<sup>227</sup>

Even though Adams was in large part championing his own role in the Revolution in making this assertion, he was nonetheless correct in the sense that a revolution can only be carried out by people who have been convinced that doing so is both possible and right.<sup>228</sup> This intellectual process is what qualifies the war that follows from it as being a

---

<sup>226</sup> Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>227</sup> John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, 13 February 1818 in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, 2: 455.

<sup>228</sup> Looby, *Voicing America*, 31.

true revolution, not simply a rebellion. Adams's argument is further proven by applying it to Washington, for as was argued both earlier in this and in the previous chapter, he became a revolutionary ahead of many of his fellow countrymen. When he accepted the appointment as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, he was doing so as an American, not a Briton seeking the restoration of the old colonial status quo.

The self-consciousness that Adams, Washington, and the rest of the Revolutionary elite felt about the idea that language was the contested site for political action was not reserved to them alone, but was also crucially infused in popular propaganda as well.<sup>229</sup> When the colonies began resisting British policies and finally demanded independence, they were doing so not just as individuals, but as members of particular local counties or congregations. This of course does not suggest that all colonists were united at all times; rather, that the effort to stage a successful revolution was far more encompassing than just the elite who were at the vanguard of the movement.<sup>230</sup> Colonists across class lines understood that the language used to either support or decry the Revolution was politically charged in a distinct, eighteenth-century manner. For instance, the law was widely read and understood by a considerable cross section of colonial American society, the result being that not only was the practice of law far more difficult then as opposed to more recent times, but it also had a profound impact on the way that Revolutionary discourse was written.<sup>231</sup> The combined effect of this Revolutionary rhetoric that uniquely interwove legal, political, and religious discourse was that the people living through these times were a part of a sophisticated

---

<sup>229</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>230</sup>J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty: 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., 10.

rhetorical culture, wherein everyone from lawyers to legislators, military officers, planters, and merchants had a particular understanding of distinctive political nuance.<sup>232</sup>

#### Washington's Collection of Revolutionary War Sermons

When examining the religious writings that Washington collected, it is critical to bear in mind that these printed sermons had as much or more to do with politics than theology. Nearly every pulpit in America was politicized during this period either for or against the patriot cause. Therefore, when considering the reasons why Washington may have read these works, it may or may not have been for religious inspiration. These sermons could provide Washington with a sense of reassurance that the public still held him and the Cause that he embodied in high regard. That reassurance would have been sorely needed over the course of that long retreat across New Jersey, during the winter at Valley Forge, and the even harsher winter at Morristown. However, it was not just vanity that drove Washington to want to know that the public was still on his side. It was also the fact that he needed to know that the American people still supported the war because for the most part, it was not obvious. States routinely failed to meet their recruiting quotas as set forth by the Congress and the army was chronically undersupplied with everything it needed including pay, uniforms, weapons, ammunition, food, medicine, and horses. Washington needed evidence that the people were still behind the war, so that he in turn could reassure his troops who were torn between their duty to support their families and obligation they felt to serve a service that often entailed suffering with little tangible reward. Washington needed to keep his troops in the army; he and his recruiting

---

<sup>232</sup> Terrence Ball and J.G.A. Pocock, *Conceptual Change and the Constitution* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1988), 2-3.

officers had to rely largely on rhetoric in order to do so. The very style in which many of these sermons, pamphlets, and newspaper articles were written included many ideas and turns of phrase that would have been useful to Washington and his recruiting staff.

Moreover, the literary style in which these works were written along with their ideological undertones would have been familiar to most of the men in the audiences they were directed at.<sup>233</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup>Historians have long debated the significance of the role that religion played in the American Revolution. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians closely linked Protestant Christianity to the Patriot Cause, but Progressive era historians were eager to rid the historiography of its overly Protestant distortions and instead stressed the influence of Enlightenment reason on the revolutionary leaders. By the 1960s, many historians began to reinterpret the question by incorporating both religion and Enlightenment influences as working together to shape the intellectual origins of the American Revolution. See Arthur Benedict Berthold, *American Colonial Printing as Determined by Contemporary Cultural Forces, 1639-1763* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1934); Ruth Bloch, "Religion and Ideological Change in the American Revolution," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s* ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 41-61; Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Many other historians since have sensed the connection between the Great Awakening and the Revolution, but reject the notion of any direct ideological connections between the two events. See Cushing Strout, *The New Heavens and New Earth: Political Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). More recently, Jon Butler cast significant doubt on any interpretation that stressed the influence of the Great Awakening on the Revolution. He calls the American Revolution "a profoundly secular event" and heavily critiques Heimert for placing too much emphasis on evangelicalism at the expense of the multiplicity of religious faiths that abounded in the colonies at the time. Still, he devoted thirteen pages of his book to the religious influence on the American Revolution, a move that is more akin to Bonomi's interpretation. See Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). After Butler's more secular interpretation of the origins of revolutionary ideology, others seemed to follow in rapid succession, but they were not without their critics. Harry Stout highlighted the extreme degree to which the Progressive era historians seemed to downplay religion, citing them as the cause for the more recent historians' more secular arguments. Perry Miller likewise argued that any historian who cannot see the degree to which religion influenced the American Revolution likely is not well enough versed in theology, and is therefore not equipped to interpret colonial documents correctly. See: Harry Stout, "Religion, Communications, and the Career of George Whitefield," in *Communication and Change in Religious History*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 109; Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in *The Shaping of American Religion, Religion in American Life*, vol. 1, ed. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 340. Much more recent is the work of Mark Noll who delineated many of the connections between republican thought and the disparate theologies of the colonials. He effectively demonstrates a much deeper degree to which they were intertwined than any previous historian who attempted to bridge the religious versus secular gap. See Mark A. Noll: *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Noll's arguments about how the ambiguity of the colonial vocabulary enabled politics and religion to be talked about in interchangeable terms and the impact that had on audiences who

What is also striking when considering Washington's sermon collection as a whole is how closely it chronicles the transformation of the American Revolution from a struggle to restore English liberties to a war to achieve complete independence from Great Britain. The earliest example in Washington's collection is William Smith's, *A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs. Preached at Christ-Church, June 23, 1775. At the Request of the Officers of the Third Battalion of the City of Philadelphia, and District of Southwark. By William Smith, D.D., Provost of the College of that City*. Preached just nine days after Washington's appointment as commander-in-chief and the formal establishment of the Continental Army, Smith's sermon argues vehemently for the justice of the American cause, but makes very clear the fact that independence was not the goal; rather, the Americans were engaged in a struggle to restore the old status quo of British rule.<sup>234</sup> Smith was preaching to men who thought they were the rightful inheritors of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In other words, the struggle that was just beginning on the far flung battlefields around Boston was one to restore the glory of the English Constitution.

Another such example of a justification for rebellion to restore English liberties from Washington's collection is, Thomas Coombe's, *A Sermon Preached Before the Congregations of Christ-Church and St. Peter's, Philadelphia, on Thursday, July 20, 1775. Being the Day Recommended by the Honorable Continental Congress for a*

---

listened to this rhetoric is supported by Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States*; and Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). For an even more enthusiastic interpretation of the impact of evangelical preaching on the coming of the Revolution, see Jerome D. Maheffey, *Preaching Politics: The Religious Rhetoric of George Whitefield and the Founding of a New Nation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

<sup>234</sup>William Smith, *A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs. Preached at Christ-Church, June 23, 1775. At the Request of the Officers of the Third Battalion of the City of Philadelphia, and District of Southwark* (Philadelphia: James Humphries, 1775).

*General Fast Throughout the Twelve United Colonies of North America.* Coombe draws on a passage from 2 Chronicles to make the argument that like the ancient Israelites who cast their eyes to God to deliver them in the face of a superior enemy coming against them, the colonists also stood against an mightier power that unjustly demanded submission from their brethren who had been loyal members of the same family. The sermon is constructed with language about loyalty, family, constitutionality and Providence. Weaving together passages from scripture with contemporary political events, this sermon plainly infuses the American Cause with a sense of righteousness, but yet stops short of calling for independence.<sup>235</sup> In the same vein as the previous example from William Smith, Coombe's sermon reflected the current situation in 1775. Therein lies a key to understanding both the language and the purpose of these political sermons. The clergy were simply reflecting upon the political situation of the moment. The pulpit served as a platform for announcing the goals of the American Revolution, but those goals were often conceived of elsewhere by others. For the most part, these clergy saw themselves not only as the link between God and the people, but also as necessary intermediaries between the revolutionary movement's leaders and the citizens who were being asked to choose sides, infusing a sense of sacredness into a war being waged over political principles.<sup>236</sup>

As the war transformed into one for independence from Great Britain, the message of the sermons likewise changed to reflect this ideological shift. Two such

---

<sup>235</sup> Thomas Coombe, *A Sermon Preached Before the Congregations of Christ-Church and St. Peter's, Philadelphia, on Thursday, July 20, 1775. Being the Day Recommended by the Honorable Continental Congress for a General Fast Throughout the Twelve United Colonies of North-America.* By Thomas Coombe, M.A. Chaplain to the Most Noble The Marquis of Rockingham. Published By Request (Philadelphia: 1775).

<sup>236</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution*, 115-130.

examples from Washington's collection are: *The Separation of the Jewish Tribes, After the Death of Solomon, Accounted For, and Applied to the Present Day, In A Sermon Preached Before the General Court, on Friday, July 4, 1777. Being the Anniversary of the Declaration of Independency*, and Chaplain John Hurt's, *The Love of Our Country. A Sermon Preached Before the Virginia Troops in New Jersey*.<sup>237</sup> These sermons were written by army chaplains and therefore reflect the degree to which revolutionary rhetoric began to resonate within the ranks. Additionally, the fact that Washington chose to keep copies of these chaplains' sermons says something about the role he believed the clergy, and organized religion played in the Revolution. When the Congress authorized the appointment of chaplains to minister to each of the regiments of the Continental Army, Washington mandated attendance at Sunday services for all soldiers. Furthermore, he insisted that the chaplains be afforded the proper degree of courtesy on pain of God's wrath, for "the blessing and protection of Heaven are at all times necessary but especially so in times of public distress and danger & the General hopes and trusts, that every officer and man, will endeavor so to live, and act, as becomes a Christian soldier defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country."<sup>238</sup> Here, Washington's choice of language in this general order was a reflection of the message emanating from the pulpits across the Continental Army encampments each Sunday morning. Moreover, even before chaplains were officially sanctioned by the Congress, Washington recognized and welcomed the contribution that evangelical clergy were making to promote the American cause. Specifically, he commended a minister who was to become one of his favorite chaplains, Abiel Leonard of Connecticut for his particular talent for explaining to the soldiers the

---

<sup>237</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 106.

<sup>238</sup>General Orders, 9 July 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. See also, Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 118.

inherent sacredness of their political rights.<sup>239</sup> Therefore, whether or not Washington was theologically aligned with his chaplains, he clearly viewed organized religion as being a key to the successful outcome of the war for it would go a long way towards inspiring both a regard for discipline and a sense of duty in the soldiers.

Interestingly, Washington's collection of revolutionary sermons includes those written by authors on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, he received two copies of a political sermon delivered by Richard Price in England, printed first in London in 1776, and then re-printed in Philadelphia shortly thereafter entitled, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War With America: To Which is Added, an Appendix Containing a State of the National Debt, an Estimate of the Money Drawn from the Public by Taxes, and an Account of the National Income and Expenditure Since the Last War*. Price was a dissenting minister in England who was known to many of the American revolutionary leaders as a friend of the colonies. This sermon in particular recognized the legitimacy of all the colonial grievances against the King and Parliament for trampling on the colonists' collective English liberties. It further delineated the staggering amount of money spent by Great Britain during the Seven Years' War, while negating the argument first advanced by Lord Grenville that the war had been fought on behalf of the colonies and so they should therefore welcome the various taxation acts as just payment for services rendered. Price argued instead that the ministers were 'strangely misinformed' and that it should have come as no surprise that the Americans resisted.<sup>240</sup> Price's arguments must have been

---

<sup>239</sup>Ibid., see also Washington to Governor John Trumbull, 15 December 1775 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>240</sup>Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America: To Which is Added, an Appendix Containing a State of the*

reassuring to the Americans who persisted in waging what at the time appeared to be a losing war. For Washington in particular, the fact that an Englishman's recognition of the justice of the American Cause was circulating in print throughout England, Ireland, and the colonies would have been heartening.

Washington seemed to have a set of favored authors. For example, his collection includes several works by Uzal Ogden.<sup>241</sup> Including *A Sermon Delivered at Roxbury, in Morris County, March 19, 1781: At the Funeral of Mrs. Hackett, Relict of Colonel John Hackett*, and two different sermons similarly entitled, *A Sermon on Practical Religion* (the first delivered at Newark, New Jersey on August 15, 1779, and the second delivered in 1782).<sup>242</sup> These sermons all in similar tones extol the Christian virtues and the benefits

---

*National Debt, An Estimate of the Money Drawn from the Public by the Taxes, and Account of the National Income and Expenditure Since the Last War* (London: 1776); Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 168-69.

<sup>241</sup>Uzal Ogden and his family were Patriots during the Revolution. Ogden began as a missionary in Sussex County, New Jersey after studying theology under the Rev. Dr. Thomas B. Chandler. He was ordained a priest by the Bishop of London in 1773. Although offered various posts at southern Anglican parishes, Ogden chose to remain in New Jersey, and did not become a loyalist when the war broke out as did the majority of Anglican clergy. In a more multi-denominational, war torn colony he found himself having to minister to people from various denominational affiliations, and was comfortable borrowing some practices and ideals from them, particularly. He was a prolific pamphleteer. The sermons cited above by Ogden pre-date when the correspondence between the two men. After the war ended, Ogden began to inundate Washington with copies of his sermons and pamphlets. Washington acknowledged receipt of two of them in a letter dated 6 July 1789, and specifically stated that he did not have the chance to read them; see the exchange of letters between Washington and Ogden in 1785 and 1789 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. This makes sense because Washington had recently begun his first presidential term and was inordinately busy, just as much if not more than at the outset of the Revolution. Evidently, he felt the need to keep the sermons anyway, although it is not clear whether or not he ever made time to read them. After the war, Ogden became embroiled in a controversy over authorship of a prayer book for the developing American Episcopal Church, alienating the Rev. Dr. William White and the Rev. William Smith, two priests whose works also appear in Washington's collection. Washington keenly followed the developments of the American Episcopal Church, and the issue of whether or not American bishops would have to be consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury reached Washington's desk after he became president (to be discussed in the next chapter). Ogden's correspondence is in the collections of the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, NJ. For his role in the prayer book debate and that over the question of an American Bishop in the postwar United States, see the *Journals of the Diocese of New Jersey 1785-Present* and the *Journals of the General Convention 1785 - Present* at archives of the Diocese of New Jersey, Trenton, NJ.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 153-4.

of maintaining a devotion to Christian worship.<sup>243</sup> This very straightforward text that urges adherence to disciplined orthodoxy as a means for living a good life and achieving a good death makes perfect sense for Washington who was working so hard to instill these values in his troops as the previous example from his general orders demonstrates. Even the funeral sermon for a colonel's wife reinforces the ideals of liberty, virtue, and piety, terms which were linked to the patriot rhetoric. The sermon promises eternal life in Heaven to these who lived according to those virtues.<sup>244</sup> As such, this same sermon could have just as easily been delivered to eulogize any soldier killed in battle, and therefore had offered an opportunity for a practical application for Washington, who, as was mentioned earlier, was constantly in search of rhetoric to bolster his recruiting efforts.

Another cleric who is heavily represented in Washington's religious collection is Granville Sharp, an English Anglican priest whose writings are even more overtly political than that of Ogden. Sharp was an outspoken critic of the British policies towards the colonies and of the prosecution of the war specifically. Washington had in his collection seventeen of Sharp's works, mostly on the subject of the American war. Of additional interest, one of Sharp's works, *An appendix to the Representation (printed in the year 1769) of the injustice and dangerous tendency of tolerating slavery, or, of admitting the least claim of private property in the persons of men in England addresses the immorality of the institution of slavery both in America as well as Britain's toleration*

---

<sup>243</sup> Uzal Ogden, *A Sermon on Practical Religion: Delivered at Newark, New Jersey, August 15, 1779* (Chatham, NJ: Shepard Kollock, 1779); Ogden, *A Sermon on Practical Religion* (Chatham, NJ: Shepard Kollock, 1782).

<sup>244</sup> Ogden, *A Sermon Delivered at Roxbury, in Morris County, March 19, 1781: At the Funeral of Mrs. Hackett, Relict of Colonel John Hackett* (Chatham, NJ: Shepard Kollock, 1781).

of it.<sup>245</sup> This is one of twenty volumes on the subject of slavery in Washington's collection all of which address, in one way or another, the moral inconsistencies of the system, either hinting at or directly calling for the need for its abolition. The significance of Sharp's and the other works on slavery will be explored more fully in chapter six in the context of Washington's decision to free his slaves in his will.

Washington also had in his collection five works by the Methodist leader, John Wesley. Wesley's sermons were printed at the conclusion of the Revolution and unlike the majority of the others discussed in this chapter, are centered on religious themes. What is noteworthy about them is that first, there are five of them, thereby indicating more of an interest in Wesley's writing on Washington's part. Second, the two men never corresponded with each other, so unlike many of the other authors whose work from the period from 1775 to 1799 appeared in Washington's collection these five were not gifts from Wesley himself. Third, these sermons became available during the period around the end of the Revolution when Washington's home state of Virginia was debating enacting into state law Thomas Jefferson's *Statute of Religious Freedom*. Although Washington was in the process of retiring and withdrawing from public life and was therefore not a member of the Virginia assembly that passed the law in 1786, he actively followed developing political affairs. Moreover, after his tenure with the Continental Army that exposed him to various forms of Christian worship, it is possible that as he followed the movement in Virginia to disestablish the Church of England once and for all, he sought to learn more about the increasing popularity of one of the Anglicans' chief rivals, the Methodists. He had been a burgess in Virginia when the bishop question dominated the agenda and pitted church against the state and the will of

---

<sup>245</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 179-82.

the people, so he understood both the significance of disestablishing the church and the impact that religious questions had on society.

#### Washington's Collection of Revolutionary War Political Tracts and Periodicals

Washington's need to follow all of the latest developments in current affairs throughout the Revolutionary era meant that he read more than just sermons. He also amassed a considerable number of political pamphlets and copies of the records of the Continental Congress, as well as those of the House of Burgesses, later the Virginia Assembly. Of the legislative records that Washington collected, it is probable that he read only those passed by the Continental Congress as they had immediate application to the activities of his army. The records of Virginia were sent to Washington by Richard Henry Lee, and Washington likely had little time to read them as he was too occupied with the war effort really to follow the legislative affairs of one state, albeit his home state.<sup>246</sup>

Washington's collection of political tracts outlines the scope of the ideological debate over the American crisis with Britain. He seemed to have an interest in developing an understanding of both sides of the conflict with Great Britain. For example, he received from his Philadelphia agent, William Milnor, a copy of Thomas Bradbury Chandler's (attributed to Myles Cooper) *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of Our Political Confusion, In Which the Necessary Consequences of Violently Opposing the King's Troops, and of a General Non-Importation Are Fairly Stated*, along with Charles Lee's refutation, *Strictures on a*

---

<sup>246</sup> Richard Henry Lee to Washington, 26 September 1775 in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

*Pamphlet: A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of Our Political Confusion, In Which the Necessary Consequences of Violently Opposing the King's Troops, and of a General Non-Importation Are Fairly Stated.*<sup>247</sup> Chandler's *Friendly Address* flatly condemned the revolutionaries' rash actions and argued that it was "high time therefore to awaken the thoughtless to a sense of danger, and to think of providing for our common safety." Chandler further asserted that "our own misconduct has brought it forward; and our immediate reformation must stop its progress. He must be blind, that is not convinced of this; and he must be infatuated, that will pursue the road, which evidently terminates in darkness and destruction."<sup>248</sup> Charles Lee's response condemned Chandler's argument point by point in similarly plain language, arguing that "the design of his Pamphlet is manifestly to dissolve the spirit of union, and check the noble ardor prevailing through the continent; but his zeal so far outruns his abilities, that there is the greatest reason to think that his Reverence has labored to little effect." Lee drew a parallel between the commonly held views that Charles I was a tyrant to the popular opinion of George III's conduct in order to decry Chandler's call for passive obedience to the monarch as "a mark of lunacy."<sup>249</sup> Washington also had another pamphlet written by Chandler, *What Think Ye of the Congress Now, Or, An Enquiry, How Far the Americans Are Bound to Abide By, and Execute the Decisions of the late Congress?*<sup>250</sup> Chandler's pro-British arguments in this pamphlet were counterbalanced in

---

<sup>247</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 59. See also William Milnor to Washington, 29 November 1774 in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

<sup>248</sup> Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, On the Subject of Our Political Confusions in Which the Necessary Consequences of Violently Opposing the King's Troops, and of A General Non-Importation Are Fairly Stated* (New York: 1774), 5.

<sup>249</sup> Charles Lee, *Strictures on a Pamphlet, Entitled, "A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of Our Political Confusions."* Addressed to the People of America (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, 1774), 1-4.

<sup>250</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 59.

Washington's collection with the presence of writings by some of Washington's fellow delegates to the Continental Congress. One such example is John Dickinson's *A Declaration by the Representatives of the United Colonies of North America Now Met in General Congress in Philadelphia, Setting Forth the Causes and Necessity of Their Taking Up Arms*. Washington was so persuaded by Dickinson's argument that he forwarded a copy to his closest friend, George William Fairfax, who had returned to England due to his loyalist leanings.<sup>251</sup> Additionally, along with Dickinson's pamphlet Washington also forwarded a copy of the Continental Congress's address to the inhabitants of Great Britain, which was a direct appeal to the British people to accept the justness of the American Cause. He notified Fairfax of his appointment as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army in the letter he sent with the pamphlets, and reported the casualties sustained at Bunker Hill because he was certain that Fairfax would "have a very erroneous account transmitted, of the loss sustained on the side of the Provincials." Washington expressed his confidence that on the American side there were no more "than 139 killed 36 missing and 278 Wounded; nor had we, if I can credit the most solemn assurances of the Officers that were in the action, above 1500 men engaged that day." He went on to state that "the loss on the side of the Ministerial Troops, as I am informed from good authority, consisted of 1,043 killed and wounded, whereof 92 were Officers."<sup>252</sup> Although the language of this letter is terse, on second reading it appears that Washington was attempting to make his friend understand his rationale for accepting the command. Despite the fact that Fairfax made the decision to return to England, the two men remained close so it makes sense that Washington would do this.

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 57. See also Washington to George William Fairfax, 25 July 1775 in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. See also the editorial notes attached to this letter.

Washington had copies of his fellow Virginian Arthur Lee's pamphlets that he originally composed in England for British audiences. These included: *An Appeal to the Justice and Interests of the People of Great Britain in the Present Disputes With America*," "A Second Appeal to the Justice and Interests of the People, On the Measures Respecting America," and "A Speech Intended to Have Been Delivered in the House of Commons in Support of the Petition from the General Congress at Philadelphia, all written and published in 1775.<sup>253</sup> Lee's writing bore all the hallmarks of an American fully trained in English common law and is therefore brimming with that particular brand of rhetoric used during this period to justify the colonists' claims against Great Britain. In addition to Lee's legalistic arguments on the justness of the American position, Washington had Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, and the *American Crisis*, whose masterful use of plain language distills the rhetoric into a heated condemnation of George III and the need to carry on the war, both of which had a profound effect on the people at large.<sup>254</sup> These different works presented Washington with the full range of opinions on the Revolution in both learned and popular language. These together provided him with a well-rounded understanding of how the people understood the conflict as it changed over time.

Besides religious tracts, printed sermons, and political pamphlets, Washington subscribed to multiple periodicals as another means of keeping track of current events. During the Revolution he maintained subscriptions to multiple periodicals including: *Monthly and Critical Reviews*, *Annual Register for 1781*, *Annual Register for 1782*,

---

<sup>253</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 122.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 156-57. Refer back to footnote 51. For an analysis of *Common Sense* and its significance see Scott Liell, *46 Pages: Thomas Paine, Common Sense, and the Turning Point to Independence* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2003).

*Pennsylvania Packet*, and *Political Magazine*.<sup>255</sup> Of these, the *Pennsylvania Packet* was expressly subscribed for Washington's particular use during the war by the publisher John Dunlap. It is interesting that with that one exception, the other four periodicals were all English publications. The disproportionate number of English journals is perhaps indicative of Washington's need to maintain an awareness of how the events of the war were represented in the popular press on both sides of the Atlantic.

### The Significance of Washington's Revolutionary Era Reading

Washington's growing personal library during the Revolutionary period when taken as a whole is revealing. By concentrating his energies and what free time he had to reading military field manuals, political pamphlets, overtly political religious works, and periodicals, Washington was able to maintain an understanding of the total progress of the Revolution, both within and beyond the army. He combined this self-directed reading with his natural penchant for leadership to become the very personification of the Revolution itself. As commander-in-chief, he had to realize that success hinged on abandoning the attempt to try to be a European style general and instead develop a plan that would preserve his army. He did so by building his force from the ground up, relying on a handful of the latest tactical guides to lay the necessary foundations in conjunction with his previous experience as commander of the Virginia Regiment. He further shaped his strategy by maintaining an awareness of public opinion as expressed through various forms of print media from periodicals to pamphlets, to sermons. His

---

<sup>255</sup> These periodicals offered reprints of political essays from both sides of the Atlantic. Although the preponderance of the articles was of British origin, a fair number of American authors were featured. Over time, as tensions intensified between Great Britain and the colonies, the overall representation of American writers increased.

reading always had an immediate application to the circumstances he was in, and he learned to adjust his thinking as he combined reading knowledge with his continually developing understanding of his circumstances. Just as his conscious rejection of classical reading in favor of a practical study of subjects like agriculture brought him wealth and status before the war, his revolutionary era reading helped him as a general.

## Chapter 4 ó Presidential Reading

All of Manhattan was abuzz with anticipation the morning of April 30, 1789, for it was the dawn of a new era for Americans who lived through decades of Revolutionary upheaval and uncertainty to see a new nation born against incredible odds. At precisely nine o'clock in the morning, church bells rang out across the New York City for the better part of a half hour, summoning congregations to assemble and pray for President-elect Washington. The faithful dutifully answered the call, and then made their way down Broadway to Federal Hall to await the much anticipated inauguration of the republic's favorite son. An estimated 10,000 people crowded the street beneath the balcony where the ceremony was set to take place hoping to catch a glimpse of the great man although of course, they had no hope of hearing a single word of his speech. Among the crowd was a self-professed Washington enthusiast who described the event as being nothing short of a religious experience. In a letter that was published in newspapers throughout the nation, the enraptured citizen wrote:

The scene was awful, beyond description. It would seem extraordinary, that the administration of an oath, a ceremony so very common and familiar should, in so great a degree, excite the public curiosity. But the circumstances of his election ó the impression of his past services ó the concourse of spectators - the devout fervency with which he repeated the oath ó and the reverential manner in which he bowed down and kissed the sacred volume ó all these conspired to render it one of the most august and interesting spectacles ever exhibited on this globe. It seemed from the number of witnesses, to be a solemn appeal to Heaven and earth at once! I confess, that I was under an awful and religious persuasion, that the gracious Ruler of the universe was looking down at that moment with particular complacency on an act, which to a part of his creatures was so very important. Under this impression, when the Chancellor pronounced in a very feeling manner, "Long Live George Washington," my sensibility was wound to such a pitch, that I could do no more than wave my hat with the rest, without the power of joining the repeated acclamations which rent the air.<sup>256</sup>

---

<sup>256</sup> "Extract of a letter from New-York, May 2," *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston), 23 May 1789. Washington's act of kissing the Bible upon completing the oath of office has been a subject of some debate since the event took place. There are four eyewitness accounts that positively attest to Washington's

This exuberant observer was not the only one overawed by the scene on that warm, spring afternoon. The newly minted President Washington was described by those closer to him on the balcony as being so moved by the immensity of both the crowd and the task he was about to undertake so much so that he did one or two things that were distinctly out of character. After taking the oath of office, he suddenly seized the hefty pulpit Bible from the hands of the unsuspecting Samuel Otis (Secretary of the Senate) in order to kiss it, which must have taken everyone by surprise.<sup>257</sup> Following the ceremony, the nerve-wracked President Washington returned to the Senate Chamber to deliver his inaugural address that was best described as hesitating, and worst as embarrassed and clumsy. He frankly admitted to the assembly that nothing had ever made him as anxious as the news of his election; he had grown despondent as he considered his own "inferior endowments from nature." He drew strength from God, however, who as the "Great Author of every public and private good," had bestowed his blessings on the people of the United States and the new government.<sup>258</sup>

---

actions including this anonymous newspaper account. The other three are from Samuel Otis, William A. Duer, and Eliza S.M. Quincy. Samuel Otis, Secretary of the Senate whose account is entered in the "Journal of the Secretary of the Senate, 1789-1813," in RG46, Records of the United States Senate [8E2/22/15/1], 187. William A. Duer witnessed the ceremony from a rooftop of one of the nearest buildings to Federal Hall and claimed to have a direct line of sight to where Washington stood; "William A. Duer's Description of the Inauguration" is entered in the record of the First Federal Congress, *Documentary History*, 15: 396. Eliza S.M. Quincy witnessed the ceremony of the rooftop of the house on Broadway that was nearest to Federal Hall and claimed to be close enough to not only see Washington, but also hear him speak. Her account is included in the *Memoir of the Life of Eliza S.M. Quincy*, 52.

<sup>257</sup> Chernow, *Washington*, 568.

<sup>258</sup> George Washington, "First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789," in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick. Available from The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799 [database online].

In the end, those who witnessed Washington's first official performances as President were not overly inspired.<sup>259</sup> The question that everyone in the assembly (not to mention Washington himself) must have been asking is why was he so awkward? He was after all America's great hero who had previously mastered the art of public appearance as he demonstrated time and again. He had put down the Newburgh conspiracy, bade farewell to his officers, submitted his resignation to the Continental Congress, and he presided over the Constitutional Convention. What then made the inauguration so difficult?

By setting all the criticism aside and looking at the event itself, it is not difficult to see why Washington was so hesitant. It was not easy to be first. Not only was he the most famous man in America, but he was well aware of the fact that he was the only one who could make the presidency and the federal government as a whole a success.<sup>260</sup> He had nothing to guide him. The United States was attempting a republican experiment that was utterly different from the closest examples from history: Ancient Rome, Cromwell's Protectorate, and the Dutch Republic.<sup>261</sup> One can just imagine the thoughts that were

---

<sup>259</sup> Joseph Ellis, *His Excellency George Washington*, 185-6. See also the editorial note, 30 April 1789, in W.W. Abbott and Dorothy Twohig eds. *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, 11 vols. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985 - ), 2: 155-57.

<sup>260</sup> Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Lincoln Thomas Johnson, and Gouverneur Morris were among those who urged Washington to accept the presidency after the Constitution was ratified. See Stuart Leibiger, *Founding Friendship: George Washington, James Madison, and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 100-101. See also, Alexander Hamilton to Washington, 13 August 1788, 13 September 1788; Washington to Alexander Hamilton, 28 August, 3 October 1788 in Harold C. Syrett ed. *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1979), 5:201-2 220-23, 207-8, 222-24; Benjamin Lincoln to Washington, 24 September 1788, Thomas Johnson to Washington, 10 October 1788, Gouverneur Morris to Washington, 6 December 1788, Washington to Benjamin Lincoln, 26 October 1788, Washington to Jonathan Trumbull Jr., 4 December 1788, Washington to Lewis Morris, 13 December 1788, Washington to William Gordon, 23 December 1788, in W.W. Abbott and Dorothy Twohig eds. *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, 1:6-7, 42, 165-66, 71-73, 136, 159, 178, 200.

<sup>261</sup> One of the most recent interpretations of the impact of Roman history on the American Revolutionaries see Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009). Shalev argues that Americans relied heavily on the classical world in order to articulate their attitudes towards their own

running through Washington's mind immediately after he was notified of his election to the presidency. How was he supposed to conduct himself? How was he supposed to make his inauguration and his subsequent public appearances sufficiently ceremonial without too closely invoking images of monarchy?

It is important to remember that Washington's nervousness ran deep. He had never been comfortable with political power, and becoming the nation's first chief executive brought him an overwhelming command of it. The Constitution was deliberately vague so as to executive (and judicial) responsibilities because the founders had paid greater attention to the composition and powers of the national legislature, and had little precedent for defining presidential powers. That vagueness would be a source of difficulty for Washington to negotiate at different times throughout his presidency. Moreover, he doubted his ability to do the job.<sup>262</sup> His solution was characteristic given the way that he approached his command of the Continental Army during the Revolution; he surrounded himself with the most talented minds to assist him. As a general, he called his staff his "military family;" as president, he called them his "cabinet." This was a fortuitous decision for several reasons. First, it would be overwhelming for any president to execute his duties without advisors. Second, by surrounding himself with qualified individuals whose opinions carried significant weight in decision making, Washington was carefully trying to avoid the criticism that he sought to hoard power in order to rule alone. He believed in this great republican experiment and therefore had no desire to be a

---

history as well as the future. For an examination of how the Dutch perceived their republic in their golden age see Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 51-93. For an examination of Cromwell's Protectorate in the context of the Glorious Revolution see Steve Pincus: *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 382.

<sup>262</sup>See footnote 308, specifically Washington's responses to those who urged him to accept the presidency.

king or dictator, and he was fearful of doing anything that could besmirch his hard-earned reputation.

Washington's awareness of history and his developing place in it relates back to his reading. As he was raised with an appreciation of British heritage, Washington had purchased Tobias Smollett's *History of England*, and in it would have read the celebratory descriptions of Elizabeth I's political skills as queen during one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of the realm.<sup>263</sup> Indeed, much of Smollett's characterization of Elizabeth's leadership can be similarly applied to Washington:

She was endowed with a great share of natural penetration: she had observed the characters of mankind. Knowing how to distinguish merit, she made choice of able counselors. She administered justice impartially, without respect of persons: she regulated her expense with such economy as could not but be agreeable to her subjects; and having been accustomed to dissimulation she not only assumed the utmost complacency in her deportment, but affected such an ardor of love and regard for her subjects, as could not fail to produce the warmest return of confidence and affection. Her frugality was not so much the effect of her natural disposition, as the result of good sense and deliberate reflection.<sup>264</sup>

The lessons of English history thus informed Washington, but this was monarchical history, so he would therefore need contemporary sources to draw upon in order to determine if his performance as a republican head of state hit the mark with the American people who still lived under the long shadow cast by the Crown.

Just as he had done during the American Revolution, Washington incorporated reading into his execution of public duties. As president, he was, of course, inordinately busy, but he did make time to read when possible, especially periodicals. Newspapers, pamphlets, and political sermons were the primary means by which he could gauge how

---

<sup>263</sup> See footnote 48.

<sup>264</sup> Tobias Smollett, *A Complete History of England, From the Descent of Julius Caesar to the Treaty of Aix la Chapelle, 1748 Containing the Transactions of One Thousand Eight Hundred and Three Years* (London: Printed for J. Rivington and J. Fletcher, at the Oxford Theater, 1758), 1: 326.

the American people responded to his performance as he did his best to forge a republican future out of a monarchical past. The fact that Washington was to be the setter of precedents for all of his successors was a daunting prospect, but the presidency would prove to be vastly different from the challenges that he had faced when given command of the Continental Army in 1775. This time, Washington had the enormous benefit of his reputation to rely on. However, the task he faced as the first president was to set the parameters of the office in order to legitimate the Constitution as a form of government that would prove resistant to republican excesses on one extreme and the potential for despotic rule on the other. Accomplishing this task would require a delicate balance of investing the office with dignity by incorporating familiar signs and symbols of authority into the presidential routine while giving them a uniquely American twist. He had to exude authority without appearing too much like a king. This was uncharted territory, and in order to be successful, Washington had to maintain an awareness of public opinion from an array of sources outside of his presidential office.

What follows is an examination of what Washington read during the years between the end of the Revolution and the end of his two terms in office. This will offer an opportunity to delve into the construction of the American presidency as an institution as well how early republicans saw themselves and this new nation they were bringing forth. Washington's collection during this period expanded tremendously in size for he received a deluge of gifts from authors eager to secure his endorsement, and others who were looking to curry favor in general. Washington's daily schedule did not permit him time to read many books during this period, but he did read as often and as much as he could. Unlike his first foray into politics as a member of the House of Burgesses,

Washington could not take his time to study law, political philosophy, and religion and gradually become more involved in issues as he became comfortable. This time, his focus was exclusively on the contemporary issues as they were developing.

### Washington's Homecoming

When Washington took his leave from public life in Congress in 1783, he was eager to get back to Mount Vernon. After he arrived home, Washington was faced with the reality that his estate was in disarray. The financial toll exacted on Washington's fortune as a result of the war and his refusal to accept a salary was substantial. He remarked to his nephew, Fielding Lewis Jr., "I made no money from my estate during the nine years I was absent from it and brought none home with me."<sup>265</sup> Washington quickly figured out that it would not be possible to remedy the situation quickly. More than a year after returning home, Washington despaired in a letter to Henry Knox that his business affairs "can no longer be neglected without involving my ruin."<sup>266</sup> By 1785, Washington nudged his estate manager of over twenty-one years, Lund Washington, aside and began personally managing the five farms that constituted the seven thousand acre Mount Vernon estate – Muddy Hole, Dogue Run, Union, River, and Mansion House. At this point, Washington's land holdings had expanded so greatly that he was unable to personally oversee all of them so he implemented a weekly reporting system from each of his respective overseers that demanded "an account of the stock and every occurrence

---

<sup>265</sup> Washington to Fielding Lewis, 24 February 1784, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>266</sup> Washington to Henry Knox, 5 January 1785 in *ibid*.

that happensí minutely detailedí every Saturday.ö<sup>267</sup> He had a bottomless appetite for details regarding his estate, and he longed to devote all of his energies to remodeling it to such a degree that it would surpass its pre-war glory. He began corresponding with the English agricultural reformer Arthur Young, who sent Washington multiple volumes of the series, *Annals of Agriculture*, to which Young was a major contributor. Young was a proponent of advancing the science of agriculture as opposed to relying exclusively on time honored techniques. Washington eventually owned thirty-two of these volumes which he diligently studied, copying out entire passages that were of a particular interest, as he had done with other agricultural texts before.<sup>268</sup> Washington and Young conducted transatlantic conversation about plows, farmyard design, soil, seeds, and crop rotation. Washington's main problem was the exhausted soil of his farms which had not been properly managed during his long absence. He began an ambitious program of revitalization by conducting his own experiments with fertilizers made from manure and soil dredged from the bottom of the Potomac. Washington also devised a complex system of crop rotation to re-infuse his soil with nutrients that called for the planting in succession: corn with potatoes and carrots, buckwheat, wheat, peas, barley, oats, and red clover.<sup>269</sup>

---

<sup>267</sup> Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds. *The Diaries of George Washington*, 6 vols. (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1976-9), 4: 255. See also Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit*, 507. Walsh includes a criticism of Washington's plantation management in her discussion of Richard Corbin's efficiency, citing that Washington did not emplace such rigid tracking mechanisms until the 1790s. I disagree with Walsh's characterization of Washington because she neglects the enormous fact that Washington was away from his estates for so many years during his public service.

<sup>268</sup> Arthur Young to Washington, 7 January 1786, and 1 February 1787, Washington to Young, 6 August 1786, and 1 November 1787 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. See also Washington's diaries from 1786 in *ibid* for specific notes about how he applied the information from Young to his plantations. Additionally, see Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 231. See also, Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 8-9.

<sup>269</sup> For the complete details of Washington's agricultural activities during this period, see his diaries from the Confederation series beginning 11 March 1784 in *The Papers of George Washington*,

Although the business of rebuilding his fortune was endless, Washington never did get the chance to truly immerse himself in the task. For one thing, he was besieged by visitors that included friends, family members, and associates, along with many strangers who simply wanted to be able to say that they saw Washington. Eighteenth-century hospitality rules dictated that no matter how beleaguered he was with the constant stream of people, he could turn none of them away. The visitors taxed both Washington's patience and his finances as the constant flow of guests devoured his food, drank his wine, and stabled their horses in his barns. The catalogue of guests reads like a hotel registry. Indeed, he and Martha finally dined alone for the first time on 30 June 1785, a full year and a half after he retired from public life.<sup>270</sup>

#### Washington's Preoccupation with His Post-War Reputation

The hordes of guests kept Washington well informed of the latest political and diplomatic developments, and increasingly it seemed he was not yet out of the public eye forever. He therefore felt the need to set a certain tone in his actions that was in accordance with what he thought the public still expected of him. For example, he resigned his position as vestryman of Truro Parish during this period, a position that he held for twenty-two years. Washington never explained his decision to give up the post, although it is likely that his motives were both political and image related, for at this time, vestrymen were still required to swear an oath of obedience to the doctrine and

---

*Digital Edition.* His daily entries record the manner in which he evaluated his estate's situation, and exactly how he set about to rectify it. He noted exact quantities of crops planted by type on each of his different farms, and chronicled the progress of his different agricultural experiments and renovation projects.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid., 4:157.

discipline of the Church of England, of which George III was the head.<sup>271</sup> Although this technicality may not have been obvious to the average parishioner, it would certainly not have escaped the notice of the political elite and Washington could not be seen to be doing anything to undermine his status. Safeguarding his reputation in this manner would be especially necessary if he were ever to be recalled to public life. Another example was Washington's agony over the question of whether or not to accept the state of Virginia's gift of fifty shares of Potomac River Company stock and one hundred shares of James River Company stock in recognition of his service to the state. Washington's first reaction was that "no circumstance has happened to me since I left the walks of public life, which has so much embarrassed me."<sup>272</sup> While he did not want to offend his fellow Virginians by rejecting the gift, he also felt that he could not accept it as he refused a salary during the war. Yet his refusal might be interpreted as "an ostentatious display of disinterestedness or public virtue."<sup>273</sup> The last thing he wanted people to think was that "sinister motives had the smallest influence in the suggestion."<sup>274</sup> He dashed off frantic letters to an astonishing number of confidants about what to do, going so far as to make the point that he did not need the money as he told Henry Knox, "I have nobody to provide for and I have enough to support me through life in the plain and easy style in which I intend to spend the remainder of my days."<sup>275</sup> After much consultation and deliberation, Washington came up with a solution. He decided to hold the gift shares in trust for public education for the creation of "two charity schools, one

---

<sup>271</sup>Thompson, "In the Hands of a Good Providence," 80. See also Chernow, *Washington*, 469-70.

<sup>272</sup> Washington to Benjamin Harrison, 22 January 1785 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Washington to Henry Knox, 28 February 1785, in *ibid*.

on each river for the education and support of the children of the poor and indigent, especially children who had lost fathers in the war.<sup>276</sup>

#### Washington's Interest in the Literature and Legacy Building

Further evidence of Washington's preoccupation with his reputation and his recognition of the weight of his celebrity can be found in what he was reading during the period between the end of the war and the convening of the Constitutional Convention. In the spring of 1783 he placed an order for several books advertized in a gazette including: Voltaire's *Letters to Several of His Friends*; John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; and Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He also ordered biographies of Charles XII of Sweden, Louis XV of France, and Peter the Great of Russia.<sup>277</sup> He further added several travel narratives to his collection including two by John Moore: *A View of Society and Manners in Italy with Anecdotes Relating to Some Eminent Characters*, and *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany: with Anecdotes Relating to Some Eminent Characters*.<sup>278</sup> At first this somewhat eclectic reading list seems to indicate that Washington intended to broaden his horizons in retirement. What this list demonstrates is that Washington wanted to gain a better understanding of European affairs so that he might cultivate an appropriate frame of reference for responding to inquiries made to him by foreign luminaries, leaders, and observers (many of whom were visitors to Mount Vernon during this period) to comment on the American situation.

The biographies on this list also illustrate Washington's growing interest in how key literary figures could assist in the cultivation of his image. Washington's initial

---

<sup>276</sup> Ibid. See also Washington to Edmund Randolph, 30 July 1785, in *ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 506.

interest in biography began when he was a teenager with his purchase of the panegyric of the Duke of Schomberg; now, as a mature man who had achieved fame in his own right, he renewed his interest in the genre. In selecting biographies of these renowned leaders at this juncture, it is possible that Washington wanted to read them not for the purpose of learning life lessons from these subjects, but rather because he was interested in how the production of biographies contributed to the subjects' lasting fame. Further evidence of Washington's interest in the benefits of biographical and historical writing is supported by the fact that he began to make a point of entertaining, sometimes at great length, some of the most prominent writers of the day. In these engagements, he exhibited none of his previous inhibitions that stemmed from being in the company of intellectuals. In May 1785, he entertained Noah Webster, who visited Mount Vernon in order to solicit Washington's support for a copyright law in Virginia and probably also to provide him with a copy of his *Sketches of American Policy*.<sup>279</sup> The next month, Washington welcomed famed British historian Catherine Macaulay Graham and her husband to Mount Vernon for a ten day visit. Unlike the scores of other guests who were little more than expensive intruders, he was clearly taken with Graham. He wrote to Henry Knox, "a visit from a lady so celebrated in the literary world could not but be very flattering to me."<sup>280</sup> Graham was an expert in both English and Roman history. Additionally, she was a radical Whig and a known friend of the American Revolution. She and Washington engaged in extensive political conversations much to Washington's delight. "It gave me pleasure to find that her sentiments respecting the inadequacy of the powers

---

<sup>279</sup> Chernow, *Washington*, 470.

<sup>280</sup> Washington to Henry Knox, 18 June 1785, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

of the Congress<sup>281</sup> coincided with my own," he told Richard Henry Lee. It is also worth noting here that Washington very well might have taken an interest in Graham as a potential biographer, for one of his diary entries from the visit indicated that he placed his military records into the hands of Mrs. Macaulay Graham for her perusal and amusement.<sup>282</sup>

Additional evidence to support such an argument that Washington did in fact appreciate the ability of biographers to enhance their subjects' reputations is embedded in Washington's letters to Lafayette in 1788. In recommending the American poet, Joel Barlow, to Lafayette, Washington described the poet as being "one of those bards who hold the keys to the gate which patriots, sages, and heroes are admitted to immortality. Such are your ancient bards who are both the priest and doorkeepers to the temple of fame. And these, my dear Marquis, are no vulgar functions." He went on to say that "In some instances heroes have made poets, and poets heroes."<sup>283</sup> These examples illustrate not only Washington's continued drive to maintain his reputation, but also more fundamentally, that the seemingly eclectic reading that he pursued in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution had eminently practical purposes.

Further examples of Washington's attempts to connect his legacy with leading writers of the time can be found in his exacting instructions for the transport of his wartime papers to Mount Vernon. He ordered the lieutenant in charge of the mission not to attempt two river crossings if there was inclement weather. The orders also stipulated that "the wagons should never be without a sentinel over them; always locked and the

---

<sup>281</sup> Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 22 June 1785, in *ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Dorothy Twohig, ed. *George Washington's Diaries, An Abridgment* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1999), 280.

<sup>283</sup> Washington to Lafayette, 28 May 1788, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition.*

keys in your possession.”<sup>284</sup> Just after the shipment arrived at Mount Vernon, two writers showed up at Mount Vernon looking to solicit his cooperation on their would-be projects. The first offer was more problematic than the second. John Bowie sought Washington’s cooperation for a biography; however, Washington was evidently uncomfortable with Bowie’s ideas, for he declared that he would not open his papers until Congress did the same with its archives.<sup>285</sup> The second project seemed to have far less self-aggrandizing potential but still could foster Washington’s legacy. William Gordon proposed to write a history of the Revolution. Washington offered to open his papers to Gordon as long as Congress authorized him to do so. Gordon had been a staunch supporter of the independence movement so Congress did not hesitate in granting Washington’s request. Gordon was a scholar with an eye for detail, and he wasted no time in immersing himself in Washington’s papers for two straight weeks, pausing only for meals. When the four volume work came out in 1788, Washington bought two copies for himself and recommended it to all of his friends, distributing forty-two sets that were sent to him by Gordon.<sup>286</sup>

The Gordon project made it painfully clear that Washington’s papers were in disarray. Washington began the arduous process of organizing the “thirty and three volumes of copied letters” besides three volumes of private, seven volumes of general orders, and bundles upon bundles of letters “that were sent to him; however, the task was simply too overwhelming for him to do alone while trying to balance the running of his

---

<sup>284</sup> Washington to Lieutenant Bezaleel Howe, 9 November 1783, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: 1931-44), 27: 238.

<sup>285</sup> Washington expressed his misgivings about Bowie’s proposition in a letter to Dr. James Craik, 25 March 1784 in W. W. Abbott and Dorothy Twohig eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, 6 vols. (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992-97), 1:235.

<sup>286</sup> See the exchange of letters between Washington and Gordon: 2 November 1785; 13 July 1786; 16 February 1789; and 25 February 1791 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. See also Chernow, *Washington*, 472.

plantations.<sup>287</sup> He decided to hire a secretary, eventually settling on former aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Colonel David Humphreys. Humphreys distinguished himself at Yorktown, earning the privilege of presenting the captured British battle flags to the Congress. He was also a talented writer; he drafted many of Washington's remarks for the numerous victory celebrations that took place in and around New York City. Once Washington hired him to serve as his private secretary, it did not take long for Humphreys to convince Washington to collaborate on a biography. Why the sudden change in attitude? Washington spurned the first offer of a biography, so what was different in 1785? It was a matter of personal affinity. Washington both understood and appreciated loyalty and Humphreys served him well in the past. Once he gave Humphreys his assent, Washington lavished attention on him, affording him unfettered access to his papers, "And I can with great truth add that my house would not only be at your service during the period of preparing this work, but I should be exceedingly happy if you would make it your home. You might have an apartment to yourself in which you could command your own time. You would be considered and treated as one of the family."<sup>288</sup> Unfortunately, Humphreys's biography is thoroughly unimpressive on its own merits; it is far too brief and celebratory to be of great value to scholars. However, far more important than Humphreys's work are Washington's editorial notes that actually run longer than the text itself, mostly centered on setting the record straight in the passages dealing with the Seven Years' War. Washington also amended some of Humphreys's characterizations of his childhood and early life. Specifically, he corrected

---

<sup>287</sup> Washington to James Craik, 25 March 1784, in W. W. Abbott and Dorothy Twohig eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, 1: 235. See also the letter between Dr. William Gordon to Horatio Gates in *ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> Washington to David Humphries, 25 July 1785, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

Humphreys's statements regarding who originally proposed that Washington should join the Royal Navy as a teenager, and other details from childhood, including his age at the time of his father's death.<sup>289</sup>

#### Calls for Government Reform Lead to Washington's Recall to Public Life

As Washington's collaborated with these projects, he also became aware that his enormous celebrity would not allow him to remain out of public life for long. The loosely united confederation of states was in crisis. Congress's powers under the Articles of Confederation seemed insufficient to many observers when it came to handling national issues. The Congress did not have the power to compel delegates to attend its sessions, let alone levy taxes or regulate the economy in order to begin to repay the staggering war debts. There was a commercial crisis that gripped the northern states thanks to trade sanctions put in place by Great Britain in the last days of the Revolution, and the southern states felt that the Confederation government relegated them to the status of a sectional minority with nothing and no one to protect the region's interests. Furthermore, the citizenry was increasingly becoming disenchanted with the manner in which both the Confederation and the state governments were functioning. In Virginia, James Madison complained to Washington about the "dark and menacing evils" that these newly elected legislators were introducing "under the name of relief to the people."

---

<sup>289</sup> David Humphreys, *Life of General Washington With George Washington's Remarks* ed. Rosemarie Zagari (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

He continued to rail that “[M]en without reading, experience, or principle” were generating laws that were “a nuisance of the most pestilent kind.”<sup>290</sup>

The situation became much more critical in Massachusetts with the outbreak of Shays’s Rebellion. Shays and his rebels took up arms to prevent the courts from sitting and foreclosing on western farms, many of which were owned by veterans of the late war. After a series of blundering decisions made by those in power in Boston, the Massachusetts government deployed an army to put down the rebellion. The desperate rebels were easily routed. Upon hearing the news of this explosive situation in Massachusetts, Washington was horrified. “Good God!” he exclaimed “There are combustibles in every State, which a spark may set fire to.” Additionally, he expressed thanks that the rebellion had “terminate[d] entirely in favor of Government by the suppression of insurgents.”<sup>291</sup> Although Shays’s Rebellion is often credited with being the catalyst for calling what would become the Constitutional Convention, in truth it was a combination of a catalogue of failures of the various state governments to adequately handle the endless stream of issues that began with the onset of peace in 1783. Those like Washington, who reacted to the events in Massachusetts with a mix of fear and disgust, were not simply reacting to armed citizens staging an uprising; rather, they were shocked at the inept handling of the crisis by the government of Massachusetts. Moreover, they all knew that if similar rebellions broke out elsewhere the national

---

<sup>290</sup> See the letters from James Madison to Washington, 7 December, 24 December 1786, and 21 February 1787, in William T. Hutchinson et al., eds. *The Papers of James Madison* 34 vols. (Chicago and Charlottesville: University of Chicago Press and University Press of Virginia, 1962-), 9:200, 284, 286.

<sup>291</sup> Washington to David Humphreys, 26 December 1786; Washington to Knox, 26 December 1786; Washington to Benjamin Lincoln 24 February 1787; Washington to Lafayette, 25 March 1787, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

government was powerless to assist. Something had to be done to prevent democratic excesses from ruining the new American national experiment.<sup>292</sup>

However, while many were dissatisfied with the downward spiral that the new nation seemed to be in, Washington's opinion that there needed to be a strong central government was somewhat exceptional as it was based on his long history of mostly unpleasant dealings with the Continental Congress during the war. From Washington's standpoint as commander-in-chief, Congress had been incapable of coercing the states into making their recruiting quotas and supplying sufficient funds on a consistent basis in order to keep the army in the field.<sup>293</sup> However, not everyone was as convinced as Washington that a strong central government was in the best interest of the states. Any move to create a national government with the power to tax and raise armies seemed all too similar to the Parliamentary tyranny that precipitated the Revolution. Therefore, when the first convention at Annapolis convened in September 1786 for the purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation, only five states showed up. An exasperated Madison turned to Alexander Hamilton, who called for another convention to be called in

---

<sup>292</sup>Gordon S. Wood, "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution," in Richard Beeman et al., eds. *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 73. Wood argues that contrary to popular belief, the main reason for calling the Constitutional Convention was not the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation. It was rather, the failures and corruptions of the state governments that together exemplified the need to forge a stronger national government. See also Douglas Bradburn, *The Citizenship Revolution: Politics and the Creation of the American Union, 1774-1804* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 65. Perhaps the best summary of the weaknesses of the Confederation Congress is Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 331-59.

<sup>293</sup>Washington made his opinions on the need for a much stronger central government very plain to his like-minded friends and former associates in his many post-war letters. One such example is Washington to Henry Knox, 5 December 1784, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. Further examples are in the exchange of letters between Washington and Madison. Madison first sought Washington's opinions and then sought to garner Washington's support for a convention of delegates from all the states to revise if not overhaul the Articles of Confederation; for he knew that any such meeting would be meaningless without Washington's presence, and more importantly, his prestige. Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 92.

Philadelphia in the spring of 1787, this time to scrap the Articles completely in favor of devising a completely new framework for the national government.

Madison deduced that part of the problem with the Annapolis Convention was that Washington was not there. In order for this new convention to even garner the participation of the states, Washington had to be a part of it. Madison therefore visited Washington for three days in October 1786 in order to coax him out of retirement and back onto the national stage. In November 1786, Madison informed Washington that Virginia unanimously decided to place his name at the head of the state's list of delegates. For his part, Washington was somewhat annoyed that he had been backed into a corner. As much as he wanted this convention to be a success, he did promise the American people upon his resignation from the army in 1783 that he was leaving public life for good. How could he go back on that? Additionally, he declined to attend a meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati scheduled to meet at the same time in Philadelphia, so how could he refuse an invitation to meet with his former comrades in arms and then show up to attend a governing convention? Finally, what if this convention proved to be another unmitigated disaster? Washington was not about to stake his reputation on a potential failure.<sup>294</sup>

Madison's response to Washington was masterful. He conceded that Washington of course had the final say; however, he suggested that it would be extremely helpful if Washington allowed his name to remain on the list of delegates for the sake of gravitas, thereby encouraging other prominent men to also sign on. Additionally, keeping his name on the list would allow the possibility that at least a door could be kept open in case the gathering clouds should become so dark and menacing as to supersede every

---

<sup>294</sup>Ibid., 98.

consideration, but that of our national experience and safety.<sup>295</sup> Washington agonized over the decision for four months; he finally decided to serve in March 1787. It is interesting to note that once he decided to serve, he made it clear that the convention should adopt no temporizing expedient, but probe the defects of the Constitution to the bottom, and provide radical cures, whether they are agreed to or not.<sup>296</sup> If he was willing to stake his reputation on this convention, it needed to produce a real result.

The Constitutional Convention brought together the prominent men from across the states assembled to devise a new system of governance for the infant republic. They wasted no time in selecting Washington as the president of the convention. His selection made perfect sense because of his celebrity, but it was also perfect for him personally. As president of the convention, he presided over the debates, but demurred from wading into them, except on two occasions. He knew that the greatest contribution that he could make to this process was not his thoughts, but rather his presence. His reputation had

---

<sup>295</sup> See Madison's letters to Washington in *The Papers of James Madison*, 9:115-56, 166-67, 170-71, 199-200, 224-25; they can also be found in the *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. For Washington's reaction to his selection for Virginia's delegation see also Washington to Madison, 18 November 1786; Washington to David Stuart, 19 November 1786; Washington to David Humphreys, 26 December 1786; Washington to Henry Knox, 3 February 1787, in *ibid.* Washington and Madison actually became close friends in the years between 1784 and 1797. For a detailed analysis of this friendship and its significance to the careers of both men and their impact on the new nation see Stuart Leibiger, *Founding Friendship: George Washington, James Madison, and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1999). In making the argument that Washington and Madison's friendship was one of the most crucial in the development and implementation of the Constitution, Leibiger builds upon the work of Lance Banning and Drew McCoy who each argued that the 1780s were the crucial period for Madison's political career. Leibiger also rightly cites the issues addressed by Glenn Phelps to argue that Hamilton's influence over Washington has been so exaggerated by historians so often and for so long that it damaged the picture that we have of his political philosophy. Leibiger argues instead that far from being a figurehead, Washington was very much in control over his administration. See Lance Banning, *Sacred Fire: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Drew McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of George Washington* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1974); Joseph Charles, *The Origins of the American Party System: Three Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956); Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Glenn A. Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

<sup>296</sup> Washington to James Madison, 31 March 1787, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

reached its zenith in his lifetime and at this particular juncture before he became the nation's first president, he no longer needed to prove himself. As the most astute legal minds in the nation debated the way ahead, the best way for Washington to contribute was to sit magnanimously above the proceedings, not appearing the least bit partisan towards any of the plans being put forth. Nevertheless, Washington was still a diligent delegate. Before the proceedings commenced he took the plans offered to him by Madison, Knox, and Jay and condensed them into a sort of ready reference. He also read the latest political tracts that offered different proposals for the upcoming convention including Charles Pinckney's *Observations of the Plan of Government Submitted to the Federal Convention, in Philadelphia, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1787*.<sup>297</sup> The Virginia delegation arrived in Philadelphia on time; before the other delegations did. While they waited, the Virginia delegation consisting of Washington, Madison, Edmund Randolph, and George Mason met for two or three hours per day in order to work out a cohesive position. These sessions yielded the Virginia Plan, spearheaded by Madison. Washington supported Madison in these internal delegation sessions, countering protests from Mason and Randolph, who did not favor a strong central government.<sup>298</sup> When the written Constitution was finally adopted on the Convention's last day, 17 September 1787, Washington was hurt by the fact that two of three of the convention's holdouts were both fellow Virginians and personal friends, Edmund Randolph and George Mason. In particular, Washington and Mason's friendship did not survive after Mason predicted flatly that this new government would end either in monarchy or a tyrannical

---

<sup>297</sup>Chernow, *Washington*, 529.

<sup>298</sup>*Ibid.*

aristocracy and that the Constitution had been formed without the knowledge of the people.<sup>299</sup>

It is interesting to note that as the convention proceeded, Washington seemed to sense that he was not going to be able to simply retreat back to Mount Vernon forever after the meeting adjourned. The presidency was plainly in his future and he began to act like a head of state. For example, he attended different religious services on various Sundays including those of his own Anglican denomination, and a Roman Catholic mass on one of his first Sundays in Philadelphia. He dined with Jewish merchants, and accepted invitations to join in fraternal dinners hosted by the Irish sons of Saint Patrick. Moreover, he accepted General Mifflin's invitation to review the city's militia forces. He also visited museums and frequented the theater whenever possible.<sup>300</sup> While Washington embarked on some of these visitations out of his own interests, he was no doubt cajoled into some of the others. Already, he knew that the maintenance of his reputation partly hinged on his ability to appear non-partisan and visible to the people. He was, in fact, beginning to exhibit a new form of performative leadership that is best described as an Americanized hybrid of a royal progress. Over the coming years, Washington would work assiduously to turn his very particular brand of statecraft into an art form that would very much sculpt the presidency. Once in office he would pay particular attention to how his performances were received by the people in the different forms of print media available at the time.

---

<sup>299</sup> George Mason quoted in Richard Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 66.

<sup>300</sup> See Washington's diary entries from March through September 1787, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

## Washington and Ratification

During the various ratification conventions that followed, Washington began to collect the published writings that outlined both sides of the ratification debate. He obtained a copy of John Adams's *A Defense of the Constitutions and Government of the United States of America*, and Noah Webster's *An Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution Proposed by the Late Convention Held at Philadelphia, With Answers to the Principal Objections That Have Been Raised Against the System*. Furthermore, Washington, who had always been an avid subscriber to newspapers and periodicals, began receiving copies of Noah Webster's *American Magazine: Containing a Miscellaneous Collection of Original and Other Valuable Essays in Prose and Verse, and Calculated Both for Instruction and Amusement*, Matthew Carey's *The American Museum, or Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces*, and *The Columbian Magazine*.<sup>301</sup> These periodicals each re-printed political essays from across the nation that centered on the Constitution. The fact that Washington paid such close attention to how the ratification debates were progressing is not surprising. First and foremost, he believed that the Constitution was the way forward for the United States if it were to survive as a nation. He was sure that the strengths of the Constitution far outweighed its weaknesses. In his defense of the Constitution,

---

<sup>301</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 516,491-95. With regard to the periodicals specifically, Washington received *The Columbian Magazine* as a gift from the publishers. After Washington received it, he wrote back to them on 9 January 1787, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition* acknowledging receipt and asked to be considered to be a regular subscriber "as I conceive a publication of that kind may be the means of conveying much useful knowledge to the community which might otherwise be lost, and when it is properly conducted, it should, in my opinion be properly encouraged." Washington wrote to Matthew Carey on 25 June 1788, in *ibid*. In the letter, Washington commended Carey for publishing a work that was "eminently calculated to disseminate political, agricultural, philosophical and other valuable information; but that it has been uniformly conducted with taste, attention, and propriety. If to these important objects be superadded the more immediate design of rescuing public documents from oblivion, I will venture to pronounce, as my sentiment, that a more useful literary plan has never been undertaken in America, or one more deserving public."

Washington remarked that “the general Government is not invested with more Powers than are indispensably necessary to perform the functions of a good Government,” and as such, “no objections ought to be made against the quantity of Power delegated to it.” As the powers of the government were balanced between its respective branches, tyranny was impossible “so long as there shall remain any virtue in the body of the People.”<sup>302</sup>

Washington further believed that by granting the federal government the power over taxation and commerce, the new nation would be able to effectively defend itself, extend trade networks through formal concessions, protect rights to property, and encourage economic growth and prosperity.<sup>303</sup> In Madison’s view, “no member of the Convention appeared to sign the instrument with more cordiality than he [Washington] did, nor to be more anxious for its ratification. I have indeed the most thorough conviction from the best evidence, that he never wavered in the part he took in giving it his sanction and support.”<sup>304</sup>

One voice of dissent that Washington found potentially damaging was that of George Mason. Mason’s staunchly anti-federalist stance was hurtful to Washington for the two men had been friends and neighbors for years, and, Mason was a member of the Virginia delegation that was involved in all the meetings that produced the Virginia Plan. When the convention drew to a close, Mason not only refused to sign the Constitution, but he went on to publish an essay condemning the Constitution as a frame of government with a paltry system of checks and balances. In Mason’s view the House of

---

<sup>302</sup> Washington to Marquis de Lafayette, 7 February and 28 April 1788; Washington to John Cowper, 25 May 1788; Washington to Adrian Van Der Kemp, 28 May 1788; Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 31 August 1788 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>303</sup> Leibiger, *Founding Friendship*, 85.

<sup>304</sup> James Madison to Edward Everett, 3 June 1827, in *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* rev. ed. in 4 vols. ed. Max Farrand (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 3:476.

Representatives was too weak while the Senate was too powerful. The Senate and the president's responsibilities seemed oddly comingled. He also wanted an addition of a bill of rights to safeguard the people's liberties, the president restrained by a council of state, and the South protected against unfair commercial laws that would disproportionately benefit the North. Mason concluded his essay with the prediction that ratification would almost immediately lead to monarchy and an aristocracy.<sup>305</sup> Upon reading the essay, Washington angrily forwarded it to Madison, writing that it appeared to be an attempt "to alarm the people." He further suggested that "sinister and self important motives governed Antifederalist leaders." Madison concurred, and further suggested that Mason had "a vain opinion" that he has influence enough to dictate a Constitution to Virginia and through her to the rest of the union.<sup>306</sup> Washington further laid blame at the feet of the Antifederalists as he wrote, "the ignorant have been told, that should the proposed Government obtain, their lands would be taken from them and their property disposed of."<sup>307</sup> Washington's palpable anger that emanates from these letters underscores the degree of anxiety that he felt over the possibility of failure in the ratification conventions.

As Washington had long recognized the value of print media through his experience in public life, he saw that the best way to sell the new government to the people was through the newspapers. The Antifederalists were already waging a newspaper war and had the reading public's attention unless the Federalists took up their pens in the gazettes. In New York, Hamilton began a set of newspaper articles that

---

<sup>305</sup> See George Mason, "Objections to this Constitution of Government," in Robert A. Rutland, ed. *The Papers of George Mason*, 3 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 3: 991-93.

<sup>306</sup> See Washington to James Madison, 10 October 1787; James Madison to Washington, 18 October 1787 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>307</sup> See Washington to Henry Knox, 15 October 1787; Washington to Bushrod Washington, 10 November 1787; Washington to James Wilson, 4 April 1788; Washington to Benjamin Lincoln, 2 April 1788, in *ibid*.

defended the Constitution. He was joined in this effort by Madison and John Jay; collectively these became known as the *Federalists*. The three collaborators sent Washington copies of their work, with Madison urging that Virginians needed these arguments as much as New Yorkers did. Washington, however, needed no prodding on this point. He forwarded the papers to Fairfax County representative David Stuart, with a recommendation that "If there is a Printer in Richmond who is really well disposed to support the New Constitution he would do well to give them a place in his Paper."<sup>308</sup> Stuart passed the essays to Augustine Davis who published them in the *Virginia Independent Chronicle* in December 1787. The essays were subsequently reprinted in papers throughout the state.<sup>309</sup>

Washington continued to play an active role in the ratification effort even though he knew that if ratification was achieved then the presidency would follow. Maintaining the proper degree of disinterestedness was therefore required in order to safeguard his reputation so that Washington would be able to effectively serve once more. Washington was compelled by both senses of duty and self-preservation; however, he simply hated to leave Mount Vernon. In 1788, he was still in the process of restoring his plantations to a profitable basis, and more importantly, he did not want to leave his family again. He and Martha were raising two of their grandchildren. His health was questionable and age was catching up with him. But how could he refuse the presidency if elected?

---

<sup>308</sup>Washington to David Stuart, 30 November 1787 in *ibid.*

<sup>309</sup>Leibiger, *Founding Friendship*, 89. For the impact that the Federalists' newspaper campaign had on the ratification in Virginia, as well as in the other states that reprinted *The Federalist* and other essays, see Pauline Maier's *Ratification*. This book offers a comprehensive examination of the ratification conventions as they played out in the different states and offers the best and most comprehensive book on the subject.

### President Washington Takes Office

Washington did not have to wait long to have to accept the inevitability of his election. On July 4, 1788 after the Constitution was ratified by the minimum number of nine states, the people of Wilmington, Delaware began toasting Washington in hopes that once again he might set aside his plow to lead his people. Later, on July 23, a flag in New York's grand federal procession bore an image of Washington with a line under it that expressed the wish that he be elected as the first President of the United States. The pleas became more insistent by the fall of 1788, this time coming from some of Washington's friends including the Marquis de Lafayette, Henry Lee, Jr., Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Lincoln. By early 1789, Washington asked David Humphreys to draft an inaugural address.<sup>310</sup>

The strange history of Washington's inaugural address hints at a degree of nervousness, for he realized that by accepting the presidency, the manner in which he preserved his reputation had to change. This statement is not to suggest that Washington was driven by sheer vanity; rather, he knew from the start that by becoming the first president, he was going to have to use his image to legitimize the new government. In other words, if his performance as the elected leader of a republican government did not strike the right chord with the people, the future of the nation could become imperiled. The presidency was going to be a delicate balancing act between establishing himself as head of state using certain performative measures that would be familiar to the people who had grown out of a monarchical past, and setting a new precedent for how chief executives should behave. In this endeavor he had nothing to guide him. The primary factor that worked in his favor was the mythology that already surrounded him; however,

---

<sup>310</sup> Pauline Maier, *Ratification*, 436-37.

one false step could wipe that advantage away. In the interest of getting things just right from the beginning, Washington sought the advice of writers he trusted for assistance with his inaugural address.

David Humphreys produced the first draft of the inaugural address and Washington immediately recognized problems with it. The first was that it was nearly seventy-four pages in length. It included everything from an analysis of the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, to a defense of the Constitution, to specific recommendations for various pieces of legislation, to a defense of Washington's 1783 retirement pledge including a mention of the fact that this was not to be the start of a monarchy because he had no biological children. Washington read it, made a copy, and sent it off to Madison for his review and suggested revisions.<sup>311</sup> Madison was appalled at the draft. He wrote back to Washington that he concurred "without hesitation in your remarks on the speech of 73 pages, and in the expediency of not including it among the papers selected for the press." Madison went on to call the draft a "strange production."<sup>312</sup> Many years later, Madison reflected that Humphreys's work was "certainly an extraordinary production for a message to Congress, and it is happy that Washington took counsel of his own understanding and of his friends before he made use of this document."<sup>313</sup> Washington summoned Madison to Mount Vernon, and as soon as he arrived, they set to work on a new address, scrapping completely Humphreys's draft.

The final draft that was actually delivered was written by Madison and edited by

---

<sup>311</sup> See the fragments of the First Inaugural Address and the corresponding editorial note in the *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. The inaugural address exists now only in fragmentary form because Jared Sparks, one of the first compilers of Washington's papers in the early nineteenth-century, judged the draft to be of no historical value and cut it to pieces to distribute to friends who were interested in obtaining samples of Washington's handwriting.

<sup>312</sup> James Madison to Washington, 30 May 1789, in *ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> James Madison to Jared Sparks, 30 May 1827, in Herbert B. Adams, *The Life and Writings of Jared Sparks*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1893), 2:211-13.

Washington. This time, the address was only four pages long. Washington accepted the presidency only out of duty; he asked God for continued blessings on the nation; admonished the members of Congress to avoid local prejudice; he requested that he not receive a salary, just the reimbursement of his expenses; and he called for amendments to the Constitution to protect the people's rights.<sup>314</sup>

In terms of the inauguration, it is worth noting the degree to which Washington and his inaugural committee paid attention to their British monarchical heritage when designing the ceremony. In many ways, it strikes a deep contrast to a coronation and a state opening of Parliament. In England, monarchs are crowned behind closed doors in Westminster Abbey. Washington took the oath of office in an outdoor ceremony, in full public view. In a state opening of Parliament, the monarch reads an address while seated on a throne while the joint assembly of the Houses of Lords and the Commons remains standing. Washington stood to deliver his inaugural address after insisting that the joint assembly of the House and Senate take seats. The ceremony was appropriately solemn and most importantly, American, even though it bore a certain resemblance to the British traditions the former colonists were used to. The celebrations of that day were both extensive and exuberant. The people seemed to conflate their love for Washington with that for the new federal government.<sup>315</sup> Washington's first act as president was, therefore, a successful performance.

During his two terms in office, Washington was inordinately busy and at times in ill health so he did not have the opportunity to do much reading, even though he was inundated with gifts of books from well wishers and office seekers. As Washington was

---

<sup>314</sup> Washington, First Inaugural Address: Final Version in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>315</sup> Leibiger, *Founding Friendship*, 108.

constantly preoccupied with public perception, however, he would make time to read as many newspapers as were available, along with many printed political sermons. These two forms of print media were critical resources for Washington for they offered the most current reflections of public opinion at the time. He remarked to Catherine Macaulay Graham that, "In our progress toward political happiness, my station is new; and, if I may use the expression, I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any action, whose motives may not be subject to a double interpretation. There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn into precedent."<sup>316</sup> In light of this awareness, Washington needed to stay abreast of how his performances were received, and print media was the primary means available. Interestingly, as Washington penned the letter to Graham, the first serious test of his ability to perform the presidential act well was about to begin. As the federal government slowly came together, debates arose as to how to best shape the American future. Washington appointed Alexander Hamilton to head the treasury department, and Hamilton wasted no time in devising a plan to shore up the utterly unstable American economy. He ultimately favored industrialization on the British model, but first the matters of the states' conflicting systems of finance and the staggering war debts must be dealt with. On January 9, 1790, Hamilton, responding to a Congressional request, submitted a report to Congress on the public credit. In it he called for a comprehensive system of finance that would nationalize all war debts still unpaid by the states and create a national bank.<sup>317</sup>

---

<sup>316</sup> Washington to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay Graham, 9 January 1790, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>317</sup> Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 93.

## Washington Shores Up Support for the Federal Government

Hamilton's plan met with instant criticism from those who feared this was just the first part of a larger plan to limit states' rights. Hamilton's future deputy, Tench Coxe wrote from Pennsylvania that local public creditors were "against assumption" because they feared it would "produce the old demon, consolidation," and that many people were opposed to it because they owed "so little as a state, and possess federal securities to a greater Amount."<sup>318</sup> Such opinions were not just limited to Pennsylvanians. During the Confederation period, states such as New York and New Jersey adopted the federal certificates that were issued as payment to the ex-Continental soldiers for their service as state debt. Connecticut reportedly assumed \$640,000 specie value, and Maryland paid an estimated \$266,000 to holders of those certificates. The redemption of certificates was even more important to the southern states. Virginia assumed nearly all debts and had only \$171,000 left unpaid. Similarly, North Carolina's remaining federal certificate debt was only \$8,695, while South Carolina assumed all manners of certificates leaving a mere \$65 to become national debt under Hamilton's 1790 plan. The South therefore had less interest than the other regions in any national system of finance that would guarantee payment to federal creditors.<sup>319</sup> Debate raged in Congress. Madison delivered a lengthy address to the House of Representatives that summarized the southern position on the subject which was promptly printed in the *New York Daily Advertiser*, the *New York Daily Gazette*, and the *Gazette of the United States*.<sup>320</sup>

---

<sup>318</sup> Tench Coxe to Alexander Hamilton, 5 March 1790, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, February 1791-July 1791* 26 vols. ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 8:291.

<sup>319</sup> E. James Ferguson, "State Assumption of Federal Debt During the Confederation," in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 38, Issue 3 (Dec. 1951), 406.

<sup>320</sup> For the text of the speech see James Madison, "Assumption of State Debts," in *The Papers of James Madison*, 13:164. See also the corresponding editor's note for details regarding the speech.

As the debate raged on and more speeches both for and against the passage of Hamilton's plan were printed in the press, the ramifications became apparent. The debate split the nation along a North-South sectional line. As 1790 unfolded, national politics were rapidly becoming bitterly partisan; Washington hated partisanship, and in his inaugural address admonished congressmen and senators to avoid it. The debate also divided Washington's cabinet. Washington had been gravely ill with pneumonia during much of this period, and after weeks of recovery when he returned to work he was appalled at the divisiveness among his councilors.<sup>321</sup>

In December 1790, almost one year after Hamilton submitted the first phase of his financial plan, he sent to Congress a request for an excise tax on distilled liquors to raise funds to pay off the debt, and the establishment of a national bank. The bank was the cornerstone of the entire program, and it was even more alarming to those who were previously opposed to the funding and assumption program because it was an even larger step towards federalizing the entire financial system under the powerful Department of the Treasury. The bank proposal faced Hamilton squarely against Madison. Madison fought the bank on terms of constitutionality in Congress, and the bill produced a sectional response. Predictably, the northern states were overwhelmingly in favor of the bank, and southerners were steadfastly against it.<sup>322</sup>

Throughout the debate, Washington was able to remain above the fray, soliciting advice equally from Hamilton, Jefferson, and Attorney General Edmund Randolph, and

---

publication. Madison was working closely with his political mentor, Thomas Jefferson, to formulate a response to Hamilton's argument that establishing and maintaining a national debt was good for the nation's future. See Herbert E. Sloan, *Principle and Interest: Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Debt* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 133-40.

<sup>321</sup> Ralph Ketcham, *Framed for Posterity: The Enduring Philosophy of the Constitution* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1993), 132.

<sup>322</sup> James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 38-39.

then waited as long as possible to sign the bill, taking time for serious consideration. In the end, however, Washington did sign it. Criticism immediately rang out that Hamilton was actively seeking to manipulate the Constitution in order to transform the United States into a monarchy by putting a select group of men in charge of federal money.<sup>323</sup> The extreme degree of bitterness around the bank seemed to deepen the sectional divide between the North and South, and increase the developing partisanship between Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson which together thoroughly alarmed Washington. As such, he decided the time was right to make good on a promise that he previously made to visit every state in the union by embarking on a tour of the southern states in the spring of 1791.

At this critical juncture, there was nothing better that Washington could have done in order to shore up southern support for the federal government. He knew very well that the people would find reassurance in his presence and faith in the federal government would be restored because to the people, Washington embodied the government.<sup>324</sup> This was not Washington's first tour; he made a similar journey across the northern states in 1789 to "acquire knowledge of the country and of its attitude towards the new government."<sup>325</sup> During that tour, Washington took copious notes in his diaries, paying particular attention to the honors that were paid to him by the people. His entries chronicling his stop in Boston are filled with descriptions of the lavish display laid out to welcome him, complete from the archway at the statehouse that hailed him as "the Man that unites all hearts," and "Columbia's favorite Son," to the procession which

---

<sup>323</sup>Ibid.

<sup>324</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, "George Washington: The Aloof American," in Don Higginbotham ed. *George Washington Reconsidered* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 302.

<sup>325</sup>Washington to Henry Lee, 22 September 1788, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

began with an ðode composed in honor of the President.ö<sup>326</sup> With this previous tour experience to guide him, Washington evidently believed that a similar effort in the South would produce the palliative effect that was so necessary in the wake of the sectional debate over the nation's financial future.

It is extraordinary to note how much both Washington's 1789 tour of the northern states and that of the southern states in 1791 resembled a British royal progress. In ways similar to that of the inaugural ceremony, however, certain things were done to project a wholly American image. The form that Washington's receptions took on his tours represented this new American patriotism through its reciprocal nature. When Washington approached a town, a mounted delegation would typically ride out to escort him. Before they would come into view, Washington would make a point of getting out of his carriage and mounting his horse, in order to meet them on the same level. Moreover, the carriage itself bore the presidential insignia in place of Washington's family coat of arms. The sight of an empty presidential carriage was a visible reinforcement of the constitutional fact that the venerable man and the office were, in fact, separate. Furthermore, Washington's riding on horseback made him more visible to the crowds who gathered to merely catch a glimpse of his face. This would turn into a full-scale civic procession, complete with military salutes along the way. In the evenings, Washington would be obliged to attend dinner parties with the local elite, at which thirteen toasts would be offered in what became a standard format.<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>326</sup>See Washington's diaries in *ibid.*

<sup>327</sup>David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 121. For detailed information on the specific receptions staged for Washington during his tours see Washington's diaries in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*; Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Republican Court; or American Society in the Days of Washington*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), 113-136, 183-202, 329-340; Archibald Henderson, *George Washington's Southern Tour, 1791* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin

In addition to the manner in which Washington traveled, the timeline of the tour is also symbolically important within a republican construct. Before departing, Washington sent his itinerary to Jefferson, Hamilton, and Knox for their review. While he planned to pass through most of these locations spending at most a few hours in each location, he did arrange two long stops. He stayed in Charleston for five days; in Savannah, he stayed for two. He intended to return to Philadelphia via a completely different route so as to not pass through any location twice.<sup>328</sup> The points where Washington planned to stop were a matter of convenience because they were all located along the post road, but by being on the main thoroughfare they offered maximum exposure to the people. This was the point of the entire tour, to make Washington's efforts at promoting the federal government known to the widest possible audience.

In addition, as the new government was still very much in its infancy and all of Washington's actions (and non-actions) were interpreted as sending some sort of message, it was better for him to avoid prolonging his stay in any one place for too long. By passing through the South in a progressive manner, Washington was able to preserve that carefully calculated degree of aloofness from the people. They could find reassurance in his presence, perhaps hear him speak, and maybe share his table; however, no one could get too close. This manner of carefully controlling physical access to an elite figure is again highly reminiscent of royal etiquette of the past, so it made sense that Washington presumably chose to perform this way because he felt he could anticipate the reaction of the audience.

---

Company, 1923); Richard Norton Smith, *Patriarch: George Washington and the New American Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 87-107.

<sup>328</sup>See Washington to Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and Henry Knox, 4 April 1791, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 8: 242-43.

Although Washington spent only a night at most stops and said little in public, he did communicate with the people through letters written to the public which were intended for publication. All of the public letters Washington sent throughout his southern tour share certain common traits. They were all drafted by Washington's secretary, William Jackson, a former Continental Army officer.<sup>329</sup> Washington's choice to have Jackson draft the letters on his behalf was just another way to maintain that official aloofness from the people. Although the reading audience may not have known that Washington was not the original author, Washington was being careful to set a precedent for his successors that a president should not do anything that could establish an overly familiar relationship with any of the people. Presidents must remain above it all and not allow local affinities or allegiances to develop. These letters all managed to communicate effectively with the people through the evolving language of republicanism. Each letter thanked the people for their expressions of warmth and welcome and imbued in each was also a call for national patriotism. For example, Washington wrote to the people of New Bern, North Carolina that he was "much indebted" to them for their "polite attentions." What gratified him the most, however, was "their pleasing declarations in the situation of our common country." The state of the union seemed especially hopeful when compared with "past scenes" from the Revolution. In comparison, how much better was "our present happy condition, and equally so is the anticipation of what we still may attain, and long continue to enjoy."<sup>330</sup>

A closer reading of Washington's other official letters from the tour reveal that they did more than just promote patriotism. These letters express Washington's support

---

<sup>329</sup> See the editorial note for the letters from Washington to inhabitants of the different southern cities he visited in April 1791 in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>330</sup> Washington to the inhabitants of New Bern, North Carolina, 20-21 April 1791, in *ibid*.

of a strong central government and they hinted at the need to develop a strong international standing ó tenets of Hamilton's financial program. Washington wrote to the people of Wilmington, North Carolina that there was "a well founded expectation" based on the federal government's record of "salutary influence that additional wise and virtuous legislation" would lead to enhanced "individual industry" and "the growing dignity and importance of our country."<sup>331</sup> Similarly, the letter to the citizens of Fayetteville, North Carolina declared that "the very favorable change already manifested in our new political system, justifies the prediction that the future operations of the general government will be alike conducive to individual prosperity and national honor."<sup>332</sup> Letters to the officials of Charleston and Savannah bear sentiments that suggest that Washington believed that national stability was contingent on the public's affirmation of the new federal government. The letter to the officials of Charleston stated that "it is the peculiar boast of our country that her happiness alone [is] dependent on the collective wisdom and virtue of her citizens, and rests not on the exertions of any individual." Furthermore, "our natural and political advantages" cannot fail to improve; and with the progress of our national importance to combine the freedom and felicity of individuals."<sup>333</sup> To the Savannah officials, Washington hinted his support for funding and assumption. Referring to the federal government's relief of the Georgia state debt he wrote, "it was with singular satisfaction I perceived that the efficacy of the general government could interpose effectual relief, and restore tranquility to so deserving a member of the Union."<sup>334</sup>

---

<sup>331</sup> Washington to the inhabitants of Wilmington, North Carolina, 25 April 1791, in *ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> Washington to the inhabitants of Fayetteville, North Carolina, 26 April 1791, in *ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> Washington to the officials of Charleston, South Carolina, 3 May 1791, in *ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Washington to the officials of Savannah, Georgia, 13-14 May 1791, in *ibid.*

These official letters conveyed Washington's nationalist agenda in the plainest language. As these letters were intended to reach a broad audience through the newspapers, consistency in both word choice and message was critical. Washington was asking all the people to keep faith with the federal government as the way to a prosperous future. Words and phrases such as "national honor," "dignity," and "national importance," would have struck a particular chord with early republicans, so Washington was sure that his message was both received and understood.<sup>335</sup> These letters further demonstrate how Washington developed an appreciation of the power of the press based on his habit of widely reading newspapers and periodicals. As in the previous example of the ratification debates, Washington understood how to use the power of the press to act on his political agenda. Here, as in the other examples in the previous chapters, Washington turned practical reading into practical application.

What allowed these American presidential tours to be successful was the combination of Washington's reputation and public behavior that always maintained the perfect balance between dignified distance and accessibility to the people. This in conjunction with the deferential nature of the society of the time allowed Washington to connect certain political practices from the bygone colonial era with the evolving principles of American republicanism. In effect, all of this was comforting to the people;

---

<sup>335</sup> There are many studies that analyze the changes that took place in American language during the Revolutionary and Early Republican eras. See Robert A. Ferguson, *Reading the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Michael P. Kramer, *Imagining Language in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Terrence Ball, *Transforming Political Discourse: Political Theory and Critical Conceptual History* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 47-79; Michael T. Gilmore, "Letters of the Early Republic," and "Magazines, Criticism, and Essays," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume One: 1590-1820*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); 541-72; Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literacy, and the Origins of the United States*; Robert A. Ferguson, *Law and Letters in American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 3-96.

they could exalt him as the nation's father while confident in the knowledge that he was not seeking a throne.<sup>336</sup> Such pageantry would have been an abject failure if Washington and the people did not share a knowledge and appreciation of British history. For Washington's part, that knowledge came from his reading of Tobias Smollett's *History of England*.<sup>337</sup>

---

<sup>336</sup>James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington and the New Nation (1783-1793)* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 229; Charles Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 10; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 117-126. For the impact that the cult of Washington had on American culture and politics at the end of the eighteenth-century see Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 143-181; Lawrence J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 41-77; Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), chap. 7; Garry Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1984); Barry Schwartz, *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999); Simon P. Newman, "Principles or Men? George Washington and the Political Culture of National Leadership, 1776-1801," in *Journal of the Early Republic*, XII (1992), 477-507. For the emergence of the sentimental monarchy and its parallels to popular patriotism and the making of American nationalism see Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1701-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 195-236; Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1989), 155-56; Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), chap. 4; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1992), 95-100. For the art of performing power see Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma, Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 124. In particular, Geertz writes:

As the political center of any complexly organized society there is both a governing elite and a set of symbolic forms expressing the fact that it is in truth governing. No matter how democratically the members of the elite are chosen or how divided among themselves they may be, they justify their existence and order their actions in terms of a collection of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities, and appurtenances that they have either inherited or, in more revolutionary situations, invented. It is these that mark the center as center and give what goes on there its aura of not merely being important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is built. The gravity of high politics and the solemnity of high worship spring from like impulses than might first appear.

<sup>337</sup>One notable critic of the argument that Washington and his fellow founders deliberately had considered the elements of monarchy when infusing symbolism into the presidency is J.G.A. Pocock, "States, Republics, and Empires: The American Founding in Early Modern Perspective" in *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, ed. Terrence Ball and J.G.A. Pocock (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1988), 73-74. Pocock argues that the founders either were unaware of the literature of courtly conduct or did not consider it. He further asserts that "it came to be assumed that the president would maintain a homespun and open style, so that access to his person would be republican and democratic;" however, the overwhelming amount of evidence from Washington's early administration indicates otherwise. Both Washington and those who feted him seemed to understand one another perfectly, without prior coordination of what presidential receptions should look like. These events were clearly based on

### Washington Attacked in the Press for the First Time

While Washington's southern tour can be considered a success in that some of the rancor over the funding and assumption plan died down and in general faith in the federal government was enhanced, Washington's public performances were not all acclaimed as setting the right tone for the new nation. There were an increasing number of critics, mostly coming from the growing Antifederalist ranks that were just as capable as Washington in using the power of the press to their advantage. Early into Washington's first term, an opposition press began to criticize the new government's protocol and before long, the most outspoken critics began to focus negative attention on the Washingtons themselves, accusing them of trying to foist a monarchy on the country. The first barbs were over Washington's weekly levees and Martha's Friday evening ladies receptions. The *Daily Advertiser* bluntly warned that "in a few years we shall have all the paraphernalia yet wanting to give the superb finish to the grandeur of our AMERICAN COURT! The purity of republican principle seems to be daily losing ground! We are on the eve of another revolution."<sup>338</sup> Martha Washington was also attacked for hosting "court like levees" in her "queenly drawing rooms."<sup>339</sup> Washington, who had always blanched at criticism, was outraged that both he and his wife were being attacked in the press. He complained to David Stuart, "Would it not have been better to have thrown the veil of charity over them, ascribing their stiffness to the effects of

---

something, and the strong parallels with certain pointed juxtapositions seem to indicate that certain British royal traditions served as the foundation upon which new American ones were developed.

<sup>338</sup> See the quote from the *Daily Advertiser* in Harlow Giles Unger, *The Unexpected George Washington: His Private Life* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2006), 245. See also Chernow, *Washington*, 579.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid*; see also Stephen Decatur, Jr., *Private Affairs of George Washington: From the Records and Accounts of Tobias Lear, Esquire, His Secretary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), 68.

ageí than to pride and dignity of office, which, God knows, has no charms for me?ö To Thomas Jefferson, who would later orchestrate some of the attacks on Washington in the hostile press, Washington reportedly said that ñobody disliked more the ceremonies of his office and he had not the least taste or gratification in the execution of its function; that he was happy at home alone.ö<sup>340</sup> Washington later decried ñthe extreme wretchedness of his existence while in office.ö<sup>341</sup> He could not understand why the public misinterpreted his actions as reported in the newspapers. At this point, his actions and reputation together should have made it clear to all that he was no monarchist.

### The Newspaper War and the Rise of Partisanship

At first, these personal attacks on Washington seemed to be limited to those voices of opposition near the seat of the government itself. As time went on and partisanship both within and outside the federal government grew, however, the chorus became both louder and larger. The rise of factionalism in the new United States can be traced to the increasing conflict between Jefferson and Hamilton over the national future. Over time, Washington's cabinet split between Hamilton and Secretary of War Henry Knox on one side, and Secretary of State Jefferson and Attorney General Randolph on the other. Jefferson, Randolph, and Washington's once trusted friend, Madison, came to believe that the expanding federal power under Hamilton's programs was indicative of a sinister plot to discard the Constitution in favor of an American monarchy modeled on the British system. Jefferson characterized Hamilton and his supporters as Anglophiles,

---

<sup>340</sup> Thomas Jefferson's conversation with Washington, 1 October 1792, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>341</sup> Thomas Jefferson's notes on a conversation with Washington, 7 February 1793, in *ibid*.

while Hamilton shot back with charges that Jefferson was involved in a Jacobin conspiracy emanating from Paris.

Hamilton's new faction, the Federalists came to represent support for the Constitution and national unity through a robust federal government headed by a strong executive. They favored banks and industry, but were still recognized the importance of agriculture. They were predominantly political elitists who doubted the wisdom of the common people. Furthermore, the party incorporated a growing number of opponents to slavery. By contrast, Jefferson's party called themselves Republicans, suggesting that they believed in saving the nation from devolving into a monarchy. Republicans favored a limited federal government with more power vested in the legislative branch than any other. They also championed states' rights while decrying the corrupting powers of banks, federal debt, and industry. Moreover, they believed in the wisdom of the common people. Over time, Jefferson and his Republicans observed Hamilton's growing influence on Washington with apprehension.

The two parties both declared war on each other in the newspapers. The Federalists could count on John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* to promote the Hamiltonian system in order to make the case for strengthening the power of the federal government. To counter this, Jefferson and Madison arranged to hire Philip Freneau, a poet and College of New Jersey classmate of Madison's, as a State Department translator. Freneau's real purpose in moving to the nation's capital was to launch the *National Gazette*, which became the Republican trumpet.<sup>342</sup> In the next few months, the two parties would wage an ugly newspaper war against one another, with some salvos fired

---

<sup>342</sup> See the editorial note on the origins of the *National Gazette* in *The Papers of James Madison, Digital Edition*.

directly at Washington himself. The Jeffersonians ramped up their attacks on the Washington administration even more after a speculative fever arose when the Treasury Department began selling shares in the new national bank. When the news broke that Hamilton's former deputy and now governor of the Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures, William Duer, had been involved in a scheme to corner the market on government bonds, the speculative bubble burst and share prices plummeted. Hamilton did in fact restore order in the system, but thanks to his former association with Duer, the damage to his reputation was done.<sup>343</sup> Freneau seized this opportunity to lambast the Hamiltonian system in the *National Gazette*, which he blamed for "scenes of speculation calculated to aggrandize the few and the wealthy, while oppressing the great body of the people."<sup>344</sup> Hamilton went on the offensive in the July 25, 1792 edition of Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* by posing a simple question about Freneau's State Department salary: "Whether this salary is paid him for translations or publications, the design of which is to vilify those to whom the voice of the people has committed the administration of our public affairs?"<sup>345</sup> By August, Hamilton charged that the *National Gazette* was established to be Jefferson's mouthpiece, and that Madison had been the agent responsible for bringing Freneau to the State Department.

Washington felt wounded by the escalating degree of hostility towards his administration. His best lieutenants were at each other's throats to such an extent that it was disrupting the cabinet's ability to function. Moreover, the voices of dissent were

---

<sup>343</sup> Chernow, *Washington*, 671-74; Leibiger, *Founding Friendship*, 153-155; John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 327-344.

<sup>344</sup> Philip Freneau, "On the Funding System," in the *National Gazette*, no. 40 (Philadelphia: Thursday, 15 March 1792), 158, in *America's Historic Newspapers*.

<sup>345</sup> Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 403.

coming from fellow Virginians, which indicated that Washington's star had fallen in his home state. After all, it was Jefferson and Madison who hatched the plan to install Freneau in the State Department and enabled him to launch his Republican newspaper. For his part, Madison penned more than eighteen essays that ran in the *National Gazette* excoriating Washington's administration.<sup>346</sup>

Washington, who had long since grown weary of the presidency and longed for retirement again, admonished both Hamilton and Jefferson to end the bickering. Both men defended themselves to Washington in extensive letters filled with heated language, each accusing the other of treachery.<sup>347</sup> The only thing that they and their respective supporters could agree on was that Washington needed to serve a second term in order to keep this growing political divide from splitting the nation. It was only after a long time of brooding and with a little cajoling from his friend, Eliza Powell, that he agreed to accept a second term if elected.<sup>348</sup>

It did not take long for Washington's hopes for a peaceful second term to be dashed. The newspaper war waged on, and Washington became the primary target of Freneau's attacks. What made matters worse was the fact that other newspapers began to follow Freneau's lead, including the *General Advertiser*, and later the *Aurora*, published by Benjamin Franklin Bache. Bache went even farther than Freneau in maligning Washington, characterizing his performance in the Revolution as incompetent, and even

---

<sup>346</sup> See the editorial note for Madison's *National Gazette* essays, 19 November 1791 to 20 December 1792, and the text of the eighteen separate essays in *The Papers of James Madison, Digital Edition*.

<sup>347</sup> See Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 23 August 1792; Washington to Alexander Hamilton, 26 August 1792; Alexander Hamilton to Washington, 9 September 1792; Thomas Jefferson to Washington, 9 September 1792; Thomas Jefferson's Conversation with Washington, 1 October 1792, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. For the draft of Hamilton's 14,000 word defense that was enclosed in his letter to Washington dated 9 September, see Syrett, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 12:229-258.

<sup>348</sup> Elizabeth Willing Powell to Washington, 17 November 1792, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

doubting whether or not Washington really supported independence.<sup>349</sup> Shortly thereafter, the opposition press had more than alleged presidential ostentation to focus on.

### The French Revolution and the American Press

When the French Revolution broke out, many Americans thought the United States should throw its support behind the revolutionaries. As the French Revolution began to spiral out of control and war between France and England broke out, Washington wasted no time in declaring that the United States would remain neutral. This sparked criticism from those who believed that the United States owed France a debt of gratitude for their alliance during the American Revolution. The critics, of course, did not see the situation from Washington's point of view: the United States was simply not prepared to enter into the war on either side, and that the safety and security of the still fragile nation depended on a policy of strict neutrality. The chorus of pro-French critics only grew louder with the arrival of the new French Ambassador, Citizen Genet, who flagrantly disregarded diplomatic protocol in order to wage a popular campaign for French support among the American people, all the while outfitting private American vessels to challenge the British navy on the high seas. In order to placate his cabinet members who were predictably split over the issue, Washington decided that he would receive Genet, but it would be the coolest of receptions.

Washington's firm adherence to the neutrality proclamation in the face of Genet's arrival infuriated the editors of the opposition press. The *National Gazette* lambasted Washington's supposed Anglomania and his utter ingratitude towards France, urging that the United States should not sit back and view with cold indifference the struggles of

---

<sup>349</sup> Chernow, *Washington*, 686.

those very friends to support their own liberties against a host of despots.ö<sup>350</sup> A few days later, the paper accused Washington of being isolated from the people. An open letter to Washington stated, öLet not the little buzz of the aristocratic few and their contemptible minions of speculators, Tories, and British emissaries, be mistaken for the exalted and general voice of the American people.ö<sup>351</sup>

Genet's flamboyant arrival in Philadelphia stirred up pro-French mobs that broke out in riots and even marched on the presidential mansion. Day after day, there were threats of dragging Washington out of his house and forcing another revolution. Genet further added fuel to the fire by violating Washington's express order that American vessels were not to be commissioned as privateers to fight the British Navy and by threatening to go over Washington's head to the American people to get the neutrality proclamation overturned. This latest of Genet's indiscretions turned out to be a sort of windfall for Washington and the Federalists. John Jay and Rufus King leaked Genet's threats to the Federalist press, and the people balked at the very idea of flouting presidential authority. The cabinet unanimously voted in favor of demanding Genet's recall. The removal of Genet did not, however, mean the end of the protests against Washington's administration over the subject of the French Revolution. New political groups calling themselves Democratic- Republican Societies sprang up. Organizers intended to bring back the spirit of the Sons of Liberty; however, Washington viewed them as an illegitimate criticism of the government given by those who sought to destroy the people's faith in public servants. He acknowledged their right to protest, but

---

<sup>350</sup> See the letter from Veritas to Washington, 30 May 1793, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>351</sup> See the letter from Veritas to Washington, 3 June 1793, in *ibid*.

Washington nonetheless regarded them as dangerous because they represented permanent hostility to the government.<sup>352</sup>

### The Whiskey Rebellion and Domestic Discord

The political situation did not improve much for Washington by the middle of his second term. Jefferson resigned as Secretary of State on December 31, 1793. Then, a series of violent encounters with hostile Indians and Anthony Wayne's soldiers provided another series of diplomatic crises for Washington. The largest crisis, however, came in 1794 when backcountry settlers rose up in opposition to the excise tax on whiskey passed in 1791 as part of Hamilton's program for paying down the national debt. Interestingly, as the storm over the whiskey tax was brewing in Pennsylvania, Washington was in fact, doing his best to analyze the best way to ensure that farming was a productive industry for both the federal government and landowners. Having received an initial gift from Sir John Sinclair of several reports on the surveys conducted on agriculture in various counties in Great Britain, Washington wrote to Sinclair asking for more. Sinclair sent Washington copies of nearly every survey conducted by the Board of Agriculture, some of them specially bound at Washington's request.<sup>353</sup> By reading the survey from across the United Kingdom, Washington was able to gain a better understanding of a national government approached the development of agriculture as an industry. Although land holding patterns in Britain were different from those in the United States, these surveys nonetheless provided Washington with a broader understanding of agricultural management beyond the knowledge he gained from running his plantations. However,

---

<sup>352</sup> Chernow, *Washington*, 698; Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 360-365.

<sup>353</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 91-95.

Washington's attempt to determine how to make agriculture a profitable industry for the nation was not going to provide him with a solution to the immediate problem of rebels rising in western Pennsylvania.

Violence broke out in mid-July 1794 in Pennsylvania when a revenue inspector named Colonel John Neville and US Marshall David Lenox tried to serve processes against farmers who had not registered their stills as was required by law. Protesters burned Neville's house to the ground and fired at Lenox. On August 1, 1794, six thousand whiskey rebels assembled outside of Pittsburgh in Braddock's field and threatened to seize the nearby federal garrison and force the resignation of anyone attempting to enforce the whiskey tax. A few of the hotheaded radicals among them even called for a French-style revolution. Washington had no tolerance for such lawlessness. After a tense meeting of his cabinet, he met with Justice James Wilson, who reassured the Washington that it was within his power to call out the militia. Washington did just that on August 7, 1794.

After negotiators failed to reach a peaceful resolution with the rebels and the violence continued to escalate even further, Washington issued a final warning to the whiskey rebels, who had utterly dismissed the peaceful overtures extended to them and now constituted a "reasonable opposition."<sup>354</sup> He interpreted their actions as a challenge to the Constitution, posing the question of "whether a small proportion of the United States shall dictate to the whole Union."<sup>355</sup> Determined to end this standoff quickly, Washington decided that he would lead the troops himself. He had a new uniform made and rode out of Philadelphia with Hamilton at his side, who, in the temporary absence of

---

<sup>354</sup> Washington, Proclamation, 25 September 1794, *The Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols. ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C., 1931-44), 33: 507-8.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

Henry Knox, was serving as acting Secretary of War. For his part, despite the overwhelming size of the force he deployed to put down the rebellion, Washington placed his emphasis on making sure the operation was a show of force that properly showcased the state militias under their respective commanders. He had no desire to see the situation deteriorate into a bloody repeat of Shays's Rebellion. He held two meetings with representatives appointed by the rebels wherein Washington reiterated that he would tolerate nothing less than capitulation, and that he would not hesitate to use force if anyone fired on the army. He pushed on with the army towards Pittsburgh for a few more days, and then once the final military plans were laid returned promptly to Philadelphia. With the display of overwhelming military might the rebellion withered. The army eventually took one hundred fifty prisoners, two of which were tried and sentenced to death, but Washington pardoned them. Although predictably criticized by the Democratic-Republican societies, Washington's handling of the Whiskey Rebellion provided an example of how to deal with civil unrest.<sup>356</sup>

Even as calm was restored to the backcountry, it was not restored within Washington's cabinet. Shortly after the Whiskey Rebellion ended, Hamilton tendered his resignation from the Treasury and Knox also resigned as Secretary of War. Jefferson had already made his departure as Secretary of State. In the coming months, Washington found that he could not find replacements with the same amount talent as his first cabinet had. He went through a string of candidates for each post before he found men that were willing to serve and those that accepted were second rate. Add to that the furor over the Jay Treaty that Republicans decried as selling out America to England with its granting

---

<sup>356</sup> For a comprehensive examination of the Whiskey Rebellion, see Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

England most favored nation status for trade and its failure to prevent the Royal Navy from impressing American sailors, and the sting of James Monroe's four hundred seventy three page condemnation of the Washington administration following his recall as ambassador to France and it seemed that Washington's second term was not going to end on a positive note.<sup>357</sup>

#### Washington's Collection of Sermons: Voices of Moderation on Popular Issues

With all of the scandals and the negative press coverage, it makes sense that Washington would have turned to other types of print media for a more reassuring appraisal of his administration. Over the course of his two terms in office, Washington was inundated with gifts of books, pamphlets, and sermons. Just as he had done during the Revolution, Washington made time to read things having to do with current affairs so that he could maintain full awareness of his situation. What are most interesting out of all of these are the printed sermons.

Most sermons in the 1790s were political, continuing the trend that had taken off in America during the revolutionary era. These sermons had in common certain rhetoric of political discourse. The clergy interpreted events in terms of a political theology based

---

<sup>357</sup>Washington appointed Monroe as minister to France in 1794 in a move that he hoped would placate Republicans. However, the evidence indicated that once in France, Monroe did not uphold the administration's policy of neutrality and was displaying a blatant favoritism towards the French. He made matters worse when he leaked some of the details of the Jay Treaty to a French official, inciting anger. Washington recalled him and replaced him with Charles Cotesworth Pinckney in July 1796. Monroe was seething by the time he arrived back in Philadelphia, when he published his defense, *A View of the Conduct of the Executive in the Foreign Affairs of the United States*. Washington obtained a copy of the book and was enraged. He filled more than sixty pages of the book with bluntly worded marginal remarks including, "Self importance appears here," "Insanity to the extreme!" and "curious and laughable." Washington's original copy of the book is currently preserved in the Harvard University Library. Jared Sparks printed Washington's comments in part in his edition of Washington's papers; Ford printed them in full in his edition of Washington's writing, 13: 452-490. Of note, Monroe's book is the only example of biting criticism that Washington retained in his library. He did not keep any copies of the *National Gazette*, *Aurora*, or any other pro-Republican periodicals. He did, however, retain copies of the pro-administration *Gazette of the United States*.

on philosophical and revelatory learning. They also reflect a population that consistently assimilated the political and constitutional issues of the day to the insights of philosophical and spiritual traditions. This manner of political theorizing gave shape to the events of the period to the same extent as newspapers.<sup>358</sup> Washington collected fifty-seven separate printed sermons during his presidency. While the majority of them were sent to Washington by the authors, there is still a plausible case to be made that Washington took the time to read at least some of them. As the newspaper war grew in both scale and ferocity over the course of Washington's two terms in office, it was becoming harder for Washington to find papers that presented non-partisan accounts.<sup>359</sup> However, another barometer available to him at that time was the printed sermon.

The clergymen who wrote these sermons were community leaders who likely thought their sermons reflected the views of their parishioners, so if one of their writings reached the President then the voice of a community was heard. The sermons offered political opinions without the same degree of biting partisan overtones. It would therefore make sense that Washington would take the time to read them as they came into his possession regardless of whether it was by his purchase or by the gift of the author, for they offered a different means by which Washington could gauge how the people were receiving his carefully crafted presidential performance.

When examining Washington's sermon collection as a whole, it is important to note that they address all of the major political issues that faced Washington's administration. Additionally, Washington kept in his collection sermons that did not

---

<sup>358</sup> Ellis Sandoz, Forward, in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 1: xii. See also Noll, *America's God*, 56-7.

<sup>359</sup> Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 24-78.

necessarily reflect his views, something he did not do with all of his editions of the different opposition newspapers. Some of the sermons were merely celebrations of the new American Republic and did not take a strong stand on any of the divisive issues of the day. One such example is William Smith's *A Sermon, on Temporal and Spiritual Salvation: Delivered in Christ-Church, Philadelphia, Before, the Pennsylvania Society of the Cincinnati*. It recounts the saga of the American Revolution cast in theological terms, effectively turning the struggle for independence into a holy war that would allow for the New Jerusalem to finally be established on the shores of America.<sup>360</sup> Washington also collected other such celebratory sermons including five that were preached on February 19, 1795, the day that Washington proclaimed should be set aside as a national day for public thanksgiving and prayer. Jedidiah Morse's *The Present Situation of Other Nations of the World, Contrasted With Our Own* could have been comforting for Washington to read as it urged the people not only to have renewed faith in the federal government, but also to properly honor Washington's performance as the nation's father. Given the tumultuous political situations that Washington found himself embroiled in and the fever pitch of the character attacks in the opposition press, Washington would have been able to read this sermon as a confirmation that his reputation had not been destroyed and that his efforts were in fact appreciated by the people.<sup>361</sup> Similarly, John Mason's *Mercy Remembered in Wrath* offered a defense of Washington's policy of keeping the United

---

<sup>360</sup> William Smith, *A Sermon, On Temporal and Spiritual Salvation: Delivered in Christ-Church, Philadelphia, before the Pennsylvania Society of the Cincinnati* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1790) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

<sup>361</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *The Present Situation of Other Nations of the World, Contrasted With Our Own. A Sermon, Delivered at Charlestown, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, February 19, 1795; Being the Day Recommended By George Washington, President of the United States of America, for Publick Thanksgiving and Prayer* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1795) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

States out of foreign wars as well as his handling of the Whiskey Rebellion.<sup>362</sup> Samuel Kendal's *A Sermon, Delivered on the Day of National Thanksgiving*, further offers a defense of Washington's performance, paying special attention to his foreign policy, in similar rhetorical terms as Mason used in his sermon. Kendal also made special mention of the opposition press, condemning their unjust charges leveled at Washington on a daily basis. David Osgood's, *A Discourse*, recognized the value of the state constitutions to make laws particular to specific localities; however, he trumpeted the federal government's role of promoting the general welfare.<sup>363</sup>

Washington also kept among his collection sermons that reflected his stance on particular issues, including Israel Evans's *A Sermon, Delivered at Concord, Before the Honorable General Court of the State of New Hampshire, at the Annual Election, Holden on the First Wednesday in June 1791*. In this sermon, Evans specifically cited Washington's stance on freedom of religion as well as Hamilton's funding and assumption program. Additionally, he also stressed the people's duty to elect wise legislators and the obligation to obey the laws passed by them once in office.<sup>364</sup> Similarly, in more overtly theological tones, Samuel Langdon's *A Discourse on the Unity of the Church as a Monumental Pillar of the Truth; Designed to Reconcile Christians of all Parties and Denominations in Charity and Fellowship, as One Body in Christ; Delivered Before an Association of Ministers Convened at Portsmouth, October 12, 1791*

---

<sup>362</sup>John M. Mason, *Mercy Remembered in Wrath. A Sermon, the Substance of Which Was Preached on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 1795, Observed Throughout the United States as a Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer* (New York: John Buel, 1795) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

<sup>363</sup>David Osgood, *A Discourse, Delivered February 19, 1795. The Day Set Apart by the President for a General Thanksgiving Through the United States* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1795) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

<sup>364</sup>Israel Evans, *A Sermon, Delivered at Concord, Before the Honorable General Court of the State of New Hampshire, at the Annual Election, Holden on the First Wednesday in June, M.DCC.XCI* (Concord, NH: George Hough, 1791) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

also championed freedom of religion.<sup>365</sup> Robert Davidson's *A Sermon, On the Freedom and Happiness of the United States of America* championed Washington's handling of the Whiskey Rebellion and general efforts to promote peace and prosperity within the United States.<sup>366</sup> These sermons in one way or another discussed all of the contentious issues discussed in this chapter. Given that these sermons came from different clergymen from different denominations in different locations, Washington could read them and gain at least a somewhat broader perspective of how his policies were received by those outside the nation's capital where the partisan press captivated the public's attention.

As stated earlier, some of the sermons that Washington collected during this period did not reflect his views. Some such as Samuel Miller's *A Sermon, Preached July 4<sup>th</sup> 1793*, William Linn's *The Blessings of America*, and Samuel Stillman's *Thoughts on the French Revolution* all very much expressed joy over the outbreak of the French Revolution and did not regret the toppling of the monarchy and the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the manner that the Federalists did.<sup>367</sup> What makes these opposition sermons so pertinent to this study is that with the exception of James Monroe's condemnation of the administration, Washington did not keep any other

---

<sup>365</sup>Samuel Langdon, *A Discourse on the Unity of the Church as a Monumental Pillar of the Truth; Designed to Reconcile Christians of all Parties and Denominations in Charity and Fellowship, as One Body in Christ; Delivered Before an Association of Ministers Convened at Portsmouth, October 12, 1791, and in Substance Repeated at a Lecture in Hampton Falls, January 26, 1792* (Exeter, NH: Henry Ranlet, 1791) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

<sup>366</sup>Robert Davidson, *A Sermon, On the Freedom and Happiness of the United States of America, Preached in Carlisle, on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1794. And Published at the Request of the Officers of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Troops of Light Horse* (Philadelphia: Samuel Harrison Smith, 1794) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

<sup>367</sup>Samuel Miller, *A Sermon, Preached in New York, July 4<sup>th</sup> 1793. Being the Anniversary of the Independence of America: At the Request of the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order* (New York: Thomas Greenleaf: 1793); William Linn, *The Blessings of America. A Sermon Preached at the Middle Dutch Church, on the Fourth July 1791, Being the Anniversary of the Independence of America: At the Request of the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order* (New York: Thomas Greenleaf, 1791); Samuel Stillman, *Thoughts on the French Revolution. A Sermon, Delivered November 20, 1794: Being the Day of Annual Thanksgiving* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1795), in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*.

opposition pieces of any type in his collection. None of his personal copies of the *National Gazette* or the *Aurora* were listed in the estate inventory taken upon his death, so what made these sermons the exception? Most likely it was because although the respective authors expressed opinions on the French Revolution that ran counter to Washington's, they did so respectfully. Within the high flown republican theological rhetoric of each of these sermons, there were no barbs aimed at Washington personally, or his neutrality proclamation. Indeed, the authors each pay heed to Washington's position that despite the feelings of obligation that many Americans felt toward the French for their support during the late American Revolution, the fact was that the United States was not prepared for war, and it therefore made sense for the administration to steer a prudent course in the stormy international waters of the time.

Moreover, Washington must have been further gratified in 1796 when William Richards published his *Reflections on French Atheism and On English Christianity*. Richards addressed the French revolutionaries's decision to disestablish the Catholic Church under the new constitution. He argued that the decision was a positive one for it would rid the French people of their superstitious obedience to popery, and allow them to have freedom of conscience. Richards hoped that this decision would allow the French people to enjoy the same type of religious freedom that Americans had after centuries of persecution and Catholic oppression. This opinion was very much in concert with Washington's. He further underscored his argument with a challenge to the notion that the French revolutionaries brought atheism to France for the first time. Atheists had been present in France before the revolution began, and it was hardly likely that they would

turn all people away from God. In other words, Richards urged his congregation to observe the developing French constitution calmly and realistically.

Richards's rational view offered a welcome contrast to the controversy swirling around Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* and his rebuttal to Edmund Burke's observations on the French Revolution. Washington collected several different critiques of Paine's *Age of Reason* including Miers Fisher's *A Reply to the False Reasoning in the "Age of Reason." To Which Are Added Some Thoughts on Idolatry; on the Devil; and the Origin of Moral Evil; on Educating Young Men for the Gospel Ministry; and on What Is 'the Word of God.' All of Which Refer, More or Less, to Opinions Advanced in Thomas Paine's "Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology."* As Fisher was a layman, his critique used a structure and rhetoric which were slightly more direct and not as laden with theological imagery as some of the other sermons in Washington's collection, and would possibly have had a greater appeal to Washington as a reader. It is worth noting that Washington began collecting critiques of Paine at around the same time that Paine began openly attacking Washington's failure to secure his release from a French prison.<sup>368</sup>

---

<sup>368</sup> Fisher Miers *A Reply to the False Reasoning in the "Age of Reason." To Which Are Added, Some Thoughts on Idolatry; on the Devil; and the Origin of Moral Evil; on Educating Young Men for the Gospel Ministry; and on what is "the Word of God." All Which Refer, More or Less, to Opinions Advanced in Thomas Paine's "Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology."* By a Layman (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1796) in *Early American Imprints, Series 1*. See also Washington to David Stuart, 8 June 1797, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. In this letter, Washington commented on Paine's attack that was printed by Benjamin Franklin Bache, the publisher of the *Aurora*. What is so interesting about the timing of Paine's attack on Washington is that after Paine was released from prison he went to live with James Monroe, who was then serving his brief stint as the American minister in Paris. It is assumed that Monroe's savage attack on Washington's administration was composed while Paine was in residence. Having been stung by both Paine and Monroe, Washington seemed to make a point of collecting at least some of the works by Paine's most vociferous critics.

### The Significance of Washington's Presidential Reading

After putting the sermon collection in context with Washington's following of the development of the partisan press during his presidency which came after he helped to shape the media campaign for ratification, what emerges is that Washington understood how the press could be a political tool. In choosing what material to publish, printers were able to steer public debate and reflect people's views. In this way, the useful knowledge that Washington gained from his reading of periodicals, sermons, and pamphlets did not just come from the text. He also learned about the power of the printed word and how to use it. Washington made his best attempt to perform the role of the precedent setting president, and he constantly sought reviews from the various forms of print media available to him at the time. As painful as the reading of the opposition press's attacks were, he knew he had to read them nonetheless because to rely only on words of encouragement offered through private correspondents would have given him a false sense of security. However, as the attacks grew more bitter over time, Washington had to increasingly look beyond the newspapers to hear the voice of the people, and that is where the printed sermons fit in.

The view of Washington's presidency through the lens of his reading material and correspondence is mixed. He started down an uncharted path on a high note with his first inauguration; however, it did not take long for his hopes of a harmonious government to be shattered as his best cabinet members squared off against one another in the debate over the correct path for the nation's financial future. The degree of Washington's anxiety is underscored by bearing in mind how carefully he tended his reputation during the Confederation period after his resignation from the army. The attention he paid to the

literary and historical attempts to chronicle his life and role in the Revolution ultimately paid dividends as Washington entered what would be his final retirement, but during his two terms in office it seemed his status was on the decline. Washington's post-Revolution career is characterized by his cultivation and careful use of his reputation for the public good, and as this chapter illustrated, he both read and used print media to achieve his ends and monitor his progress. With all of this established, the next chapter will explore how Washington rounded out his library with works intended to secure his legacy.

## Chapter 5 ó A Legacy Library

March 4, 1797 began like any other day for President Washington. Up before dawn, he devoted time to reading through some correspondence that had been unceremoniously dumped on his desk, and he noted the temperature in his diary. He donned a black suit and ate his customary light breakfast. Despite its inauspicious beginning, this day was not, however, just any typical day. It was Washington's last morning as president. Just before noon he strode alone to Congress Hall, entering to thunderous applause. He watched as his former secretary of state and soon to be vice president Thomas Jefferson made his rather unceremonious entrance wearing a simple blue suit. Finally, the new president John Adams arrived, appearing more than a bit awkward in a pearl colored suit with wrist ruffles, powdered wig, and cocked hat. Adams already looked like he was not getting any sleep, which must not have been a reassuring sign to those gathered in the chamber to watch the first ever transfer of presidential authority in the brief history of the United States. Adams glanced over at Washington, who by contrast looked positively tranquil, as if the weight of the world was just lifted off his shoulders. Adams later wrote to his wife:

A solemn scene it was indeed, and it was made affecting to me by the presence of the General, whose countenance was as serene and unclouded as the day. He seemed to me to enjoy a triumph over me. Methought I heard him say, "Ay! I am fairly out and you fairly in! See which of us will be happiest!"<sup>369</sup>

If Washington did not say this he ought to have, because this was the scene of his most longed for retirement. After decades of public service, Washington was at long last taking his final leave of public life and heading back to Mount Vernon.

---

<sup>369</sup>John Adams to Abigail Adams, 16 March 1797, quoted in Freeman, *George Washington*, 7:437. See also John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), 334-5.

It is difficult to imagine the immense feeling of relief that Washington must have felt upon leaving Congress Hall a private citizen. He could look forward to returning to Mount Vernon, which once again suffered from his long absences. Additionally, for as much as Mount Vernon needed Washington's care, Washington needed Mount Vernon's ability to rejuvenate him. His health declined precipitously over the course of his presidency; the cares of office seemed to rapidly accelerate the aging process.

The physical toll that the presidency took on Washington was a source of concern for him. During his presidency, his mother succumbed to breast cancer, and his beloved nephew and estate manager, George Augustine Washington, also passed away.<sup>370</sup> Just after he left office, his sister, Betty, also died. Moreover, he knew that Washington men were not typically blessed with longevity, and he just passed his sixty-fifth birthday. Therefore, although he was elated to return home and he did recapture some energy in throwing himself back into the business of managing his estates, Washington seemed to sense that his end was drawing near.<sup>371</sup> With that in mind, he focused his time and effort on setting all things right. Getting his financial affairs back on track was merely one aspect of this. Washington also devoted considerable time into one final attempt at shaping his legacy, and a major part of that undertaking was through building up his library.

---

<sup>370</sup>Washington was notified of his mother's death by Burgess Ball, who was married to George Augustine Washington's sister, Frances on 25 August 1789. Ball's letter from that date is in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. George Augustine Washington died on 5 February 1793; see Bryan Fairfax to Washington, 17 February 1793, in *ibid*. Betty Washington Lewis died on 31 March 1797; see Washington's reference to her death in his letter to his nephew, George Lewis, 9 April 1797, and the corresponding editorial note in *ibid*.

<sup>371</sup>Washington's last sibling, Charles, died on 16 September 1799. Washington was notified by Burgess Ball, to which Washington replied that he "was the first, and now am the last, of my fathers Children by the second marriage who remain. When I shall be called upon to follow them, is known only to the giver of life. When the summons comes I shall endeavor to obey it with a good grace." The death of his mother, brothers, sister, and nephew within a few years of each other evidently affected Washington, making him aware of his own advancing age and declining health and faculties. See Washington to Burgess Ball, 22 September 1799, in *ibid*.

As has been established in the previous chapters, all of Washington's reading was done purposefully with practical intent. Reading was a tool that helped him work through whatever particular circumstance he found himself in, and over the course of a lifetime of such study, he developed a deep appreciation for the power of reading. The previous chapter illustrated how Washington used different forms of print media to both help craft his reputation and measure his presidential performance. This chapter will illustrate how in his final retirement Washington added to his library at Mount Vernon those works that would help refine his public image for the ages. This final, short phase of Washington's life is noteworthy not so much because of what he read, but rather because of what he deliberately acquired in order to set the record straight for posterity. Although the presidency exacted a toll on Washington's carefully crafted reputation, he knew that interest in his life would only grow after his death, so he needed to spend whatever time he had left getting his records in order.

This chapter will also explore one specific example of how Washington's reading led him to make a momentous decision that would separate him from his fellow southern founders. In his will Washington emancipated his slaves. He was the only founding father to do so.<sup>372</sup> Although the complexities of Virginia law only allowed him to free his own slaves and not those that belonged to the Custis estate, Washington's act of setting his slaves free is still immensely significant. His decision to make this provision in his

---

<sup>372</sup> With regard to the other southern founders not freeing their slaves, see Herbert Sloan, *Principle and Interest*, 11-12. Sloan seems to hint that Jefferson felt conflicted over the status and future of his slaves, but was unable to effectively do anything about them because he was so deeply in debt. Sloan, however, tempers this point by highlighting the fact that in all his writings that chronicled his thoughts on his unceasing problems with personal debt, Jefferson is silent about the ramifications that this debt had on his slaves.

will was not reached quickly or easily and it shows how his views on slavery developed thanks to in part to his study of the subject.

#### Washington's Final Retirement and Homecoming

Upon his return to Mount Vernon, Washington immediately resumed his old routine of rising before dawn, spending several hours in his library before breakfast, followed by a tour of his five farms. He quickly found that Mount Vernon needed more extensive repairs than he initially thought. This left him little time for reading and caused him to fall behind on his correspondence. As he wrote to Secretary of War James McHenry, "I have not looked into a book since I came home, nor shall I be able to do it until I have discharged my workmen; probably not before the nights grow longer, when possibly I may be looking in [the] doomsday book."<sup>373</sup> Still, Washington kept up remarkably well with current events by reading newspapers widely. Since he still thought them too biased, he asked Treasury Secretary Oliver Wolcott to tell him the real truth about certain issues.<sup>374</sup> The fact that Washington still set aside the time to keep up with the affairs of the nation through a wide array of printed sources reinforces the argument that Washington was indeed focused on shoring up his legacy for posterity. Given the demands Mount Vernon placed on his time, it would have been perfectly plausible for Washington to turn his attention away from politics, staying informed only through the news brought by the stream of visitors that once again besieged Mount Vernon on a daily basis. For Washington, however, sitting back and turning a blind eye simply would not do. He gave up domestic happiness and risked his health and

---

<sup>373</sup> Washington to James McHenry, 29 May 1797, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>374</sup> Washington to Oliver Wolcott, Jr. 15 May 1797, in *ibid*.

reputation to legitimize this new government. He could not walk away without paying attention to whether or not the experiment would survive the test of his absence.

#### Assembling the Record for Posterity

Washington devoted a set amount of time each day to arranging the papers in his vast personal collection. Before departing Philadelphia, he ordered his secretaries to pack up his papers and prepare them for shipment to Mount Vernon, leaving aside only those required by President Adams. In addition to arranging his correspondence into a more structured archive, Washington also collected copies of nearly every piece of legislation and every government record that he could get his hands on, from the records of the Continental Congress and the Confederation Congress as well as the Congressional Record beginning with the first one convened in 1789. Additionally, he obtained copies of the decisions on major cases heard by the Supreme Court.<sup>375</sup> These records from the legislative and judicial branches of the government combined with his archive of presidential and state papers would have, if completed, constituted the first presidential library in the nation. Washington seemed to have the idea long before there were such libraries in the United States, for records indicate that he was planning to construct a separate building at Mount Vernon to house these voluminous archives. He had even gone so far as to order bookshelves for this new facility, but his death preempted its construction.<sup>376</sup>

To complement the official records of the governments he both led and served, Washington purchased some of the latest books published on American history, including

---

<sup>375</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 202-212.

<sup>376</sup> Chernow, *Washington*, 777.

James Thomson Callender's *The History of the United States for 1796; Including a Variety of Interesting Particulars Relative to the Federal Government Previous to That Period*.<sup>377</sup> Washington also collected printed commentaries that were separately published on his different policies, pieces of legislation, and treaties including Albert Gallatin's *An Examination of the Conduct of the Executive of the United States, Towards the French Republic; Likewise an Analysis of the Explanatory Article of the British Treaty – In a Series of Letters*.<sup>378</sup> Gallatin's commentary, unlike most tracts Washington collected, was critical of his conduct. For example, Gallatin charged that Washington "has interpreted the same parts of the Constitution, variously at different times; and that he has thereby converted the great charter of our country into a thing of chance, liable to the direction of whim, caprice, or design."<sup>379</sup> Gallatin then launched into an attack of Washington's personal handling of foreign affairs from when he took office in order to castigate the neutrality proclamation and Jay Treaty.<sup>380</sup> Washington likely felt safe in his decision to keep this in his collection because its stilted argument was balanced by Alexander Addison's refutation, *Observations on the Speech of Albert Gallatin, in the House of Representatives of the United States, on the Foreign Intercourse Bill*.<sup>381</sup>

---

<sup>377</sup> Washington to Clement Biddle, 15 September 1797, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. Washington's letter makes it clear that he wanted this specific book and not just any available history for in his order he specified that Biddle should "Send me the History of the United States" the one which contains Nos 5 and 6 alluded to in Col's Hamilton's late Pamphlet. This indicates that Washington was not only keeping current with political affairs in his final retirement, but also with what was being written about them. He maintained an interest in history books as useful devices for shaping public opinion. See also Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 40.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>379</sup> Albert Gallatin, *An Examination of the Conduct of the Executive of the United States, Towards the French Republic; Likewise an analysis of the Explanatory Article of the British Treaty – In a Series of Letters. By a Citizen of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Printed by Francis and Robert Bailey, at Yorick's-Head, 1797), 2.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 2-72.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid. See also Washington to Alexander Addison, 3 June 1798, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. Washington wrote that he had read both Gallatin and Addison's respective

Addison's refutation does not offer a celebratory review of Washington's presidential performance. Instead, Addison offered a point by point defense of Washington's conduct according to the parameters set forth in the Constitution. In other words, Addison's work offered a defense of presidential power as well as Washington's use of it.<sup>382</sup>

### War with France? Washington's Recall to Active Duty

The possibility that the United States could be drawn into the ongoing war between Great Britain and France was one diplomatic issue of continued relevance to Washington after he left office. President Adams was doing his best to sustain Washington's policy of strict neutrality, but fallout at home over the Jay Treaty had not subsided and American shipping was continually menaced on the high seas. Washington's position on the matter was unchanged and as he was keenly aware of the ramifications this war would have on the future of the United States, he naturally wanted to remain current on the debate and latest developments. Washington collected numerous commentaries on the French War. Some were gifts from their respective authors including Sir Francis d'Avernois's *Reflections on the War: In Answer to Reflections on Peace, Addressed to Mr. Pitt and the French Nation*.<sup>383</sup> Washington also kept from d'Avernois, *A Cursory View of the Assignats and Remaining Resources of French Finance, (September 6, 1795): Drawn From the Debates of the Convention and State of the Finances and Resources of the French Republic, to the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1796. Being a*

---

works with equal attention & satisfaction; and although it has been justly observed in one of them that to offer conviction to a person convinced before is labor lost, yet, much good may & I am persuaded will result, from the investigation of political heresies" ö

<sup>382</sup>Alexander Addison, *Observations on the Speech of Albert Gallatin, in the House of Representatives of the United States, on the Foreign Intercourse Bill* (Washington, PA: Printed by John Colerick, 1798), 1-52.

<sup>383</sup>Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 107.

*Continuation of the Reflections on the War, and of the Assignates; and Containing an Answer to the Picture of Europe, by Mr. De Calonne.*<sup>384</sup> Washington also received Baron Thomas Erskine's *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the Present War With France*.<sup>385</sup> Erskine's work was a response to Edmund Burke's *Two Letters Addressed to a Member of the Present Parliament, on the Proposals For Peace With the Regicide Directory of France*. If Washington had not read Burke's work for himself, he almost certainly would have heard of it from his nephew, Bushrod Washington, who owned a copy and was often present at Mount Vernon throughout this period.<sup>386</sup> Burke argued that "out of the tomb of the murdered Monarchy in France, has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination" going Straight forward to its end, unappalled by peril, unchecked by remorse, despising all common maxims and all common means, that hideous phantom overpowered those who could not believe it was possible she could at all exist! "ö"<sup>387</sup> Erskine, by contrast, offers a defense of the French Revolution by illustrating the nature of the oppression that was felt by the people under the Ancien Regime. He highlighted the differences between the American and French Revolutions, citing that the Americans rebelled against corruption within the British government that came about a specific point in time; whereas the French overthrew an old order so corrupt in every way that there was no other alternative to such a rebellion. Erskine used this comparison to justify the excesses of the French Revolution and explain the causes of the war between Great

---

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 75

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Edmund Burke, *Two Letters Addressed to a Member of the Present Parliament, on the Proposals for Peace With the Regicide Directory of France* (Philadelphia: Printed for William Cobbett, in Second Street, Opposite Christ-Church, and J. Ormrod no. 41, Chestnut Street. By Bioren and Madan, 1797), 5.

Britain and France.<sup>388</sup> These contrasting English interpretations of the French Revolution would have provided Washington with balanced evidence to justify his position that maintaining neutrality was the best course of action for the United States because both Englishmen took a dark view of the war with France.

As matters seemed to escalate towards war, Adams solicited Washington's advice about how to go about appointing officers for a newly raised army, letting it slip that Washington was to be named commander-in-chief. The thought of being pulled back into federal service again got Washington's attention, and he spent considerable time and effort to become apprised of the situation, to determine first and foremost, how realistic a prospect this actually was. He increasingly began to pay particular attention to the defensive posture of the United States along with the readiness of the army. Timothy Pickering sent him nearly every speech, report, and produced by government officials on the subject of the war including copies of the *Report From the Department of War, Relative to the Fortifications of the Ports and Harbors of the United States* and the *Report of the Committee, Appointed to Enquire into the Actual State of the Naval Equipment Ordered By a Former Law of the United States, and to Report Whether Any and What Further Provision is Necessary to Be Made on This Subject*.<sup>389</sup> Pickering also purchased a copy for Washington of John Gifford's *A Letter to the Hon. Thomas Erskine: Containing Some Strictures on his View of the Causes and Consequences of the Present War With France*.<sup>390</sup> Pickering had been purchasing various printed works for Washington for quite some time, and therefore was well aware of the types of writing that

---

<sup>388</sup> Thomas Erskine, *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the Present War with France* (Boston: Printed for Adams and Larkin, Court-Street, and E. Larkin, no. 47 Cornhill, 1797), 1-100.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>390</sup> Timothy Pickering to Washington, 20 January 1798, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

Washington would find particularly useful. In this case, Pickering was careful to read the pamphlet first before sending it to Washington, and only did so after commending it as a "very able work." Washington's possession of Erskine's work and his knowledge of Edmund Burke's position on the subject would have provided him with the necessary context to absorb this latest recommendation from Pickering. In this pamphlet, Gifford pointed out Erskine's defense of the French Revolution and used it to make the argument against the United States getting involved in ongoing war.<sup>391</sup> Pickering further sent Washington a copy of a letter he wrote, *A Letter from Mr. Pickering, Secretary of State, to Mr. Pinckney, Minister Plenipotentiary at Paris: In Answer to the Complaints Communicated By Mr. Adet, Minister of the French Republic, Against the United States of America*. Pickering's letter, written during Washington's administration at his urging, offered a pointed defense of the neutrality policy, in response from specific charges from the French minister that the United States abandoned its treaty obligations in favor of establishing a more lucrative relationship with Great Britain.<sup>392</sup>

All of this reading was in fact necessary because Adams did commission Washington as the commander-in-chief of the newly reconstituted United States Army as war fever began to grip the United States. Washington was at once irritated with Adams who did not seek his permission before ushering the appointment through the Senate. He insisted that he would not take the field unless absolutely necessary. Instead of commanding in person, Washington was confident that he could remain at Mount Vernon

---

<sup>391</sup> John Gifford, *A Letter to the Honorable Thomas Erskine; Containing Some Strictures on His View of the Causes and Consequences of the Present War With France* (Philadelphia: Published by William Cobbett, Opposite Christ-Church, 1797), 1-128.

<sup>392</sup> Timothy Pickering, *A Letter from Mr. Pickering, A Secretary for the Department of State of the United States – to Mr. Pinckney, Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States of America, at Paris* (Stockbridge: MA, Printed by Rosseter and Willard, 1797), 6.

and allow a trusted second in command to run the daily administration of the army in his absence.<sup>393</sup> Washington further conditioned his acceptance of the commission on the assertion that he would select the general officers, a condition that Adams acquiesced to, but immediately regretted because Washington's choice was none other than Hamilton. Washington's other choices for subordinate generals were also sources of tension for Adams: Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and Henry Knox in that order.<sup>394</sup> Adams suggested other choices: Daniel Morgan, Horatio Gates, and Benjamin Lincoln, all of whom were rebuffed by the Secretary of War, James McHenry. Completely at a loss, Adams sent Washington's suggested names to the Senate for confirmation, but reversed the order, insisting that Knox had legal precedence over the others, and that Pinckney must outrank Hamilton.<sup>395</sup> This created complete confusion and forever damaged the relationship between Washington and Adams. Eventually, Hamilton did get the commission as second in command, and as the plans for the new army began to take shape, Washington appeared more and more to be a figurehead. By 1798, Adams decided to use diplomacy to negotiate a way out of the quasi war with France, and by 1800, the army was disbanded.<sup>396</sup> Washington never had to leave his plantation to take the field again.

### Washington Frees His Slaves In His Will

---

<sup>393</sup> Washington to John Adams, 13 July 1798, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>394</sup> Washington to John Adams, 25 September 1798, in *ibid*.

<sup>395</sup> John Adams to Washington, 9 October 1798, in *ibid*.

<sup>396</sup> Chernow, *Washington*, 783-793; Ferling, *Adams*, 348-371; Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark*, 410-427; Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 601-605.

As Washington entered what would be his last year of life and the last thoughts of war faded, he turned his attention back to his estate and the question of how to properly arrange his affairs after his death. In mulling over the complex question of how to dispense with his vast amounts of property, Washington's mind kept returning to a dilemma that pricked at his conscience – what to do with his slaves? Washington was born and raised in a world that ran on the backs of slaves, and over time he became one of the largest slave owners in Virginia. However, his life experiences, particularly in the American Revolution where he saw firsthand that black soldiers were just as capable as their white counterparts, began to change his mind on slavery. He wrote to Robert Morris in 1786, "There is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it."<sup>397</sup> In fact, the seed for change was apparently in place even before the Revolution began, for he was one of the authors of the Fairfax Resolves that called for a ban on the importation of slaves. As this seed grew in the years following the Revolution, Washington knew that the proper way to accomplish the abolition of slavery was through national level legislation, but as president, he quickly found that to be politically impossible.<sup>398</sup> Now that he was approaching the end of his life, Washington actively wrestled with the topic on a personal level as he re-wrote his will.

Washington's decision to re-write his will apparently was spurred on by a dream he had one night in July 1799 that foreshadowed his death. This story emerged in the nineteenth-century from historian Benson Lossing, who was a friend of the Custis family

---

<sup>397</sup> Washington to Robert Morris, 12 April 1786 in William W. Abbott and Dorothy Twohig eds. *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, 4:16.

<sup>398</sup> Dalzell, and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 211. See also Washington to Lawrence Lewis, 4 August 1797, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

and heard this piece of family folklore from one of Martha's descendents. The story has since been called into question by more recent historians who have a healthy distrust for the highly romanticized histories of their nineteenth-century forbearers. Whether or not the 1799 anecdote is actually true, there is evidence to suggest that Washington began seriously contemplating a manumission project as early as 1794, when in the midst of an illness that he mistakenly took to be cancer.<sup>399</sup>

At the end of 1793, Washington contacted the renowned British agricultural reformer Arthur Young, asking for assistance in locating "substantial farmers, of wealth and strength" to lease four of the five farms that comprised the Mount Vernon estate. In the plan he outlined to Young, Washington intended to only keep the Mansion House farm for himself for his "residence, occupation, and amusement in agriculture." He was even prepared to rent to groups, or to further subdivide the four other farms to make the rent more affordable. The main object, however, was to obtain "good farmers" as tenants that would provide Washington with a steady income, fulfilling his "wish to live free from care, and as much at my ease as possible" for the rest of his life.<sup>400</sup> However, the desire to rest easy in his declining years was just a half truth. At the same time, Washington instructed Tobias Lear to begin selling off his western lands. He initially gave Lear the same reason as Young for wanting to sell off the real estate, but then he

---

<sup>399</sup> Henry Wiencek, *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 353-4. Wiencek accepts the validity of the story of Washington's 1799 death foreshadowing dream. The authenticity has most recently been challenged by Peter Henriques who called into question several inconsistencies in the story. See Peter R. Henriques, "The Death of George Washington: He Died as He Lived," (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2000), 77. If there is any truth in the 1799 story, it was likely passed orally from Martha Washington to her descendents, who in turn told Lossing. See also, Joseph Fields, ed. "Worthy Partner:" *The Papers of Martha Washington* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 272-3, 321-22; Flexner, *George Washington*, 4: 149.

<sup>400</sup> Washington to Arthur Young, 12 December 1793, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

added one other reason which was "more powerful than all the rest." The money obtained from the western land sales would hopefully be enough to allow Washington "to liberate a certain species of property" which he possessed "very repugnantly" to his feelings.<sup>401</sup> This was a revolutionary idea indeed in 1794.

Part of Washington's evolving view that slavery was abhorrent came from his reading on the subject. Beginning in the 1760s when he became a burgess, he began collecting writings on slavery. Some were infused with a strong sense of abolitionism; others simply analyzed cost versus benefit. By the end of his life, Washington had in his library more than twenty works that in one way or another addressed the questions of slavery and emancipation. Among these were: Granville Sharp's *An Appendix to the Representation (Printed in 1769) of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery, Or, of Admitting the Least Claim of Private Property in the Persons of Men in England*; Anthony Benezet's *The Potent Enemies of America Laid Open: Being Some Account of the Baneful Effects Attending the Use of Distilled Spirituous Liquors, and the Slavery of the Negroes*; David Cooper's *A Serious Address to the Rulers of America: On the Inconsistency of Their Conduct Respecting Slavery: Forming a Contrast Between the Encroachments of England on American Liberty, and American Injustice in Tolerating Slavery*; Joseph Woods's *Thoughts on Slavery; Debates in the British House of Commons, Wednesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1789: On the Petitions for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*; and August Nordenskold's *Plan For a Free Community Upon the Gold Coast of Africa, Under the Protection of Great Britain; But Intirely Independent of All European*

---

<sup>401</sup>Washington to Tobias Lear, 6 May 1794, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources* (Washington, D.C., 1931-44) 33:367-60.

*Laws and Governments.*<sup>402</sup> These and the other works in this collection presented Washington with views on slavery from both American and British voices. While some of them, particularly the religious ones by Sharp and Benezet simply called for the complete abolition of slavery, Nordenskold's work is of particular interest because it proposed a plan for what to do with the slaves once they were set free. Nordenskold proposed returning freed slaves to Africa and establishing a colony on the Gold Coast. This colony would fall under the protection of Great Britain; however, the people would enjoy complete self-government. Nordenskold argued that this was the best opportunity for the freed slaves for absorbing them into white society presented too many challenges.

Such reading must have led Washington to the conclusion that merely emancipating his slaves was not enough. How could they be expected to support themselves in free society with no training or preparation? Washington churned this question over in his mind for a considerable period of time before he sat down to re-write his will. In his particular case, whatever plan he devised would be fraught with legal difficulties. First, since he had no biological children he had no direct heir which by itself carried with it a host of potential issues under Virginia law. Second, from the time that he married Martha forty years earlier, Washington and Custis slaves themselves intermarried and produced children. Under the law, Washington could only free the slaves that were his; he had no such power over the Custis slaves. Therefore, if he were to free his slaves, the immediate question would be what about the intermarried spouses and their children? Third, what was he to do about the slaves that were too old or ill to care for themselves? For those elderly slaves, freedom might actually be worse than

---

<sup>402</sup> Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum*, 557.

servitude because they would have no guaranteed way of ensuring that their basic needs were met.

Washington eventually devised answers to all of the above questions in extraordinary ways. In his will he first addressed the matter of ownership. He, in fact, owned only one hundred twenty three of Mount Vernon's three hundred sixteen slaves; forty were rented; the rest of the property of the Custis estate and would pass to Martha's heirs upon her death.<sup>403</sup> He acknowledged the legal complexity as follows:

Upon the decease of my wife, it is my Will & desire that all the Slaves which I hold in my own right, shall receive their freedom. To emancipate them during her life, would, though earnestly wished by me, be attended with such insuperable difficulties on account of their intermixture by Marriages with the dower Negroes, as to excite the most painful sensations, if not disagreeable consequences from the latter, while both descriptions are in the occupancy of the same Proprietor; it not being in my power, under the tenure by which the Dower Negroes are held, to manumit them.<sup>404</sup>

The language that Washington used in this passage is intriguing because he is effectively trying to appeal to Martha, or really the Custis heirs to join him in emancipating their slaves along with his to make the entire process smoother.

Washington next addressed the welfare of the sick and aged slaves that would be unable to care for themselves in free society:

And whereas among those who will receive freedom according to this devise, there may be some, who from old age or bodily infirmities, and others on account of their infancy, that will be unable to support themselves; it is my Will and desire that all who come under the first and second description shall be comfortably cloathed & fed by my heirs while they live.<sup>405</sup>

---

<sup>403</sup> Wiencek, *An Imperfect God*, 354.

<sup>404</sup> See George Washington's Last Will and Testament, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

On the surface this provision seems unnecessary to those who assume that slave owners were benevolent and always cared for their slaves, even when they were unable to work. However, Washington was well aware that such assumptions were often horrendously incorrect. As such, he further stipulated that òa regular and permanent fund be established for their support so long as there are subjects requiring it; not trusting to the uncertain provision to be made by individuals.ö<sup>406</sup>

The next clause was the most extraordinary aspect of Washington's manumission plan:

[the children who] have no parents living, or if living are unable, or unwilling to provide for them, shall be bound by the Court until they shall arrive at the age of twenty five years; and in cases where no record can be produced, whereby their ages can be ascertained, the judgment of the Court, upon its own view of the subject, shall be adequate and final. The Negros thus bound, are (by their Masters or Mistresses) to be taught to read & write; and to be brought up to some useful occupation, agreeably to the Laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, providing for the support of Orphan[s] and other poor Children.<sup>407</sup>

The idea of not just freeing, but educating slaves put Washington's thinking out of step from his contemporaries. This clause seems to suggest that Washington did not necessarily believe that blacks were inherently inferior to whites; he attributed deficiencies as being the result of enslavement, and that with education and employment opportunities, freed slaves could prosper.

The next clause implied in no uncertain terms that Washington did not trust his executors:

I do hereby expressly forbid the sale, or transportation out of the said Commonwealth, of any Slave I may die possessed of, under any pretense whatsoever. And I do moreover most pointedly, and most solemnly enjoin it upon my Executors hereafter named, or the Survivors of them, to see that this

---

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

clause respecting Slaves, and every part thereof be religiously fulfilled at the Epoch at which it is directed to take place; without evasion, neglect, or delay.<sup>408</sup>

In being so specific, Washington made it clear that the freed slaves would have a right to live in Virginia, and would not or could not be forced to flee somewhere else.

Washington crafted one other very particular slave clause for his personal servant, William Lee:

And to my Mulatto man William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom; or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents that have befallen him, and which have rendered him incapable of walking or of any active employment) to remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so. In either case, however, I allow him an annuity of thirty dollars during his natural life, which shall be independent of the victuals and cloaths he has been accustomed to receive, if he chuses the last alternative; but in full, with his freedom, if he prefers the first; & this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War.<sup>409</sup>

For Washington, this was an act of justice in return for the more than thirty years that Lee served him faithfully as a personal slave. Washington's motive was not likely affection, for there is no other evidence anywhere in the written records that Washington considered Lee a favorite. Washington maintained different degrees of aloofness from just about everyone except his wife, so it would not make sense that he shared an exceptionally close friendship with a slave. However, almost above friendship, Washington valued loyalty, and by offering Lee immediate freedom or care for life, Washington reciprocated.

Washington's decision to free his slaves was the one final way that he set himself apart from his fellow founders. Although nearly all of them professed at least a theoretical abhorrence of slavery, none of the other southern founders emancipated their slaves. Washington's manumission program brought the ideals of the Revolution home

---

<sup>408</sup>Ibid.

<sup>409</sup>Ibid.

to those who were otherwise excluded from the American dream. On a personal level, in making his will, Washington also made peace with his conscience ó the conscience that evidently had been plaguing his mind since he helped pen the Fairfax Resolves decades earlier. There are no records to indicate how the slaves received the news. Typically a wave of terror broke with news of an impending death of a master, but at least for some Mount Vernon slaves, terror likely turned to elation. Washington's executors dutifully followed the letter of the will as far as the law allowed. Lawrence Lewis's executor's ledger indicates that the final support payment was paid out by the estate to a former slave named Gabriel in 1839. Unfortunately, Virginia law prohibited teaching slaves to read and write (a fact that Washington evidently chose to ignore, or assumed would be waived given his uniquely exalted status) so that provision was never carried out.<sup>410</sup>

A further examination of Washington's will beyond the passages on slavery reveals another bequest which demonstrated how much he valued reading and how much he lamented the fact that he never had the opportunity to study at a university. In his will he made good on his promise to use Virginia's gift of stock in the Potomac and James River Companies for public education. He bequeathed fifty shares to help establish a national university in the new capital. Washington had long advocated for the establishment of such an institution. He hoped to curtail the practice of sending American youth to Europe to be educated where they contracted "too frequently not only habits of dissipation & extravagance, but principles unfriendly to Republican Government, and to the true and genuine liberties of mankind."<sup>411</sup> A national university would also bring together students from across the country thereby breaking them of

---

<sup>410</sup> Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 217.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 219. See also Washington, Last Will and Testament, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*.

“local prejudices and habitual jealousies” which, when carried to excess are never failing sources of disquietude to the Public mind and pregnant of mischievous consequences to this country.”<sup>412</sup> Washington also provided one hundred shares of stock in the James River Company to Liberty Hall Academy in Rockbridge, Virginia, and twenty shares of stock in the Bank of Alexandria to Alexandria Academy. Washington could not have known that the bid to establish a national university would never get off the ground. There was little support for it in Congress and by 1828 the shares of Potomac River stock were worthless. The Alexandria Academy survived, however, eventually becoming a part of the city’s public school system. Liberty Hall Academy also survived as Washington and Lee University.<sup>413</sup>

#### Washington’s Contribution to the American Future

At the end of his life, Washington looked back and saw all that he was able to achieve by diligently reading carefully selected works. He valued reading and the “useful knowledge” that could be deduced from the pages of a well structured piece of writing. Furthermore as the consummate American leader of the time, Washington wanted to see Americans become intellectually independent from Europe. He thoroughly believed that the country’s future success rested on the ability to raise good citizens to carry the nation forward into the next century and beyond. That ability would be hindered if the best minds were continually exported to Europe where they risked corruption. America’s future depended on a virtuous citizenry, educated at home and thus infused with a strong national identity.

---

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington’s Mount Vernon*, 219.

In dispensing with the rest of his personal property, Washington clearly did not intend for Mount Vernon to become a shrine to his memory. He broke up his real estate holdings among his many relatives, including Martha's grandchildren that he and she had raised. He gave away many of his cherished personal items and furnishings to trusted friends, relatives, and colleagues. Notably, he bequeathed his massive archive and library to his nephew, Bushrod Washington, who also inherited Mount Vernon and the Mansion House Farm. Washington's choice of Bushrod as the beneficiary of the home and archive that he painstakingly built over the course of more than forty years made sense. Washington had a fairly close relationship with Bushrod, who had recently been appointed an associate justice of the Supreme Court. He would therefore need a place to live and entertain on an appropriate scale that was close to the new capital. Moreover, since Bushrod was one of his most educated relatives, Washington likely felt that his library and archive would be in safe hands and would be appropriately used. Washington may have been dismantling his vast estate in his final act; however, he was not about to do the same to his legacy. The evidence that substantiated all that Washington had done was in that library, and he wanted to entrust it to someone who would appreciate and preserve it.

In the last three years of his life, Washington devoted the majority of his time and effort to putting his affairs in order. This endeavor was far more involved than simple home repairs and minor updates to his will. Washington was intent on both renovating and preserving both his home and his legacy. With respect to his legacy, he dramatically expanded his library to include nearly every official record from his many years of public service in order to complement his vast repository of correspondence. With the exception

of his attempt to prepare himself for war in the wake of Adams's decision to recall him to duty in the event of war with France, this phase of Washington's life was not so much punctuated by what he read, but rather what reading material he collected.

Washington's exceptional decision to free his slaves reflects the impact that his long term reading had on his intellectual development when combined with his life experience. His manumission plan was the culmination of a personal moral revolution. Washington had grown up with slavery, but over time he had grown uncomfortable with the institution. His changing personal convictions were tempered with the considerable amount of reading that he had done over a long period during which he took his time to reflect on the knowledge he gained. Although all the historians who have ever discussed Washington will remark on the extraordinary nature of this decision, far too little attention has been paid to the fact that this example shows just how completely Washington inculcated the ideology of the American Revolution. This decision marks a coming together of Washington's intellectual development, his sense of morality, and his life experience to produce the most profound push for abolition by an elite southerner before the Civil War.

Washington's educational endowments signified the degree to which he valued education and believed that the ultimate key to the success of this American republican experiment lay with the next generation of Americans. These bequests mark another joining together of Washington's lessons learned with his dreams for a better future. Even though some of Washington's wishes went unfulfilled as in the examples of the freed slaves being taught to read and write and his wish for a national university, not even the harshest critic can effectively argue that Washington failed. Washington's former

cavalry lieutenant Harry Lee was both sincere and correct when he eulogized Washington as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

## Chapter 6 ó A Place for Secluded Study

In the early morning darkness as the clock struck 4:00 retired President George Washington slipped quietly out of bed, taking care to tuck the covers back in around his wife to prevent her from getting cold. Having shared his bed for nearly forty years, Martha Washington had long since become accustomed to her husband's daily routine and thus did not even stir as he stood up and the wood bed frame creaked. He tugged the bed curtains closed, tiptoed out of the room and descended the private stairway that connected to his library below. No one else in the house was up; it was not yet time for the slaves to make their rounds to each bedroom to stoke the smoldering fires and begin the day. This was a cherished part of Washington's day, the time when the master of Mount Vernon could be alone in his library with his books, papers, and thoughts before it was time to embark on his daily inspection tours of his farms, before the grandchildren came in wanting to go for horseback rides with their grandpapa, and before the daily onslaught of visitors came to call.

It was during these early morning hours in the solitude of his library that Washington was most productive. Here he did his reading, writing, and planning for the future of his vast estates and the solidification of his legacy. A friend and former lieutenant of Washington's, General Henry Lee, once remarked to his chief, "We are amazed, sir, at the vast amount of work that you accomplish."<sup>414</sup> Washington replied, "Sir, I rise at four o'clock, and a great deal of my work is done while others are

---

<sup>414</sup>Conversation between General Henry Lee and George Washington recorded by George Washington Parke Custis cited in *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington By His Adopted Son, George Washington Parke Custis, With a Memoir of the Author By His Daughter; and Illustrative and Explanatory Notes, By Benson J. Lossing* (1860; reprint, Bridgewater, VA: American Foundation Publications, 1999), 454.

asleep.<sup>415</sup> This is vintage Washington, the old soldier who maintained his characteristically rigid routine until the day he died. The image of the solitary man alone at his desk in the early hours of the morning is one which admiring biographers have long recognized as evidence of his exemplary character, but few have paused this scene long enough to consider the significance of the library for the man who built and worked in it. Indeed, at first glance the study's austere appearance masks the fact that it was designed to be the operations center for Washington's great self-fashioning project. It housed his sizable collections of books, other printed works, and the voluminous correspondence compiled over decades that together catalogued the transformation of an ambitious middle-class boy into the father of his country. There are two main reasons why the study's significance has been repeatedly glossed over by biographers and scholars. First, of the many labels applied to Washington both during and since his lifetime, scholar is not typically among them. He simply cannot be placed in the same academic category with such contemporaries like Jefferson and Adams with their respective university and legal training, or even Franklin who despite his self-made rise to prominence in the absence of a formal education still sought to become a man of letters. Second, Washington's skill as an amateur architect has been largely underappreciated by scholars and critics who cannot move beyond the fact that Mount Vernon's exterior is asymmetrical. Nevertheless, the study's design, placement within the larger structure of the mansion, and the manner in which the space was furnished and used provide keys to understanding how Washington approached the act of reading for this space in which he engaged in this solitary act was entirely a work of his own creation.

---

<sup>415</sup>Ibid.

How, where, and what one reads reveals a great deal about his/her attitude towards the significance of reading as an activity. Does he/she read in public or otherwise in front of others, thumbing through the materials casually for the sake of entertainment, or do they read in private for the sake of concentrated study? Is there music or other noise that might be distracters? Is he/she willing to share their materials with others? Does he/she feel confident enough in his/her skills as a reader to take part in discussions about the reading? What does he/she read? Why does he/she choose to read certain types of material and not others? Does he/she make marginalia or notes? With the evidence that is left of how Washington expanded Mount Vernon over the years along with the list of the contents of his private library, it is possible to answer these questions and thus develop a new understanding of Washington's reading and how that contributed to his intellectual development.

#### Mount Vernon's Exterior: A Powerful First Impression

The layout of the main estate and gardens including the exterior appearance of the main mansion house conveys a sense of majesty and power not typically found in English manors. In direct contrast to English and European landscape design that typically located the approach road and entrance on a direct axis, Washington created a three-quarter-mile-long axial vista to the house thereby increasing the dramatic appearance of the mansion from afar. The effect of increasing the drama by creating a specific physical distance is a technique that Washington also incorporated into his meticulously managed public image. Just as Washington's staged aloofness enhanced his reputation and the

mythology surrounding him, the carefully shaped distance between the approach road and the house enhanced the mansion's aesthetic appeal to visitors.<sup>416</sup>

The resulting design of the mansion house that Washington laid out is a striking reflection of his personality. The house is an architectural manifesto framing in wood and paint Washington's politics as well as his sense of self. The exterior of the house with its famed asymmetrical west front that greeted visitors upon arrival up the long gravel drive is deliberately styled in a plainly understated Anglo-American way. The house is white and free of adornments so as to not detract from the magnificent landscape upon which the house is perched. Although the house is eye-catching and impressive upon first sight, upon closer inspection one realizes that the house is not really what Washington wanted people to notice; it was the land. Washington loved his land and thoroughly believed it was the best piece of real estate in America. Set high above the banks of the Potomac River, the main estate property conveys a masterful sense of dominance. The sheer beauty of this plot of land set above the river is the property's prime asset, and an ostentatious house would have detracted from the impact that the land alone had on the beholder.

A prime example of Washington's effort to design an understated exterior to his home in order to place greater dramatic emphasis on his landscape is the two story piazza on the east side of the house. Supported by eight Tuscan columns, the piazza served as an extension of the central hall that served as the setting for family gatherings with a

---

<sup>416</sup>Allan Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect* (London: New Architecture Group Ltd., 1999), 12. Alan Greenberg is a former classical architecture professor at Yale University and Law School, Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania who works on architectural commissions. This book focuses on the aesthetics of Mount Vernon without providing a great deal of historical context, but Greenberg makes an important connection between Washington's design of the estate and his mental world. It is important to further develop Greenberg's allusion in the historical context for it will help inform the discussion of just how Washington engaged in the act of reading.

majestic view of the Potomac as a backdrop. The relaxed and intimate scale when combined with the absence of pilasters on the inside wall as well as the absence of axes allowed visitors to drink in the scene before them, free of architectural distractions. During a visit to Mount Vernon in the 1790s, artist and designer Benjamin Latrobe devoted the longest single section of his travel journal to a description of the piazza:

Towards the East Nature has lavished magnificence, nor has Art interfered but to exhibit her to advantage. Before the portico a lawn extends on each hand from the front of the house. Down the steep slope trees and shrubs are thickly planted. They are kept so low as to not interrupt the view but merely to furnish an agreeable border to the extensive prospect beyond. The mighty Potowmac runs close under this bank the elevation which must be 250 perhaps feet. The river here is about 1 ½ miles across and runs parallel with the front of the house for about 3 miles to the left and 4 to the right.<sup>417</sup>

Similarly, another late 1790s visitor to Mount Vernon, Julian Niemcewicz, noted that from the immense open portico supported by eight pillars one looks out on perhaps the most beautiful view in the world. It is there that in the evenings the Gl., his family and the guests [guests] go to sit to enjoy the fine weather and the beautiful view. I enjoyed it more than anyone. What a remembrance!<sup>418</sup> Moreover, Abigail Adams considered the piazza to be Mount Vernon's greatest ornament.<sup>419</sup> Given that Washington's design for his piazza had the desired effect on his visitors; it makes sense that the rest of the home's design was also just as deliberate in eliciting a certain response from beholders.

---

<sup>417</sup>Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1795-1798*, ed. Edward C. Carter II, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 165-166.

<sup>418</sup>Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree Travels through America in 1797-1799, 1805, with some further account of life in New Jersey*, ed. and translated by Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, NJ: Grassman, 1965), 97.

<sup>419</sup>Abigail Adams to Mrs. Richard Cranch, December 21, 1800, cited in Mount Vernon Ladies Association *Annual Report*, 1957. The original letter is in the collections at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston.

Just as he would do when crafting his public persona, Washington played up the positive attributes to the fullest when it came to the exterior design of his estate while maintaining a sort of dignified simplicity all around. Presentation was everything to Washington, and just as he viewed every aspect of his public life as a form of performance, he cast Mount Vernon as an actor playing his role on the grand stage of his landscape. Another part of playing up the positive attributes of the estate was Washington's act of "dressing up" what could have been a modest looking farmhouse to perform the role of imposing and powerful structure. For as wealthy as Washington was, procuring enough stone to construct a home on the scale he planned for was simply financially out of reach. So rather than compromise on size, Washington chose to use inexpensive wood siding, but had the panels rusticated by cutting out grooved panels in each board and then whitewashing them with a specialized mixture of river sand and paint that provided the texture and appearance of stone masonry. Thus, a wood frame house was fitted in a costume of "masonry." According to Washington, this sanding process was "designed to answer two purposes, durability and presentation of stone."<sup>420</sup> Furthermore, rustication affected the perceived scale of the house itself. The pronounced joints in the wide panel boards are emphasized by the shadows cast on the upper surface and the highlight on the lower surface, so the eye reads the wall as an incised surface. The sand increases the reflectivity of the each rusticated board and the brilliance of the joint. Combined, these different effects come together to downplay the large expanse of

---

<sup>420</sup>George Washington to William Thornton, October 1, 1799, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799 Volume 13 October 1, 1778-January 11, 1779*. 1931 ed. 39 vols ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington D.C., 1931-44) 37:387. See also George Washington, "Memorandum," dated November 5, 1796, Fitzpatrick 35: 263-264, in which Washington discusses how to prepare the sand and apply it to the paint; and "Restoration Painting," in *Annual Report*, (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 1956), 15.

the west façade, making the house appear smaller than it actually is within the larger setting of the landscape.<sup>421</sup>

Washington would have seen in his surrounding neighborhood several fine examples of brick walls with stone quoins in the construction of homes and churches including the Aquia Church (ca. 1754-1757) in Stafford County; his friend George Mason's home, Gunston Hall (1755); Thomas Nelson's home in Yorktown (ca. 1710-1730); Cleve (ca. 1750) in King George County; and the Carlyle House in Alexandria (1751-1753). More remote sources that Washington never saw in person but became aware of through his study of the popular architectural books of his day including Batty and Thomas Langley's *Builder's Jewel, or The Youth's Instructor and Workman's Remembrancer*, and Langley's *The City and Country Builder's and Workingman's Treasury of Designs* include: Inigo Jones's Banqueting Hall in Whitehall, London (1619-1622), Andrea Palladio's Palazzo Thiene in Vincenza Italy( begun ca. 1542). Both of these buildings as well as many of Jones's designs for gateways, had the unusual of a *ovö* for all horizontal and vertical joints, a design feature that is also found in Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall, the Nelson and Carlyle Houses, and the Aquia Church. Additionally, a variation of a design feature in the Pantheon found on plate 75 of Langley's *Builder's Jewel* that includes upper and intermediate cornices that have the same mouldings and unusual form of a block modillion, with cyma recta, or a reverse S-shaped, curved end with associated V-jointed rustication appears to have inspired Washington for the same details occur at the arcades, dependencies, and exterior cornice of Mount Vernon.<sup>422</sup>

---

<sup>421</sup>Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, 67-69.

<sup>422</sup>*Ibid.*, 32; For a further explanation of the architectural details listed above, see also John Harris and Gordon Higgot, *Inigo Jones, Complete Architectural Drawing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 129-135. According to Harris and Higgot, another design inspiration could have been Domenico

As for the house's layout, Washington took an English style and tailored it to fit its American circumstances, a method that Virginians had honed over the course of several generations of picking and choosing from English plans and styles to fashion homes that suited their slave-holding society as it changed over time. This included scaling down the hall-parlor English model and produce plans that had few rooms alike in function or size that were dictated by the owner's attempt to replicate "civic order in a public society." The result was a sort of county seat, with halls separating the public's entrance with the family's private rooms.<sup>423</sup> Over the course of Washington's various renovations, he took this method and refined it to a higher degree. The fact that Washington molded Mount Vernon into an architectural self-portrait indicates that in some ways he was very much in step with his generation, for during his lifetime, the social, political, economic, and religious conditions in Middle Virginia changed. As Washington's thought process reacted to the societal changes happening in his world, the things he did and the architectural renovations he undertook at Mount Vernon reflected

---

Fontana's unexecuted design for the Porta Exquilina (see pp. 135-136). On p. 149, there is an early sketch of the Queen's House by Jones that has a rusticated base with a "Vö-joint." Jones also used the V design at other gates at Arundel House, the Privy Garden at St. James's Palace, the vineyard at Oatlands Palace, see John Harris, *The Palladians* (London: Trefoil Books, 1981), 48-49. It is also quite possible that the source for both Jones and Washington was Palladio's Palazzo Theine, whose base has a "Vö-joint." Jones would have seen this structure in person, but Washington obviously did not; he would have instead found it in Isaac Ware's 1738 translated edition of Palladio's *Four Books of Architecture*, originally published in Venice in 1570. For further explanation of the architectural links between the Pantheon and Mount Vernon see the Fourth Book, plates LII and LIII of Ware's edition of Palladio. The ancient Roman Temple of Mars the Avenger in Rome also has rustication at all levels and a similar cornice with block modillions. See Matthew John Mosca, "The House and its Restoration," in *The Magazine Antiques: Mount Vernon*, February 1989: 464. The modillion is illustrated on plate X of Ware's edition of Palladio.

<sup>423</sup>Ibid. See also William M. Kelso, *Kingsmill Plantations, 1619-1800: Archaeology of Country Life in Colonial Virginia* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1984), 23-25; Thomas Tiletson Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia 1706-1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946); and Marcus Whiffen, *The Eighteenth Century Houses of Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1960); and Dell Upton, "Vernacular Architecture in Eighteenth Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio* (Chicago, 1982), Vol. 17, p. 197.

his evolving mindset.<sup>424</sup> Increasingly, Virginians conceived their society as being a stratified organic whole wherein the social order, distinguishing between the rulers and the ruled, used symbols and trappings to reinforce this notion of hierarchy as natural and ordained by God.<sup>425</sup>

One thing that visitors to Mount Vernon always notice is that from the exterior, the house is asymmetrical. The asymmetry of the windows on the west front of the house appears to be a flaw, and indeed is one of the main reasons why Washington's architectural skills are often either critiqued or at the very least underappreciated. The asymmetry of the house's west front exterior has a couple of possible explanations, the first being that it was simply a mistake. However, given that Washington devoted such attention to detail and that nearly everything he did was somehow loaded with meaning, this explanation seems unlikely. This explanation is even more unlikely given the fact that the only effort required in order to make the exterior symmetrical would have been to move two windows on the first floor and two on the second, a fairly minor undertaking given the overall complexity of the Washington's renovation project.<sup>426</sup> Moreover, the only extant line drawing in Washington's own hand of Mount Vernon's front provides a window into his thought process. This drawing, most likely completed in 1773 prior to

---

<sup>424</sup>Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 189-90. See also, Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 36-37. Isaac credits the construction of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, begun in 1706 and completed by about 1720 under the direction of Governor Alexander Spotswood, as the structure that introduced the Georgian style of building to Virginia. Spotswood's effect of adding adjoining "offices" symmetrically arranged on either side of the central palace combined with the addition of enclosed gardens and finely wrought gates gave an aura of formal balance to the overall layout. Isaac argues that all of the great Virginia houses built after 1720 were modeled on Spotswood's layout, which established a colonial tradition parallel to (and interconnected with) and ongoing cultural development in England.

<sup>425</sup>Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 3.

<sup>426</sup>Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, 24. See also Charles E. Brownell, "Mount Vernon," in Charles E. Brownell, Calder Loth, William M.S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson, *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 206.

the construction project that began in 1774, reveals a very different Mount Vernon than the one that was actually constructed. The biggest difference is that the house in the drawing is symmetrical, or nearly symmetrical. Despite the fact that the two windows north of the central doorway are approximately six inches further from the center of the house than those south of the doorway the difference is likely attributed to a thick pencil line and may be due to the overall small size of the drawing, or the fact that it was a study that did not demand much accuracy, for similar disparities are present in other parts of the drawing as well. Because of the symmetry in the drawing, the windows of the west parlor and small dining room are in different locations. The small dining room has one window, and the first window in the south side of the center door is in the closet under the staircase. Other differences include wider doors, smaller windows on the first-floor with higher sills, and lower second-floor window sills. The significance of this sketch by Washington is that it demonstrates that the asymmetrical reality of Mount Vernon was neither an afterthought nor an oversight.<sup>427</sup>

Interestingly, it is also worthwhile to note that the other three façades of Mount Vernon are also asymmetrical, but in different ways. For example, the asymmetry of the north façade seems to juxtapose aristocratic high style with farmhouse practicality. This façade features Washington's Venetian window that is the centerpiece of the large dining room that was a part of the 1774 expansion. From the exterior, the large, elegant window shares an elevation with the cellar door, which Washington could have either easily moved to some other more discreet part of the building, or hidden in a sunken areaway. By opting to leave the cellar door where it was, it seems that Washington sought to communicate to visitors that he saw no incompatibility between the ornamental and the

---

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 22-24.

practical being equally visible. Both had functional purposes and these allowed them to exist side by side in Washington's neatly ordered world.<sup>428</sup>

It is possible that Washington chose to incorporate asymmetry as a design theme in order to exploit the visual effect that asymmetry has on tricking the eye in order to alter perceptions of the building's scale. Or, perhaps despite his perceived preference for formality and aristocratic bearing, Washington did not want to create the perfect English manor house that dominated the landscape. It would seem that he did in fact, want to preserve and indeed present the fact that Mount Vernon was a farmhouse. He wanted to preserve some sense of the vernacular farmhouse architecture that he both remembered from his childhood and saw firsthand from his extensive travels throughout Virginia.<sup>429</sup>

What is also likely is that Mount Vernon's exterior asymmetry was a deliberate byproduct of Washington's efforts to expand what had been a somewhat modest farmhouse interior into an elegant country seat. Part of Washington's extensive renovation (between 1757 and 1760) included raising the roof and the expanding the central hall in order to accommodate a larger, grander staircase. This naturally impacted

---

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 27. See also James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Random House, 1996), 126. Deetz argues that "The distinction between vernacular and academic building is a critical one, since each reflects different aspects of the culture that created the buildings. Vernacular building is folk building, done without benefit of formal plans. Such structures are frequently built by their occupants or, if not, by someone who is well within the occupant's immediate community. Vernacular structures are the immediate product of their users and form a sensitive indicator of these person's inner feelings, their ideas of what is or is not suitable to them. Consequently, changes in attitudes values and worldview are very likely to be reflected in changes in vernacular architectural forms." The change in Anglo-American building form from the early seventeenth-century to the end of the eighteenth-century is essentially a picture of the slow development of vernacular forms under an increasing influence of the academic styles that were their contemporaries. Deetz's observation neatly encapsulates what Washington was doing over the course of the several decades that he spent renovating and refining Mount Vernon. He was a vernacular builder that studied forms of academic building through available architectural manuals and by visiting many different homes and seats of government over the course of his life. In so doing, Mount Vernon became an extension of himself. See also George Washington to George Augustine Washington, June 3, 1787, in Fitzpatrick 29: 228.

the placement of the windows on the south side of the front door.<sup>430</sup> It made perfect sense for Washington to want to improve the appearance of the central hall, for this passage was the most public room in the house. It was the place where he conducted the business transactions of his farms, received visitors, and entertained guests during hot summer days. The wood paneling, finely cut moldings, and wider staircase conveyed a sense of Washington's wealth to any visitor more accustomed to the look of common eighteenth-century homes with plainly plastered interiors, or rude log cabin walls.<sup>431</sup>

Also during this renovation project, Washington enhanced the interior of some of the other existing rooms that were a part of the original structure. What had been Lawrence Washington's red room became the small dining room. The 1757 remodel of this room included the addition of paneled wainscoting and a second window overlooking the entrance court. Washington also relocated the existing window in the room so that the two windows together were located in the same relative position in the room when viewed from the inside. This window realignment had a dual effect: the interior was both balanced and the formality of the room enhanced, and the exterior asymmetry became more pronounced.<sup>432</sup>

---

<sup>430</sup> Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, 62.

<sup>431</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses and Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 114. In his chapter, "Houses and Gardens" Bushman points out that houses across colonial America had begun to evolve central passages into wider, more formal rooms for receiving visitors as houses were enlarged from their original seventeenth century footprints. As houses gained additional rooms, much of the family living that had taken place in central halls was removed to the privacy of these new bed and guest rooms. Central passages still served as multi-purpose rooms for meeting and entertaining guests, but again, the daily, more intimate affairs of family life were afforded privacy. Washington's first expansion of Mount Vernon fits nicely into the pattern laid out by Bushman.

<sup>432</sup> Mesick, Cohen, Waite, Architects, *Historic Structure Report*, 3 vols. 1993, prepared for the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2: 297 and 302.

### Mount Vernon's Expansion

The most ambitious aspect of the 1757-1760 renovation was the construction of the west parlor. The room was paneled and two elaborate Ionic door frames were installed. The inspiration for these door frames may have been the "Ionic Entablature" on plate VI in Batty Langley's *Builder's Treasury of Designs*. Another possible source is Palladio's rendition of the Ionic order, found in Book One, plate 20 of his *Four Books of Architecture*, as well as plate 23 of Langley's *Builder's Jewel*, which is the most likely source.<sup>433</sup> The mantel and overmantel were clearly taken from the designs on plates 50 and 51 in Abraham Swan's handbook, *The British Architect*. The chimneypiece, doorframes, and doors were painted with a red mahogany graining, while the walls were covered in a stone colored paint that contained both ochre and umber pigments mixed with white lead.<sup>434</sup>

The rest of the renovation project consisted of the redecoration of both rooms on the east side of the house as guest bedchambers, along with the simple bedroom on the north side of the passage that dated from Lawrence Washington's time. Washington further paneled the bedroom on the south side of the passage in 1758; this room would serve as the master bedroom until the next major addition to the house was undertaken in 1773. Additionally, as a result of this 1757-1760 renovation project, the second floor had five bedrooms with plastered rails, cornice moldings and a chair rail. At this point until

---

<sup>433</sup>Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, 65; Batty Langley, *The city and country builder's and workman's treasury of designs: or the art of drawing and working the ornamental parts of architecture. Illustrated by upwards of four hundred grand designs* (London: Printed for and Sold by S. Harding on the Pavement in St. Martin's Lane, 1745), plate VI (reproduced by the British Library); Batty Langley, *The builder's jewel: or the youth's instructor, and workman's remembrancer. Explaining short and easy rules, made familiar to the meanest capacity, for drawing and working, ... By B. and T. Langley, The twelfth edition* (Edinburgh: Printed for R. Clark, Bookseller in the Parliament-house, 1768), plate 23 (reproduction from the National Library of Scotland).

<sup>434</sup>Matthew John Mosca, "The House and its Restoration," 468; Abraham Swan, *The British Architect, or, the Builder's Treasury of Staircases*, (London: 1745), plates 50 and 51.

1770, Washington temporarily stopped adding to the house so that he could retire some more of his debts to English merchants. Thanks to his willingness to diversify his plantation operations to include such cottage industries as a fishery and livestock trading in addition to his crops, he turned profits that reduced his dependence on imports and drastically changed his way of life. This enabled him to undertake the second phase of the house's expansion that would serve as a proclamation of his new found financial independence and transformation from tobacco planter to diversified farmer.<sup>435</sup>

#### A Second Expansion Driven By a Need for Privacy

This second expansion project, begun in 1774, was on a much grander scale than the first. Washington planned to enlarge the house at both ends, add a two story piazza facing the river, and add arcades to connect the dependencies to the house on the west side. Additionally, he planned a complete redesign of the west garden to be done simultaneously with the addition. He removed the central driveway that had been carried over from the English manor tradition, and replaced it with the symmetrical parterres, created the bowling green, the serpentine walks, the north and south service lanes, and the flower and vegetable gardens. Also, he began an extensive tree planting program. Construction on the house began on the south end with Washington's new private study and some storage rooms on the first floor, capped by the master bedroom and two dressing rooms. In this wing of the house, the plaster walls were covered with a simple coat of whitewash, the woodwork was covered in a soft, blue-gray paint, and the doors

---

<sup>435</sup> Alan Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, 65.

were covered in burnt umber paint.<sup>436</sup> The master bedroom is very modestly decorated with a simple mantle, simple furnishings, and soft white fabrics on the bed, which probably is as much a testament to Martha Washington's taste as her husband's, for as soon as she arrived at Mount Vernon, she began putting such decorative touches in order, and she notably found simplicity serene in such a private space as a bedroom.<sup>437</sup>

In designing this wing, Washington constructed buffers to separate these two rooms from the more public side of the house. To access this area, one must pass through the small dining room and the downstairs bedroom to get to the vestibule that leads either to the study or the private stairway up to the master bedroom suite above. The fact that there is no hallway that connects directly to the library or the staircase speaks to the degree that Washington sought to separate his private life from the public one that he was obliged to lead given his wealth and social standing. Beginning with his retirement from the Virginia Regiment and intensifying after the Revolution, guests poured into Mount Vernon in staggering numbers, many of which were complete strangers. The beauty of Washington's design of the south wing of the house was that it allowed the Washingtons to entertain the multitudes of visitors in such a manner as to maintain the requisite social graces while sacrificing none of their privacy. Washington bemoaned the burden of his celebrity by comparing his beloved home "to a well resorted tavern," because "scarcely

---

<sup>436</sup>Ibid., 65-67. To enrich the context for Washington's diversification of his plantation operations, see Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607 – 1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 472-538. Walsh makes the point that only the most daring planters risked planting wheat. Washington was one of the first to attempt large scale wheat production and struggled. This point will be discussed more fully in chapter three.

<sup>437</sup>Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* (New York: Viking Group, 2005), 68.

any strangers who are going from north to south, or from south to north do not spend a day or two at it.<sup>438</sup>

During the same phase of construction, Washington added an ornate mantel and overmantle to the small dining room. The ornate design is unusual for a corner fireplace in a relatively small room. The design was taken from plate 50 in Abraham Swanø, *The British Architect*.<sup>439</sup> At the same time, an elaborate plaster ceiling was created by a French artisan whose name has since been lost. The work in this room was completed in 1775 while Washington was away with the Continental Army. What is remarkable about this entire renovation project is just how engaged Washington was with nearly every detail even though he was many miles away, preoccupied with the business of the Revolution.<sup>440</sup> Perfecting Mount Vernon had become necessary for Washingtonø sanity.

---

<sup>438</sup>George Washington to Mary Ball Washington, February 15, 1787, in *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series* 6 vols., ed. W.W. Abbott (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992-1997), 5:35.

<sup>439</sup>Abraham Swan, *The British Architect, or, the Builder's Treasury of Staircases*, plate 50.

<sup>440</sup>See the series of letters between George and Lund Washington between August and November 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*, ed. Theodore J. Crackel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008). The letter which specifically gets to the heart of Washingtonø need to mentally escape to Mount Vernon and maintain a sense that he had control over it is written from George to Lund Washington, dated 20 August 1775. The letter begins with a complaint about reports of disreputable conduct of some volunteers near Piscataway, New Jersey, and then rapidly transitions back to instructions regarding payment to an inept miller that had previously been employed by Washington as well as instructions for the recoup and payment of several debts that all involved the miller in question, Simpson. The letter then shifts to a preoccupation with maintaining the safety of Martha Washington and Washingtonø papers that had recently come under threat from Lord Dunmore. Washington was fairly confident at the time he wrote this letter that Martha had already reached a place of safety in Maryland, so he does not belabor this point too long. Washington then returns to complaining about the poor quality of the officers under his command. After this lengthy vent, he provides a summary of his position in Cambridge, and then resorts to a lengthy list of instructions for Lund having to do with the payment and assignments for millers and carpenters, the safekeeping of the crops harvested from the fields, the procurement of certain cloth, putting pressure on the craftsmen working on the dining room chimney piece, repairs to the rustication of the both the new and old kitchens, boarding up a well, seeing to the painterø accounts, sowing wheat in the ground, and which horses were to be used to accomplish the work. The fact that this letter swings back and forth between a discussion of the litany of problems with the army and detailed instructions for activities at home suggests that Washington was exasperated under the weight of the immense pressure on him, and that he needed to have a firm grip on the things that were within his ability to control. Lund Washingtonø reply, dated 15 October 1775 painstakingly answers each one of the points made in the previous letter, and is remarkably deferential in that he makes recommendations on how to proceed with various projects, but waits on further instructions before acting,

As a man for whom control was paramount, his daily reality as the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army was such that he needed to maintain a sense of being in control of something, and mentally escaping to Mount Vernon provided that for him.

Washington's cousin and overseer, Lund Washington reported on the finished project in November 1775, "it is I think very Pretty[.] the Stucco man agrees the Cielg [ceiling] is a Handsomeer one than any of Colo[nel] Lewises [Washington's brother-in-law] altho[ugh] not half the work in it[.]"<sup>441</sup>

After constructing the private sanctuary and embellishing the existing public rooms of the house, Washington dramatically added to the public side of the house in 1776. In the most ambitious project of all of Mount Vernon's expansions, Washington designed the two story dining room as the setting for grand entertainments. What is further remarkable about this project is that it was begun at Washington's urging at the lowest point in the Revolution as his army was retreating rapidly after a series of humiliating losses in New York. He wrote to Lund Washington urging him to commence work in a "masterly manner."<sup>442</sup> Additionally, it would take nearly twenty years to complete for Washington was away from Mount Vernon from 1775 until 1783 (a period interrupted only by a brief return en route to Yorktown), and following the war he had a difficult time locating the craftsmen needed to complete a project on this scale. The design for the fireplace and the Venetian window are particularly striking. The design for the window is taken from Batty Langley's *The City and Country Builder's and*

---

even though he is the overseer and is actually there and is in a much better position to make decisions on how to best proceed with matters of construction that are separate from those decorative taste that would be the purview of the owner alone.

<sup>441</sup>Lund Washington to George Washington, November 12, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series Series 7* vols., ed. Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985-1997), 2:356.

<sup>442</sup>George Washington to Lund Washington, September 30, 1776, in *ibid.*, 6:442.

*Workingman's Treasury of Designs*.<sup>443</sup> Washington undoubtedly selected such a window for its size and striking appearance in and of itself, in addition to the fact that it provides commanding views of the river. He further added a marble mantle that was a gift from Samuel Vaughn. The scale and symmetry of this room, when combined with the intricate decoration conveys the sense that Washington was highly attuned to the finest tastes of his times. For example, he had the ceiling embellished with a plaster medallion in the center, surrounded by four panels, each with a center design that incorporates different farming implements to symbolize that he made amassed his wealth through the diversification of his agricultural pursuits. This rich detailing contributes to the overall splendor of the room, especially when combined with the added effect of the wallpaper border, the latest in interior design accessories, imported from France. In this room, Washington hung some of his finest (and most expensive) paintings.<sup>444</sup>

As a part of the 1774 expansion, the outbuildings were realigned and the covered walkways connecting the house to the two closest dependencies were added. In 1777, the piazza was constructed, and in 1778 the cupola was added to the roof. In 1785, he began construction of the greenhouse and repainted the small dining room brilliant verdigris green (an expensive way of dressing up a room given the price of paint at the time). In 1787, he painted the west parlor a bright Prussian blue and also added an intricate plaster ceiling. In 1792, he added the slave quarters adjacent to the greenhouse. Four years later, Venetian shutters were added to the west front and the shingles on the roof of each of the two dependencies were painted to match the roof of the house. Finally, in 1797, he

---

<sup>443</sup>Batty Langley, *The City and Country Builder's and Workingman's Treasury of Designs*, plate LI. The text that explains the proper placement and use of the design is on page 18.

<sup>444</sup>Allan Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, 70.

added wood grain finish to the entry hall, similar to what he had done in his study in 1786 when he added unusual built in, glass paneled bookcases, and refinished the walls.<sup>445</sup>

Given what is known about Washington's other lifelong project of shaping his public persona, his layout of the most intimate spaces in his home makes perfect sense. For as much as history remembers him as the majestic, awe-inspiring father of his country, he was also a sensitive man for whom an escape from the public eye was a necessity. To sustain the public face, Washington needed an ultra-private retreat where he could both unburden himself to the one person who knew him best and work out solutions to whatever challenges were before him. Having felt the sting of criticism from a young age, he left nothing to chance and therefore sought to protect two very precious elements that made him who he was: his marriage and his mind. His marriage brought him the love, comfort, and support that he craved. His mind, although sharp, was constantly preoccupied by the fact that unlike so many of the men he would lead in both the military and political realms, he lacked a formal education. For example, unlike the highly educated Thomas Jefferson who could easily carry on intellectual conversations on any number of subjects with complete strangers, Washington preferred instead to indulge in either light, even flirtatious conversations with women or conversations with men on subjects that he felt most comfortable with for short bursts at a time, retiring from his company on a rigid schedule that often precluded the opportunity to become overly familiar. Additionally, besides the design of this private suite of rooms, Washington went even further to ensure that the master bedroom and the library were indeed secluded. He lit and maintained the fire in the master bedroom whenever he and Martha were in the room; the slaves were responsible for lighting the fires in the pre-dawn hours

---

<sup>445</sup>Ibid., 77.

in each of the other occupied bedrooms of the house, but not the master. Furthermore, his step-grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, would later recall that the study was ãa place that no one entered without orders.ö<sup>446</sup>

### A Closer Look at Mount Vernon's Library

A look at the décor and furnishings of the library further reinforces the notion that this was a private workspace: a desk; a dressing table; a small table that held a letterpress; and a large, freestanding globe. Along one side were built in bookcases with glass doors. The only adornments to the walls were an awkwardly fitted mantelpiece and a portrait of Lawrence Washington, elder half-brother and mentor to young George.<sup>447</sup> There were no other chairs or furnishings that could serve as seating. The austerity of this room is striking when contrasted with the public rooms of the house including the parlor, entry hall, dining rooms, and music room which are richly paneled, plastered, and accessorized with intricate mantelpieces, ceilings, doorframes, chair rails, paint, artwork, furnishings, china, etc.<sup>448</sup> The public rooms were laid out and finished in such a way so as to convey to visitors a sense of Washington's wealth and prestige; the private rooms were kept simple to eliminate distractions from the reasons for their very existence ó a happy marriage and solitary intellectual development.<sup>449</sup> The interior design of Mount Vernon seems to convey Washington's desire to balance pleasure and power, freedom and

---

<sup>446</sup> George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 527-528.

<sup>447</sup> Robert F. Dalzell Jr. and Lee Baldwin Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon: At Home in Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15-16.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Email exchange with Ted Crackel, 21 August 2012 regarding Washington's use of his study as a retreat away from the many people in and around Mount Vernon on a daily basis. See also Washington to Lawrence Lewis, 4 August 1797, in *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. Washington asked Lewis to come live with him at Mount Vernon to take some of the hospitality responsibility off Washington's hands. Washington wrote that constant company was troublesome given that ãit is my inclination to retireí either to bed, or to my study, soon after candlelight.ö

restraint. Moreover, Mount Vernon is a visual representation of Washington's mental shift from Anglophile to American.<sup>450</sup>

The degree to which Washington's design is unique is further evidenced by the fact that for all the books that Washington would eventually amass in his private library, architectural manuals were chiefly not among them.<sup>451</sup> He must have borrowed them from friends, neighbors, and the artisans he hired, which would have been fairly easy given the wide availability of these books throughout the colonies.<sup>452</sup> Although as highlighted throughout this chapter, elements of Mount Vernon's design are taken from some of the most popular building manuals available in the colonies; none of the architectural details from Mount Vernon are exact copies from these various British templates. Just as with nearly everything else in his life, Washington was different. From the time he began work on the first expansion of the house, Washington made it clear that he was deliberately avoiding the reproduction of an English manor. His inspiration was British, his design was American so there is nothing accidental about it.

---

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>451</sup> Appleton P.C. Griffin, *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenaeum Compiled and Annotated By Appleton P.C. Griffin... With an Appendix. The Inventory of Washington's Books Drawn Up By the Appraisers of His Estate; With Notes in Regard to the Full Titles of the Several Books and the Later History* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1897), 482-566.

<sup>452</sup> Helen Park, *A List of Architectural Books Available in America Before the Revolution* (Los Angeles:, 1973). Park not only lists both the architectural books that were available in the colonies from Britain, but also includes the cities in which re-print editions were produced in subsequent years. The considerable list of titles along with the numerous editions available up and down the eastern seaboard supports the assumption that Washington would have had no problem gaining access to copies of the different manuals he gleaned inspiration from. Since he did not intend to assiduously copy any design, it seems logical that he would leaf through the books that he could gain access to simply take the few details that he wanted to incorporate in Mount Vernon's design. For a discussion of the particular books that Park identifies that were most prevalent in Virginia, see Marcus Whiffen, *The Eighteenth Century Houses of Williamsburg: A Study of Architecture and Building in the Colonial Capital of Virginia* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1960), 58-65.

## Washington's Mount Vernon Contrasted With Jefferson's Monticello

To place Washington as an architect in a broader context, a brief comparison to Thomas Jefferson and his creation of Monticello can be instructive. In no way can Washington be described as a student of architecture in the same vein as Jefferson who literally spent decades poring over academic architecture treatises and studying some of the grandest designs in Europe to perfect his vision. However, in placing the two owner-builders' lives side by side, there are several striking similarities and differences that together explain the drive each man had to not simply construct a nice house, but to create a home that was an extension of himself.<sup>453</sup> Furthermore, this comparison reveals that Washington in his design of Mount Vernon was much more creative and thoughtful than previous scholars have concluded.

Both Washington and Jefferson lost their fathers as adolescents. Augustine Washington died when George was eleven years old.<sup>454</sup> Peter Jefferson died when Thomas was fourteen.<sup>455</sup> The passing of their fathers meant that both boys lost the guiding hand that fostered them, protected them, and steered them onto the path for a

---

<sup>453</sup> Refer once again to the argument made by James F. Deetz about the significance of vernacular architecture in his book, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archeology of Early American Life*, 126, "Vernacular structures are the immediate product of their users and form a sensitive indicator of these persons' inner feelings, their ideas of what is or is not suitable to them. Consequently, changes in attitude, values, and worldview are very likely to be reflected in changes in vernacular architectural forms." The circumstances of both Washington and Jefferson losing their fathers at a young age and each having a cool relationship with their mothers created a need for each to make new homes that were their own. The development of Washington's worldview was a sort of progression away from embracing a British identity toward a new American one, inspired by Britain for certain, but still distinct. Jefferson's worldview was conversely shaped by his embrace of European and Enlightenment ideas gleaned from both his extensive formal education through the College of William and Mary, his legal studies under George Wythe and the exposure that Wythe provided him to Virginia's other educated and erudite men, his travel to Europe and his long residence there, and above all the desire he had to cultivate in himself a classically trained European mind.

<sup>454</sup> James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience (1732-1775)* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 17.

<sup>455</sup> Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), 33.

successful life at a sensitive age. Both Washington and Jefferson had cool relationships with their mothers, and would each escape their mothers' homes as early and as often as possible. Moreover, both men sought to make homes for themselves on lands they inherited and deeply loved to serve as a haven. Both were deliberate in their designs for their homes and took decades to complete them. Both Washington and Jefferson carved out distinct public rooms and private rooms within their respective structures. One of the main differences between the two builders was that Washington's project followed a more linear progression of expansion. He started with an existing house and expanded on it over several different phases. Furthermore, Washington kept up a program of expansion and redecoration as opposed to renovation. Jefferson began Monticello from scratch, and developed a fondness for completely remodeling the structure rather than merely adding to it as his tastes changed.

The difference between Washington's preferences for expansion as opposed to Jefferson's penchant for renovation comes down more to their personalities than their finances. Throughout his adult life, Washington sought to present himself to the public as the embodiment of a self-controlled patrician who achieved wealth from hard work and fame through disinterested public service. As a result, Mount Vernon was a work in sequential progress, expanded when Washington could afford it; a home that was refined rather than revolutionized over time to impress upon visitors a sense of the man who molded it. Conversely, Jefferson projected an image of himself as a perpetual Enlightenment student/philosopher, continually seeking knowledge and experiences that would broaden his mind over a lifetime of development. Monticello therefore was in an

almost permanent state of revolution over the course of more than fifty years as Jefferson brought together the series of worlds that he interacted with and created.<sup>456</sup>

Many scholars and architectural critics credit Jefferson as the better architect who pursued a more exactly executed design than Washington who is often derided as mere amateurish home owner who simply managed to produce an oddly asymmetrical wood frame house with pretentiously rusticated siding as a poor substitute for stone. To accept such a critique pays a well deserved compliment to Jefferson's studied skills in designing his home, but it completely negates Washington's considerable creative skills in shaping his. Jefferson's plans reflect his commitment to architectural orthodoxy while simultaneously bringing together Palladian design with French, Italian, and Chinese elements. Washington's resulting design reflects a no less deliberate effort to take different details of British Palladianism in order to make an amalgamated American structure. If Mount Vernon appears somehow less Palladian or studied than Monticello, it's because it is so but that is deliberate on Washington's part, not a mistake or an indication that he was somehow not as gifted as Jefferson.

Having established the inspiration and deliberateness of Mount Vernon's design and the degree to which Washington relied on his creativity rather than academic architecture in order to realize his vision for his dream home, the next question that must be explored is how did Washington use the house to reinforce the self-image that he worked so continuously to refine and project. Once this question is properly answered, it will then be possible to understand the anatomy of the study as a reading/workspace

---

<sup>456</sup> Susan R. Stein, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers in association with the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., 1993), 12. Stein argues that "Jefferson's Monticello is woven out of both American self-confidence and absorption with the arts of eighteenth-century France; of both untutored innocence of taste and a remarkable sophistication. It is, in short, not the story of a single world but of the series of worlds that Jefferson made at Monticello" 6

within the larger framework of Washington's life. What must be understood is that Washington was thoroughly a man of his time. After spending the rest of his adolescence following the death of his father under the tutelage of his older half-brothers and powerful patrons, Washington keenly understood that in order to fulfill his ambitions for success in provincial Virginia, he must act properly in genteel circles. A large part of being genteel was learning how to stage and move about in the social spaces of homes in order to cultivate the right image. When refined people took to the stage in these social settings to perform, it was possible for the people and the environment to harmonize. That harmony hinged partially on the human actors, but also on the ability of the décor, light, furnishings, and the silver to serve their purposes. Only then did the house fulfill its purpose of projecting that ideal image of gentility of the owner upon his guests.<sup>457</sup>

By the time Washington began his first phase of expansion of Mount Vernon, he had achieved the goals he set out for himself as an ambitious young man. He made money and powerful connections through early work as a surveyor, achieved fame as the commander of the Virginia Regiment during the French and Indian War, won elections to become a member of the House of Burgesses, and married the richest woman in the colony which brought both wealth and domestic happiness. He was at the top of Virginia society and his home needed to reflect the dignity of this station.

The expansion of Mount Vernon's structure was only part of Washington's improvements. He also spent lavishly to decorate the interior to the standard expected among Virginia's elite. When he married Martha, Washington began to do business with her agent, Robert Cary and Company. The Washingtons were big shoppers, prone to ordering more than the profits could pay for, as so many in their social circle would also

---

<sup>457</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, 127.

do. The reason why Washington, a man usually characterized by an extreme degree of calculated restraint, spent so much money on home furnishings, clothing, and accessories for entertaining on such a consistent basis again stems from the simple fact that he was a man of his time at the top of a society that was in the midst of a radical transformation. By the time of Washington's marriage to Martha, Virginians were extending their imaginative horizons beyond the narrowly bound tradition from whence they came. Washington is but one example of a colonist who had undergone a "new birth" by serving in the armies of the empire and who was eager to participate in a wider Anglo-American market.<sup>458</sup> The pace at which the market for consumer goods was expanding picked up rapidly after 1740. Even colonials living three thousand miles from the metropolis could take part in consumption.<sup>459</sup> It is the speed of this transformation coupled with changing fashion trends which by the mid-eighteenth-century were no longer the preserve of the aristocracy that are significant to understanding Washington in the broader context of his society during this period.<sup>460</sup>

Although Washington spent lavishly in order to outfit his house and family, it is curious to note that nearly all of the household accessories he purchased were intended for the more public rooms of Mount Vernon. As stated earlier, the study was comparatively austere in terms of furnishings and decorations. All of this begs the question as to why there is such a stark contrast between the adornments of the public rooms of the house and the private library. The answer could lie partly in the simple

---

<sup>458</sup>T.H. Breen, "The Meaning of Things: Interpreting the Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (New York: Routledge, 1994), 250.

<sup>459</sup>Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 53-54; T.H. Breen, "The Meaning of Things: Interpreting the Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century," 251.

<sup>460</sup>*Ibid.*, 257

explanation that as he designed this room to be for his personal use and no one else's, Washington saw little need to embellish the aesthetic appeal of the space. An equally plausible explanation is that Washington intended this to be an efficient study space and operations headquarters for his estates ó nothing more. The potential for distractions needed to be eliminated from a room designed for constant intellectual activities which would not benefit from distractions. Everything about Washington's militaristic use of the room as discussed at the opening of this chapter supports this interpretation.

Further credence for this efficiency based interpretation of the anatomy of Washington's study comes from returning briefly to the comparison between Mount Vernon and Monticello. Jefferson designed his study to also be a mostly private room with limited public access; however, he spent years refining and then remodeling the physical design of the overall space to accommodate not just his desk and his bookshelves, but also his bedroom and his attached hobby room and greenhouse. In other words, Jefferson created a study that was a personal retreat ó a place for rest, reflection, study, and experimentation all in one room.<sup>461</sup> Washington, on the other hand, built a workspace. This distinction in study designs between the two men is crucial to defining exactly what kind of an intellectual and reader Washington was. While Jefferson is famously remembered as the darling of the Enlightenment, a constantly evolving intellectual whose academic pursuits change and expand dramatically over time, Washington is instead the largely self-educated upstart who defined his own definition of "useful knowledge" as being that which has a practical application to advancing an individual's wealth and/or place in society. Both men are driven by the need for self-improvement, but their definitions of that term are utterly different. For as much as

---

<sup>461</sup>Susan R. Stein, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*, 103-110.

Jefferson was interested in intellectual pursuits that would lead him to practical discoveries and improvements like inventing a system for recycling rain water at Monticello, he also had a passion for poetry.<sup>462</sup> Washington, by contrast, read and worked towards specific goals and from the evidence we have, spent comparatively little time on contemplation.

Additionally, the fact that the studies at both Monticello and Mount Vernon were reserved for the private use of their owners says something about each man's attitude towards the pursuit of reading. Both Jefferson and Washington found solitude to be an absolute necessity. However, Jefferson routinely allowed his daughter, Martha, access to the room and its contents, and he would open the room to favored visitors to his estate, such as Dr. William Thornton and his wife, Anna Maria.<sup>463</sup> Washington extended no such invitations to enter and peruse his study to either members of his family or any among the hordes of visitors that flocked to his doorstep on a daily basis. According to George Washington Parke-Custis, if there were guests, and nearly always there were, books and papers were offered for their amusement in the sitting rooms.<sup>464</sup>

The lengths that Jefferson and Washington went to in order to keep access to their libraries restricted placed them slightly out of step with many of their contemporaries in the Virginia gentry and in the wider realm of British country living at the time. For example, fellow Virginians including the Speaker of the House of Burgesses, Peyton Randolph, and eminent lawyer and law professor to Jefferson, George Wythe, maintained studies that served as places to entertain male guests and conduct business in their stately

---

<sup>462</sup>Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder*, 157.

<sup>463</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>464</sup>George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 167.

Williamsburg homes.<sup>465</sup> Another notable Williamsburg resident who used his private library as a showpiece was the colony's lieutenant governor, Francis Fauquier. Fauquier was an accomplished scientist who had been made a Fellow of the Royal Society (F.R.S) in 1753. When he moved to Virginia to take up his post, he left much of his library in England; however, the partial collection he brought with him revealed a man of engaging personality and high intellect. He frequently invited guests into his library for a mix of intellectual conversation mixed with good food and drink. Moreover, he was frequently willing to loan out books to others, even his most valuable presentation copies, to interested friends.<sup>466</sup>

Fauquier's frequent use of his library as a space to entertain and exchange ideas combined with his willingness to lend his books offers a stark contrast to Washington and to a lesser extent Jefferson, and further demonstrates that Fauquier was in step with the intellectual trend of mid-eighteenth-century aristocratic England. Over the course of the long eighteenth century, libraries in fashionable homes had transitioned from private places of study for the homeowners to living and entertaining spaces for entire families and their guests. The rooms themselves were enlarged and lavishly decorated with rich artwork and furnishings, and the size and scope of the collections of books were likewise enlarged. The reason for the expansion and repurpose of libraries during this time was due to shifting attitudes among the aristocracy towards learning and culture. It became

---

<sup>465</sup>Marcus Whiffen, *The Eighteenth Century Houses of Williamsburg: A Study in Architecture and Building in the Colonial Capital of Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1960), 174, 193.

<sup>466</sup>Kevin J. Hayes, *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 60-61.

increasingly important for the ruling class of Britain to appear worthy, and while uneducated gentlemen could still be found, they were scorned by their peers.<sup>467</sup>

English born Fauquier fits neatly into this pattern, and the evidence suggests that this trend had crossed the Atlantic into some of the fashionable homes in the colonies, but clearly this was an English tradition that Washington was not willing to embrace. As he did with the rest of Mount Vernon, Washington chose from among English inspired fashions those which suited his tastes and personality the best. He was not about to turn his study into some sort of living space or salon because in so doing he would risk revealing his Achilles heel ó his òdefective education.ö For a man who was all about carefully fashioning his image so that it projected power, it was far better to maintain a sense of aloofness in intellectual matters whenever possible, and if that meant being slightly out of fashion with his private library, so be it. It was better to appear distant than dim. The care and attention to detail that he paid to the design, construction, and decoration of his estate and gardens at Mount Vernon reinforces the notion that everything that Washington did was deliberate so as to convey a certain message of power, control, and refinement to all who beheld both the home and its owner. The situation of the study within that setting combined with how it was used reveal that Washington maintained a highly organized and diligent attitude towards his larger life project of self-improvement, and that he was zealous about guarding the inner workings of his mind at work.

---

<sup>467</sup>Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 166-170, 178-180.

## Conclusion

In the fall of 1796, a host of issues plagued President Washington. From a diplomatic standpoint, the United States still faced the threat of being pulled into the war between Great Britain and France. At home, Washington could not keep cabinet advisors. Ever since Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and Henry Knox resigned their respective posts, Washington had to approach second rate candidates who refused his offers in rapid succession. On top of that, the partisan attacks from the menacing Republican press grew ever more vicious. Washington, however, had one headache that eclipsed all the official ones that came with the burden of his office ó his stepgrandson, George Washington Parke Custis. As a child, Washy (as he was known within the family) was a delight to his grandparents who raised him, but as the boy grew into an adolescent he began to display the same worrying personality trait towards indolence as his deceased father had years before.

As a grandfather, Washington was determined to not make the same mistakes with Washy that he made with his father, Jacky Custis. When Jacky was a boy, Washington was a new husband and stepfather, who, fearful of offending his wife, deferred to her in the disciplining of her son. Martha doted on the boy, and her spoiling took its toll. Jacky grew up knowing that one day he would inherit the Custis fortune, so he therefore found no need to apply himself in his studies. Washington did what he could to curb the boy's worst excesses, but he was unable to mold Jacky into the man that he wanted. Now with Washy, however, there was a second chance.

Washington wanted his grandson to grow into a good citizen of the new republic and not become just another rich young fop. He determined that the boy should have the

best American education possible, and therefore decided that when he was old enough he would be enrolled at the College of New Jersey, which was sufficiently conservative without being too puritanical, and was far enough away from both New York and Philadelphia so as to prevent the diversions of a big city to lure the boy from his studies. The College of New Jersey was also an ideal selection for placating Martha, who worried incessantly whenever Washy was away from home. Washy would be away at school, but not so far that he was out of reach of the presidential mansion.

Once Washy was enrolled, his grandfather kept in close contact with him and with his tutors to monitor his progress. With regard to study, Washington assured his grandson that “It is yourself who is to derive immediate benefit from these [studies]. Your country may do it hereafter. The more knowledge you acquire, the greater will be the probability of succeeding in both, and the greater will be your thirst for more.”<sup>468</sup> Washy reassured his grandfather that he was working hard, to which Washington replied with a mixture of enthusiasm and relief:

The assurances you give me of applying diligently to your studies, and fulfilling your obligations which are enjoined by your Creator and due to his creatures, are highly pleasing and satisfactory to me. I rejoice in it on two accounts; first, as it is the sure means of laying the foundation of your own happiness, and rendering you, if it should please God to spare your life, a useful member of society hereafter; and secondly, that I may, if I live and enjoy the pleasure, reflect that I have been, in some degree, instrumental in effecting these purposes.<sup>469</sup>

This advice given by Washington to his grandson captures the meaning that reading had in his own long life. Although Washy did eventually abandon his studies when he found it too difficult to live in his grandfather’s shadow, the message above did not entirely fall on deaf ears. When Washy published his memoirs of life with his grandfather, he

---

<sup>468</sup> Washington to George Washington Parke Custis, 15 November 1796, in George Washington Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, 73.

<sup>469</sup> Washington to George Washington Parke Custis, 28 November 1796, in *ibid.*

included these letters in them, thereby communicating to a wider reading public of young Americans that the father of the nation placed a premium on education.

Study, in part, made Washington an effective public servant. Moreover, the newly developed concept of republican citizenship mirrored Washington's life. What is most interesting about this fact is that the majority of Washington's admirers, even those that were somewhat close to him, were largely unaware of the extent of his self-directed reading and the significance that it played over the course of his long life in the public spotlight. When considering the fact that Washington consistently occupied positions wherein he was surrounded by individuals who were more qualified than he was, his achievements take on a greater significance. Reading was the way that he compensated for his limited childhood education and for the most part it served him well.

This study demonstrated the value that Washington placed on reading. Over time, Washington came to absorb the knowledge that came from the content of his reading material in such a way that he effectively put it to use. He also learned another lesson from his reading, however, that was just as important. Washington learned to understand the power of the printed word and how that power influenced society and current events.

This study began with the question of why he developed certain reading preferences. Having lost his father at age eleven, Washington's educational career was cut short, and from a young age he had to make his own way. As such, he was careful, especially in his earlier years, to keep this shortcoming hidden from those around him that he was trying to impress. Although Washington could not have known it at the time, the fact that he never had the chance to study abroad the way his older half-brothers did

was actually a blessing, for it instead set Washington on a very practically oriented path in terms of his intellectual development.

Washington was driven. He was always ambitious and was relentless in the pursuit of his goals, a personality trait that never diminished with the passage of time. After his father's death, he set about mastering the knowledge required to become a surveyor, so he could earn money and purchase land. His older half-brother, Lawrence, mentored the young Washington and whetted his appetite for a military career. As a militia officer, Washington turned his intellectual energies briefly towards the rapidly emerging field of the military art, for he recognized that he was completely unprepared for the rank and position he held. He began reading the books that his British counterparts were reading; however, when tasked with raising a new Virginia Regiment, Washington turned away from military history and theory in favor of more practical texts on tactics and small unit organization. When it became clear that he was not to get the British commission he sought after so desperately, Washington abandoned military studies for what he thought was forever.

Instead of military science, Washington developed a keen interest in the science of agriculture, which would become one of his great passions. He embarked on a new career as a planter and set his sights on a new goal of making it to the top of provincial Virginian society. After his marriage, he was charged with managing multiple plantations spread throughout Virginia, many of which were not profitable. He therefore studied every available treatise on agriculture with scholarly intensity, making notes and engaging in experiments that would enable him to abandon the unprofitable practice of tobacco cultivation. Washington's goal of ascending to the top of the social ladder was

only partly based on economic success. As an elite planter, he was expected to play a role in the public life of the colony. He became a burgess and a vestryman, and it was quickly evident that as a burgess he was surrounded by lawyers and career politicians with considerably more education and experience than he had. Washington, who was never comfortable with political power, worked his way up through the ranks of the burgesses by serving on committees on military issues, taking his time to do some targeted background reading on some of the major issues of the day such as the bishop controversy before attempting to speak up more in the spirited legislative sessions. Eventually, he got off the back bench and was one of the more respected burgesses in the assembly.

When tensions began to flare between Great Britain and the colonies, Washington evolved into a revolutionary ahead of many of his contemporaries. His experiences with British military bureaucracy and the utterly unregulated system of exchange between planters and their British agents had together made clear in his mind that the British never considered the colonists to be fellow subjects with the same rights as native born Englishmen. In recognition of his status within Virginia, he was selected to be a delegate to the Continental Congress in 1774, and again in 1775. It became clear when the Congress convened in 1775 that the colonies were on a collision course for war, and in discussions about raising an army, one of the first questions asked was who should command it. Washington seemed an obvious choice as he was a native born American with military experience. There were other more qualified candidates to be sure, but none of them were Americans by birth. Washington was aware of the talk buzzing about him, and the familiar feelings of inadequacy began to build in his mind. He scoured

Philadelphia's bookshops and purchased every military treatise he could find and set down to read. He would not have long to wait before that useful knowledge was put to the test.

Washington's military reading in the American Revolution is perhaps the most significant because it represents both his shortcomings and the key to his ultimate success. Always the practical reader, he wasted no time with high flown military theory and the histories of Europe's greatest wars. He devoted the little spare time he had to reading field manuals and attempted to learn how to raise and maneuver entire armies on wide open battlefields. His first real attempt to put this knowledge into practice after the British abandoned Boston was in New York, which of course was a disaster for Washington's fledgling army. Although this was an enormous defeat, there was a silver lining. Washington was more than humbled by the experience of the New York campaign; his shortcomings as a field commander were glaring. In the long term, this was a blessing, for Washington's awareness of his own inadequacies as a tactician kept him from becoming overconfident and risking his precious soldiers in large scale battles that would have been too much for his force to handle. His shortfalls as a commanding general forced him to arrive at what was the correct strategic conclusion – he did not have to win the battles in order to win the war. As Washington was aggressive by nature, if he had the European military educational pedigree, he might have been prone to let his aggression rule over his common sense. The secret to his strategic thinking was that thanks to his lack of a European education, he was able to evolve into a general who went against the grain of eighteenth-century military convention.

The Confederation period is characterized by Washington's efforts to preserve the reputation that he so carefully constructed over the course of his public life. In this effort, Washington actively sought to become involved in the world of print media, collaborating with historians and biographers who were attempting to generate the first chronicles of the American Revolution. Here, Washington was doing his part to shape the mythology that was already growing up around him. When the time came for him to put his reputation at stake at the Constitutional Convention, Washington was among the first to advocate taking the ratification debate to the newspapers to ensure that the case for the Constitution reached a wider audience. Washington made this suggestion because as a voracious newspaper reader, he understood the power of the press in the shaping of debates. He never suspected that the same press would one day turn on him.

As the nation's first chief executive, Washington needed to know how his presidential performance was being received for he had no precedent to guide him. For this he turned first to the newspapers, but as an opposition press developed and a fierce newspaper war broke out between the Federalists and Jeffersonians, Washington came under personal attack. Feeling burned, he concluded that he could not trust the papers, so he looked beyond them to printed sermons to ascertain how the people were responding to his policies. The presidency took a significant physical and emotional toll on Washington, who, on entering his final retirement determined that he had to shore up his legacy for posterity.

One of Washington's chief concerns in his final years was setting the historical record straight. In this he began assembling a massive archive of government documents and records from every phase of his public career. All of this combined with his

voluminous correspondence would have amounted to the first presidential library had he lived to complete the project. Additionally, in an extraordinary example of the maturation of his thinking, Washington decided after years of study, experience, and reflection to emancipate his slaves in his will and support their transition to free society. In this he was generations ahead of his time. Washington further sought to make a lasting impact on education by setting up endowments at the primary and university levels so that the next generation would learn to think as an Americans as he himself had done.

The final question explored was where Washington did his reading. Where he did his reading tells us a great deal about his attitude towards the practice and what he expected to derive from it. Understanding Washington's design for his library provides a broader context for examining what he read and how he used the knowledge gained from it. He was diligent, preferring to read alone in his specially designed library that no one else had access to, and was centered on efficiency. The library at Mount Vernon was Washington's refuge, a place where he could read, think, and plan for the future out of the public eye.

Washington was very much a practical reader. That much had been established by previous biographers including Paul Longmore. The seriousness with which Washington approached the act of reading, however, has been largely overlooked until now. While the purpose of this study was not to remake Washington's image into a sort of closeted scholar, it does argue that reading was a key component behind Washington's success. The real contribution that this study makes is to get one step closer to understanding how Washington's mind worked. While his self-directed reading was not

anywhere near that of Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams, Washington outshone them all by bringing the knowledge he gained from his reading together with his natural talent for leadership into a masterful performance. Washington has always been held up as a shining example of the quintessential American leader. As a result of this study, the understanding of how he rose to that status now has a new dimension. So too does our understanding of how he shaped a new national identity.

## Bibliography

- A Memorial Containing a Summary View of Facts, with Their Authorities. In Answer to the Observations Sent by the English Ministry to the Courts of Europe Translated from the French.* New York: H. Gaine, 1757.
- Abbott, W.W., and Dorothy Twohig, eds. *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*. 11 vols. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985 -.
- Abbott, W.W., ed. *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*. 6 vols. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992-97.
- Adams, John. *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: the Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*. Edited by Lester J. Cappon. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Works of John Adams*. 10 vols. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856.
- Adams, John, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Rush. *Old Family Letters: Contains Letters of John Adams, All But the First Two Addressed to Dr. Benjamin Rush; One Letter from Samuel Adams, One from John ... Dr. Rush*; Philadelphia: Nabu Press, 2010.
- Albanese, Catherine L. *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976.
- Amory, Hugh, and David D. Hall ed., *A History of the Book in America Volume One: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Anderson, Fred. *Crucible of War: the Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*. 1st Vintage books ed. New York: Vintage, 2001.
- Anson, George. *A Voyage Round the World in the Years Mdccxl,i, Ii, Iii, Iv, by George Anson, Esq; Afterwards Lord Anson...Compiled from His Papers and Materials, by Richard Walter*. 6th ed. London: 1746.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Ball, Terence. *Transforming Political Discourse: Political Theory and Critical Conceptual History*. New York: Basil Blackwell LTD, 1988.

- Ball, Terence, and J.G.A. Pocock. *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1988.
- Banning, Lance. *Sacred Fire: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Beeman, Richard, and Rhys Isaac. "Cultural Conflict and Social Change in the Revolutionary South: Lunenburg County, Virginia." *Journal of Southern History* 46 (1980): 525-50.
- Berthold, Arthur Benedict. *American Colonial Printing as Determined by Contemporary Cultural Forces, 1639-1763*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1934.
- Blackall, Offspring. *The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation in General, and of the Scripture Revelation in Particular. Both as to the Matter of It, and as to the Proof of It;...IN Eight Sermons....BY Offspring Blackall*. London: H. Hills, 1769.
- Bland, Humphrey. *A Treatise of Military Discipline: In Which Is Laid Down and Explained the Duty of the Officer and Soldier, Thro' the Several Branches of the Service*. London: S. Buckley, 1727.
- Bloch, Ruth. "Religion and Ideological Change in the American Revolution." In *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s*, edited by Mark A. Noll, 41-61. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Bonomi, Patricia. *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Bradburn, Douglas. *The Citizenship Revolution: Politics and the Creation of the American Union, 1774-1804*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.
- Brady, Patricia. *Martha Washington: an American Life*. New York: Viking Adult, 2005.
- Breen, T.H. "The Meaning of Things: Interpreting the Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century." In *Consumption and the World of Goods*, edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter, 249-60. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tobacco Culture: the Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters On the Eve of Revolution*. 2nd pbk. ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Brookhiser, Richard. *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*. New York: Free Press, 1997.
- Brownell, Charles E., Calder Loth, William M.S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson. *The Making of Virginia Architecture*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992.

Bushman, Richard L. *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts (Institute of Early American History and Culture)*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage, 1993.

Butler, John. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Carroll, Frances Laverne, and Mary Meacham. *The Library at Mount Vernon*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: Beta Phi Mu, 1977.

Casper, Scott E. *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth Century America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Sarah Johnson's Mount Vernon: The Forgotten History of an American Shrine*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009.

Chaplin, Joyce. *The First Scientific American: Benjamin Franklin and the Pursuit of Genius*. New York: Basic Books, 2007.

Chandler, Thomas Bradbury. *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, On the Subject of Our Political Confusions in Which the Necessary Consequences of Violently Opposing the King's Troops, and of A General Non-Importation Are Fairly Stated*. New York: 1774.

Charles, Joseph. *The Origins of the American Party System: Three Essays*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956.

Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Washington: a Life*. New York: Penguin Press HC, The, 2010.

Clark, J.C.D. *The Language of Liberty Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World: 1660-1832*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Colburn, H. Trevor. *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965.

Colley, Linda. "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument." *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (October 1992): 309-29.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Comber, Thomas. *Short Discourses Upon the Whole Common-Prayer. Designed to Inform the Judgment, and Excite the Devotion as Such as Daily Use the Same. The Fourth Edition. By Thomas Comber, D.d.* London: J. Nicholson, 1712.

Commanger, Henry Steele, and Richard B. Morris, eds. *The Spirit of Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Its Participants*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002.

Contrecoeur. *A Memorial Containing a Summary View of Facts, with Their Authorities. In Answer to the Observations Sent by the English Ministry to the Courts of Europe*. New York: 1757.

Coombe, Thomas. *A Sermon Preached Before the Congregations of Christ-Church and St. Peter's, Philadelphia, On Thursday, July 20, 1775. Being the Day Recommended by the Honorable Continental Congress For a General Fast Throughout the Twelve United Colonies of North-America. By Thomas Coombe, M.a. Chaplain to the Most Noble the Marquis of Rockingham. Published by Request*. Philadelphia: 1775.

Crackel, Theodore J., ed. *The Papers of George Washington, Digital Edition*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008.

Custis, George Washington Parke. *Recollections and Private Memoirs of George Washington*. 1860. Reprint, Bridgewater: American Foundation Publications, 1999.

Dann, John C., ed. *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War For Independence*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1983.

Darnton, Robert. *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1985.

Davidson, Robert. *On the Freedom and Happiness of the United States of America, Preached in Carlisle, On the 5th October 1794. And Published at the Request of the Officers of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Troops of Light Horse*. Philadelphia: Samuel Harrison Smith, 1794.

Davis, Richard Beale. *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*. 3 vols. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978.

- DeFontblaque, Edward B. *Political and Military Episodes....From the Life and Correspondence of John Burgoyne, General*. London: 1876.
- Decatur, Stephen Jr. *Affairs of George Washington: From the Records and Accounts of Tobias Lear, Esquire, His Secretary*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933.
- Deetz, James. *In Small Things Forgotten: [an Archaeology of Early American Life]*. Expanded and rev. ed. New York: Anchor, 1996.
- Dinwiddie, Robert. *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie: Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia 1751-1758*. 2 vols. Richmond: 1933-1934.
- Diocese of New Jersey. *Journals of the Diocese of New Jersey 1785-Present*. Trenton: Diocese of New Jersey, 1785 -.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Journals of the General Convention 1785 - Present*. Trenton: \_\_\_\_\_, 1785 -.
- Elkins, Stanley, and Eric McKittrick. *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1993.
- Ellis, Joseph J. *American Creation: Triumphs*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *His Excellency: George Washington*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.
- Essay on the Art of War: In Which the General Principles of All the Operations of War in the Field Are Fully Explained. The Whole Collected from the Opinions of the Best Authors*. London: Printed for A. Millar, 1761.
- Evans, Israel. *A Sermon, Delivered at Concord, Before the Honorable General Court of the State of New Hampshire, at the Annual Election, Holden On the First Wednesday in June, M.dCc.xCi*. Concord: George Hough, 1791.
- Evans, Emory G. *A "Topping People:" The Rise and Decline of Virginia's Old Political Elite, 1680-1790*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.
- Everett, Edward. *The Life of George Washington*. New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860.
- Ewald, Johann. *Diary of the American War: a Hessian Journal*. Edited by Joseph P. Tustin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Fabel, Robin. "The Patriotic Briton: Tobias Smollett and English Politics, 1756-1771." *Eighteenth Century Studies* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1974): 100-14.

Farrand, Max, ed. *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*. Revised ed. 4 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Fauquier, Francis, and George Henkle Reese. *The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, 1758-1768*. Edited by George Reese. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1981.

Ferguson, E James. "State Assumption of Federal Debt During the Confederation." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 3 (Dec. 1951): 403-24.

Ferguson, Robert A. *Law and Letters in American Culture*. Cambridge· MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Reading the Early Republic*. Cambridge· MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Ferling, John. *Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. *John Adams: A Life*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010.

Fields, Joseph, ed. "*Worthy Partner:*" *The Papers of Martha Washington*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Fischer, David Hackett. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America (America: A Cultural History)*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Paul Revere's Ride*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Washington's Crossing*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2004.

Fitzpatrick, John C., ed. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799 Volume 13 October 1, 1778-January 11, 1779*. 1931 ed. 39 vols. Washington, D.C.: 1931-44.

Fleigelman, Jay. *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Flexner, James Thomas. *George Washington and the New Nation: 1783-1793*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *George Washington in the American Revolution (1775-1783)*. New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. *George Washington: Anguish and Farewell (1793-1799)*. [1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *George Washington: The Forge of Experience 1732 - 1775 - Volume I (Force of Experience, 1732-1775)*. Seventh Printing ed. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1965.

Fliegelman, Jay. *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993.

Force, Peter. *American Archives: Fifth Series, Containing a Documentary History of the United States of America From the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, to the Definitive Treaty of Peace with Great Britain, September 3, 1783. (Fifth Series.)* 3 vols. Washington D.C.: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1848.

Ford, Worthington C., ed. *Journals of the Continental Congress*. 24 vols. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904-1937.

Franklin, Benjamin. *Experiments and Observations On Electricity: Made at Philadelphia in America, by Mr. Benjamin Franklin, and Communicated in Several Letters to Mr. P. Collinson of London, F.R.S.* 1750. Reprint, N.p.: Gale, Sabin Americana, 2012.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. 1788. Reprint, New York: Tribeca Books, 2011.

Freeman, Douglas Southall. *George Washington: A Biography*. 1st - stated -A- Edition ed. 7 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

Friedman, Lawrence J. , *Inventors of the Promised Land*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975.

Gallatin, Albert. *An Examination of the Conduct of the Executive of the United States, Towards the French Republic; Likewise an analysis of the Explanatory Article of the British Treaty – In a Series of Letters. By a Citizen of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Printed by Francis and Robert Bailey, at Yorick's-Head, 1797.

- Geertz, Clifford. "Centers, Kings, and Charisma, Reflections on the Symbolics of Power." In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, 121-46. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Gilmore, Michael T. "Letters of the Early Republic." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume One: 1590-1820*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch, 541-58. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Magazines, Criticism, and Essays." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume One: 1590-1820*, 558-72. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Girouard, Mark. *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Glassie, Henry. *Folk Housing Middle Virginia: Structural Analysis Historic Artifacts*. Knoxville: Univ Tennessee Press, 1976.
- Gordon-Reed, Annette. *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*. Reprint ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.
- Grant, James. *John Adams: Party of One*. New York, NY.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.
- Greenberg, Allan. *George Washington, Architect*. London, England.: Andreas Papadakis Publishers, 1999.
- Greene, Jack P. "Virtus et Libertas: Political Culture, Social Change, and the Origins of the American Revolution in Virginia, 1763-1776." In *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, edited by Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, page nr. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979.
- Griffin, Appleton P. C. *A Catalogue of the Washington Collection in the Boston Athenæum*; 1897. Reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2009.
- Griswold, Rufus Wilmot. *The Republican Court; Or American Society in the Days of Washington*. 2nd ed. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867.
- Grizzard, Frank E., and Jr. *The Ways of Providence: Religion and George Washington*. Buena Vista, Va.: Mariner Companies, Inc., 2005.
- Gruber, Ira D. *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)*. Translated by Thomas Burger. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Hamilton, Stanislaus Murray, ed. *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers*. 1898. Reprint, 5 vols. Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2009.
- Harris, John. *The Palladians*. London: Trefoil Books, 1981.
- Harris, John, and Gordon Higgot. *Inigo Jones, Complete Architectural Drawing*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.
- Harvey, Edward. *A New Manual, and Platoon Exercise: With an Explanation*. London: 1764.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- Hayes, Kevin J. *The Road to Monticello: the Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008.
- Heimert, Alan. *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Henderson, Archibald. *Washington's Southern Tour, 1791*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923.
- Henriques, Peter R. *The Death of George Washington: He Died as He Lived*. Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2000.
- Henry, Benjamin, and Carter II, Edward C. (editor) Latrobe. *The Virginia Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1795-1798: Volume 2: 1797-1798*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- Higginbotham, Don. *George Washington and the American Military Tradition (Lamar Memorial Lectures, No 27)*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Reconsiderations On the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978.
- Houlding, John. *Fit For Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795*. New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1981.
- Humphreys, David. *Life of General Washington: With George Washington's Remarks*. Edited by Rosemarie Zagarri. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006.

- Hunt, Lynn. *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Hutchinson, William T., Robert A. Rutland, and John C.A. Stagg, eds. *The Papers of James Madison*. 34 vols. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1962 -.
- II, Samuel B. Griffith. *The War For American Independence: from 1760 to the Surrender at Yorktown in 1781*. 1st Illinois ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Isaac, Rhys. "Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1774-1776." *William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (1974): 348-65.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia in the Era of the Great Awakening and the Parsons' Cause." *William and Mary Quarterly* 30 (1973): 3-36.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Isaacson, Walter. *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Benjamin Franklin: an American Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- Jefferson, Thomas. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. Edited by Albert Ellery Bergh and Andrew A. (Andrew Adgate) Lipscomb. 20 vols. Washington, D.C.: 1903.
- Jr., Robert F. Dalzell, and Lee Baldwin Dalzell. *George Washington's Mount Vernon: At Home in Revolutionary America*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000.
- Kelso, William M. *Kingsmill Plantation, 1619-1800: Archaeology of Country Life in Colonial Virginia (Studies in Historical Archaeology)*. New edition ed. New Haven: University of Virginia Press, 2004.
- Kennedy, John Pendleton, and H.R. McIlwane, eds. *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*. 13 vols. Richmond: The Colonial Press, 1905-1915.
- Ketcham, Ralph. *Framed For Posterity: the Enduring Philosophy of the Constitution*. Lawrence: University Press Of Kansas, 1993.
- Kidd, Thomas S. *God of Liberty: a Religious History of the American Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.
- Kramer, Michael P. *Imagining Language in America: from the Revolution to the Civil War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Labaree, Leonard W., ed. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. 37 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959 -.

Langdon, Samuel. *A Discourse On the Unity of the Church as a Monumental Pillar of the Truth; Designed to Reconcile Christians of All Parties and Denominations in Charity and Fellowship, as One Body in Christ; Delivered Before an Association of Ministers Convened at Portsmouth, October 12, 1791, and in Substance Repeated at a Lecture in Hampton Falls, January 26, 1792*. Exeter: Henry Ranlet, 1791.

Langford, Paul. *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Langley, Batty. *The City and Country Builder's and Workman's Treasury of Designs: Or the Art of Drawing and Working the Ornamental Parts of Architecture. Illustrated by Upwards of Four Hundred Grand Designs*. London: by S. Harding on the Pavement in St. Martin's Lane, 1745.

Leibiger, Stuart. *Founding Friendship: George Washington, James Madison, and the Creation of the American Republic (Constitutionalism and Democracy Series)*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999.

Lengel, Edward G. *General George Washington: A Military Life*. New York: Random House, 2005.

\_\_\_\_\_. *This Glorious Struggle: George Washington's Revolutionary War Letters*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007.

Liell, Scott. *46 Pages: Thomas Paine, Common Sense, and the Turning Point to Independence*. Philadelphia: Running Press, 2003.

Longmore, Paul K. *The Invention of George Washington*. 1st University Press of Virginia paperback ed. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999.

Looby, Christopher. *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996.

Lossing, Benson J. *The Home of Washington, or Mount Vernon and Its Associations, Historical, Biographical and Pictorial 1870*. 1ST ed. New York: A. S. Hale, 1870.

Mackesy, Piers. *The War for America: 1775-1783*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

Maheffey, Jerome D. *Preaching Politics: The Religious Rhetoric of George Whitefield and the Founding of a New Nation*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007.

Maier, Pauline. *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.

Mancall, Peter C. *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession For an English America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Mason, John M. *Mercy Remembered in Wrath. A Sermon, the Substance of Which Was Preached On the 19th of February, 1795, Observed Throughout the United States as a Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer*. New York: John Buel, 1795.

McConville, Brendan. *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

McCoy, Drew R. *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and The Republican Legacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

McDonald, Forrest. *The Presidency of George Washington*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974.

McLaughlin, Jack. *Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder*. Reprint. ed. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1990.

Mesick, Cohen, and Waite. *Historic Structure Report, 3 Volumes*. Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 1993.

Miers, Fisher. *A Reply to the False Reasoning in the "Age of Reason." To Which Are Added, Some Thoughts on Idolatry; on the Devil; and the Origin of Moral Evil; on Educating Young Men for the Gospel Ministry; and on what is "the Word of God." All Which Refer, More or Less, to Opinions Advanced in Thomas Paine's "Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology." By a Layman*. Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1796.

Miller, Perry. "From the Covenant to the Revival." In *The Shaping of American Religion, Religion in American Life: Volume One*, edited by James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison, 340-61. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Miller, Samuel. *A Sermon, Preached in New York, July 4th 1793. Being the Anniversary of the Independence of America: At the Request of the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order*. New York: Thomas Greenleaf, 1793.

Monceau, Henri-Louis Duhamel du. *A Practical Treatise Of Husbandry: Wherein Are Contained, May Useful and Valuable Experiments and Observations In The New*

*Husbandry, Etc....* Second edition, corrected and improved ed. London: C. Hitch and L. Hawes, et al, 1762.

Monroe, James. *A View of the Conduct of the Executive in the Foreign Affairs of the United States*. Philadelphia: 1797.

Morgan, Edmund S. "George Washington: The Aloof American." In *George Washington Reconsidered*, edited by Don Higginbotham, 287-308. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.

Morse, Jedidiah. *The Present Situation of Other Nations of the World, Contrasted with Our Own. A Sermon, Delivered at Charlestown, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, February 19, 1795; Being the Day Recommended by George Washington, President of the United States of America, For Publick Thanksgiving and Prayer*. Boston: Samuel Hall, 1795.

Mosca, Matthew John. "The House and Its Restoration." *The Magazine Antiques: Mount Vernon*, February 1989.

Mount Vernon Ladies Association. *Annual Report*. Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 1956.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Annual Report*. Mount Vernon: \_\_\_\_\_, 1957.

Muller, John. *A Treatise Containing the Practical Part of Fortification in Four Parts For the Use of the Royal Academy of Artillery at Woolwich* London: Printed for A. Millar in the Strand, 1764.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Treatise of Artillery...To Which is Prefixed, an Introduction, with a Theory of Powder Applied to Fire-Arms*. London: John Millan, Whitehall, 1768.

Newman, Gerald. *The Rise of English Nationalism: a Cultural History, 1740-1830*. New rev. ed. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997.

Newman, Simon P. "Principles or Men? George Washington and the Political Culture of National Leadership, 1776-1801." *Journal of the Early Republic* 7 (1992): 477-507.

Niemcewicz, Julian Ursyn. *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree Travels through America in 1797-1799, 1805, with Some Further Account f Life in New Jersey*. Translated by Metchie J. E. Budka. Elizabeth: Grassman, 1965.

Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Ogden, Uzal. *A Sermon Delivered at Roxbury, in Morris County, March 19, 1781: At the Funeral of Mrs. Hackett, Relict of Colonel John Hackett*. Chatham: Shepard Kollock, 1781.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Sermon On Practical Religion*. Chatham: Shepard Kollock, 1782.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Sermon On Practical Religion: Delivered at Newark, New Jersey, August 15, 1779*. Chatham: Shepard Kollock, 1779.

Osgood, David. *The Day Set Apart by the President For a General Thanksgiving through the United States*. Boston: Samuel Hall, 1795.

Pacheco, Josephine F., ed. *To Secure the Blessings of Liberty: Rights in American History*. New York: University Press of America, 1993.

Paine, Thomas. *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*. London: Barlow, 1794.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The American Crisis*. Philadelphia: 1776.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Common Sense*. Philadelphia: 1776.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Rights of Man*. Mineola, NY.: Dover Publications, 1999.

Palladio, Andrea. *The Four Books On Architecture*. 1570. Reprint, Boston: The MIT Press, 2002.

Palmer, Dave R. *George Washington: First in War*. Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *George Washington's Military Genius*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery History, 2012.

Pargellid, Stanley L., ed. *Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1765*. New York: Archon Books, 1969.

Park, Helen. *A List of Architectural Books Available in America Before the Revolution*. New ed. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973.

Pasley, Jeffrey L. *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001.

Phelps, Glenn A. *George Washington and American Constitutionalism (American Political Thought)*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993.

Pincus, Steve. *1688: The First Modern Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Pocock, J.G.A. *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: a Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century :a Reissue with a Retrospect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. "States, Republics, and Empires: The American Founding in Early Modern Perspective." In *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*, edited by Terrence Ball and J.G.A. Pocock, 55-77. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988.

Price, Richard. *Observations On the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America: To Which Is Added, an Appendix Containing a State of the National Debt, an Estimate of the Money Drawn from the Public by the Taxes, and Account of the National Income and Expenditure Since the Last War*. London: 1776.

Rakove, Jack N. , *the Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979.

Ramsey, Chevalier. *The Travels of Cyrus to Which Is Annexed, a Discourse Upon the Theology and Mythology of the Pagans*. 7th ed. London: James Bettenham, 1745.

Randall, Willard Sterne. *George Washington: A Life*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1998.

Reed, William Bradford. *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*. 1847. Reprint, 2 vols. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2001.

Rozbicki, Michael J. *Culture and Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Rutland, Robert A., ed. *The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792*. 3 vols. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970.

Sandoz, Ellis, ed. *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Indianapolis, IN.: Liberty Fund, 1998.

Schama, Simon. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. New York: Random House, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Embarrassment Of Riches - Interpretation Of Dutch Culture In The Golden Age*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

Schwartz, Barry. *George Washington: the Making of an American Symbol*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ Pr, 1990.

- Shalev, Eran. *Rome Reborn On Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.
- Sharp, James Roger. *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Sharpe, Kevin. *Reading Revolutions: the Politics of Reading in Early Modern England*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Sheffling, Charles, and Cynthia Shattuck. *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Slaughter, Thomas P. *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Sloan, Herbert E. *Principle and Interest: Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Debt*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.
- Smith, William. *A Sermon On the Present Situation of American Affairs. Preached at Christ-Church, June 23, 1775. At the Request of the Officers of the Third Battalion of the City of Philadelphia, and District of Southwark*. Philadelphia: James Humphries, 1775.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Sermon, On Temporal and Spiritual Salvation: Delivered in Christ-Church, Philadelphia, Before the Pennsylvania Society of the Cincinnati*. Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1790.
- Smollett, Tobias George. *A Complete History of England, from the Descent of Julius Caesar to the Treaty of Aix La Chapelle, 1748 Containing the Transactions of One Thousand Eight Hundred and Three Years*. 11 vols. London: for J. Rivington and J. Fletcher, at the Oxford Theater, 1757-1765.
- Sparks, Jared. *Washington Writings: Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private*. 12 vols. Boston: 1827-1837.
- Sparks, Jared, and Herbert B. Adams. *The Life and Writings of Jared Sparks, Comprising Selections from His Journals and Correspondence, Volume I*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1893.
- Stein, Susan. *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993.
- Stillman, Samuel. *Thoughts On the French Revolution. A Sermon, Delivered November 20, 1794: Being the Day of Annual Thanksgiving*. Boston: Manning and Loring, 1795.

- Strout, Cushing. *The New Heavens and New Earth: Political Religion in America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
- Summerson, John. *Inigo Jones*. New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre BA, 2000.
- Swan, Abraham. *The British Architect, Or, the Builder's Treasury of Staircases*. London: 1745.
- Sweet, Leonard I., ed. *Communication and Change in Religious History*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Sydnor, Charles. *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952.
- Syrett, Harold C., ed. *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. 27 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1979.
- Thompson, Mary V. *"In the Hands of a Good Providence" Religion in the Life of George Washington*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.
- Toland, John, ed. *The Oceana of James Harrington and His Other Works*. London: 1700.
- Twohig, Dorothy, and Philander Chase, eds. *The Papers of George Washington: Colonial Series*. 10 vols. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993-1995.
- Twohig, Dorothy, ed. *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*. 20 vols. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985 -.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series Series*. 7 vols. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1985-1997.
- Unger, Harlow Giles. *The Unexpected George Washington: His Private Life*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2006.
- Upton, Dell. "Vernacular Architecture in Eighteenth Century Virginia." *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Chicago 1982): 197.
- Waldstreicher, David. *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: the Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Walsh, Lorena S. *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Washington, George. *Diaries*. Edited by Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Diaries of George Washington*. Edited by Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig. 6 vols. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1976-1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Diaries of George Washington, an Abridgement*. Edited by Dorothy Twohig. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. *George Washington Diaries*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick. 4 vols. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Journal of Major George Washington, Sent by the Hon. Robert Dinwiddie, Esq., His Majesty's Lieutenant-Governor, and Commander in Chief of Virginia, to the Commandant of the French Forces On Ohio*. Williamsburg: William Hunter, 1754.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Quotations of George Washington*. Bedford: Applewood Books, 2003.

Waterman, Thomas Tiletson. *Mansions of Virginia 1706-1776*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946.

Webb, Thomas. *A Military Treatise on the Appointments of the Army. Containing Many Useful Hints, Not Touched Upon Before By Any Author: and Proposing Some New Regulations in the Army, Which Will Be Particularly Useful in Carrying on the War in North-America. Together With a Short Treatise on Military Honors*. Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1759.

Weintraub, Stanley. *General Washington's Christmas Farewell: a Mount Vernon Homecoming, 1783*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Whiffen, Marcus. *The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg (Williamsburg Architectural Studies)*. Rev Sub ed. Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1984.

Wiencek, Henry. *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Wills, Garry. *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984.

Wilson, Kathleen. "Empire, Trade, and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian England: The Case of Admiral Vernon." *Past and Present* no. 121 (1988): 74-109.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*. 1st pbk. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Wood, Gordon. *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004.

Wood, Gordon S. "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution." In *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, edited by Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II, 69-109. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Random House, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Random House, 1992.

Wright, Louis B. *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1964.

de Luzancy, H. *A Panegyrick to the Memory of His Grace Frederick Late Duke of Schonberg*. London: R. Bentley, 1690.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Adrienne Marie Harrison

## EDUCATION

Rutgers University

PhD, Early American History, Department of History, New Brunswick, NJ,  
January 2013.M.A., Early American History, Department of History, New Brunswick, NJ, May  
2011.

United States Military Academy

B.S., United States History, Department of History, West Point, NY, June 2002

## RELEVANT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor ó United States Military Academy: 7/11 - Present

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Commander ó E Company, 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade Support Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat  
Team, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division (Light Infantry): 7/07 ó 6/09Logistics Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division (Light  
Infantry): 10/06 ó 7/07Support Operations Officer for Transportation, 189<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Battalion,  
46<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Group, 1<sup>st</sup> Corps Support Command, XVIII Airborne Corps:  
9/05 ó 12/05Executive Officer, 546<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company, 189<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Battalion  
& 7<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion, 46<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Group, 1<sup>st</sup> Corps Support  
Command, XVIII Airborne Corps: 6/04 ó 9/05Platoon Leader, 546<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company, 189<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Battalion &  
7<sup>th</sup> Transportation Battalion, 46<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Group, 1<sup>st</sup> Corps Support  
Command, XVIII Airborne Corps: 4/04 ó 6/04Platoon Leader, HQ/A Company, 407<sup>th</sup> Forward Support Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade  
Combat Team, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division: 11/03 ó 4/04Adjutant, Troop Support Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Corps Support Command: 11/02 ó 11/03