

so he cut his throat. She survived, but he was “determined to die” (210), and did. In such ways the photographs lead to stories not only about the war but to its after-effects.

Technically, the population of artifacts that Coddington found in flea markets and kept in an old cigar box does not constitute a random sample or a representative collective biography. He describes it as a “great diversity in war experience,” and asserts that his photographs are of men “wealthy and poor, educated and unschooled, American-born and immigrant, city slicker and country boy” (xviii). Those differences are present in his collection, but it should also be noted that nearly all the men were Union officers from eastern states who survived the war.

Coddington has worked from the photographs to track down the facts about the men. His sources are mainly disability pensions and military service records, regimental histories, and the *Official Records*. He quotes amply from pension applications that might contain debatable claims about war-related injuries or illnesses, but these applications probably contain the only first-person testimony that is recoverable.

As for the evidence in the photographs themselves, a scholar of Victorian visual culture and body language may draw inferences from the soldiers’ poses. One might think studio poses would have a limited range, but in this collection no two are exactly alike. Alan Trachtenberg did not take up *carte de visites* in his “Albums of War” chapter in *Reading American Photographs* (Hill and Wang, 1989), so perhaps, in addition to Coddington’s accomplishment here, we have an idea for another book.

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Joseph J. Ellis. *His Excellency: George Washington*. (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2004. Pp. xiv, 320, notes, index. Cloth \$26.95.)

There has been an acute interest in the multidimensional career of George Washington since the 1980s. Unlike other acclaimed biographies of Washington, Ellis’s study presents a penetrating portrait and a synthesis of Washington’s lengthy and complex career. Chronologically and topically arranged, this pensive and fascinating biography contains a preface and seven detailed chapters. Ellis demonstrates how major themes concerning military

and political leadership, westward expansionism, capitalistic pursuits, republican ideologies, and the vexing slavery issue were intimately related to his career.

The book's first two chapters describe important events and issues associated with Washington's early career. Washington was born near the Potomac River in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on February 22, 1732, to planter Augustine Washington and his second wife, Mary Ball Washington. Although lacking a formal education, Washington learned much about the attitudes and manners of the Virginia gentry from his half brother Lawrence Washington, who served as his surrogate father. He continued to learn from Fairfax family members the ways of a Virginia squire acquiring knowledge about tobacco planting and becoming a licensed surveyor.

Ellis discusses how this young Virginia squire developed into an important military leader in the Ohio Country. After the French seizure of a half-built British fort at the source of the Ohio River in 1754, the aggressive Lieutenant Colonel Washington helped to direct a military expedition to the western country and deemed it essential to establish Fort Necessity that year. With support from his Indian allies under Tanacharison, Washington and his men succeeded in killing the French commander De Jumonville and in defeating the French troops on May 27, 1754, at Great Meadows. As Ellis correctly suggests, Washington achieved a reputation as an ascending military leader in both London and Williamsburg. Three years later, he and members of the Virginia Regiment worked in November of 1758 with General John Forbes and with his British troops to extirpate the French from Fort Duquesne and to establish Fort Pitt.

In 1758, Washington married the wealthy widow Martha Dandridge Custis, and after the war, he resumed the life of a Virginia planter. Washington, who felt that the London mercantile firm of Cary & Company was paying too little for his tobacco shipments, revealed clever and innovative business tactics. In addition to tobacco, he began to raise wheat and other crops at Mount Vernon and thus began to develop a lucrative agricultural enterprise. Ellis maintains that Washington disliked the Stamp and Townshend Duties, believing these taxes to be unconstitutional. He was elected in 1774 as a member of the First Continental Congress and then accepted the offer to lead the American army against the British forces.

The third and fourth chapters, which are based on the many classic works of the Revolutionary era, meticulously detail Washington's leadership role and activities during the War of Independence. Ellis demonstrates that

Washington was to embody the spirit of 1776. "His Excellency" looked upon this war as the defining moment in his career, realizing that prudent and shrewd leadership was required to overcome the enormous British military supremacy. With more losses than victories, he knew that the Fabian strategy of hit and run had to be deployed against the British, but cautiously waited for a moment to use conventional tactics to achieve an enduring victory against them.

Ellis explains Washington's woes at Valley Forge, describing the assistance of the Marquis de Lafayette and the Baron von Steuben. Ellis also shows that after Saratoga, Washington was constantly short of soldiers and funds and failed for over three years to work in concert with French generals. Furthermore, with the surrender at Yorktown on October 17, 1781, Washington found the appropriate moment to use conventional tactics to bring an end to the War of Independence.

The fifth chapter contains revealing sections about Washington's role during the Philadelphia Convention. Ellis perceptively observes that Washington was the major leader in winning American independence and worked in 1787 to secure it: "his Excellency" thus epitomized the spirit of 1776 and that of 1787. Heading the Constitutional Convention, Washington supported a viable federal republic, a strong national government, a presidency rather than a monarchy, and national powers concerning taxation and the veto privilege.

The sixth chapter concerns Washington's Presidency. He selected cabinet officers and administrators according to the principle of merit rather than that of patronage. He wished to promote harmony, yet encountered strife and party disputes. After problems ensued between Treasury Secretary Hamilton and Secretary of State Jefferson about the issue of creating the Bank of the United States, Ellis shows that Hamilton's Bank Bill, which Washington supported, was passed in 1791 and that the major effect of this dispute would lead to the formation of a two-party system in the young republic.

Ellis investigates other matters arising during Washington's Presidency. Ellis shows that despite criticisms of the Jeffersonians, Washington exercised prudent judgment during the 1793 Genêt Affair, adhering to a neutrality policy to avert American involvement in a European conflict. He also lauds Washington for his firm stance against the Whiskey Rebels in 1794. Ellis accords Washington two significant diplomatic victories in 1795. The acrimoniously debated Jay Treaty and the Pinckney Treaty, which endorsed the American right of deposit in New Orleans, were ratified that year and

consequently facilitated rapid expansion into the western country. The author assesses the importance of the president's Farewell Address, maintaining that Washington, who was quite cognizant in 1796 of his leadership role in America, accentuated in it republican doctrines, natural liberties, executive powers, and national unity.

Ellis, in the last chapter, makes a compelling case for Washington's perspective on slavery, claiming that for over thirty years he had evaluated both its business and moral considerations. By selling numerous western tracts, Washington, by the late 1790s, felt financially secure and inserted into his will in 1799 a clause to emancipate his slaves. He thus stated his moral repudiation of human bondage and became the only Founding Father to liberate his slaves following his death.

This incisive and masterful biography is the finest synthesis of America's foremost "Foundingest Father" (xiv). Ellis is at his best in describing Washington's personal qualities and thinking, in explaining his military and political leadership roles and achievements, and in demonstrating his ties to the Founding Fathers and to family members. Carefully crafted, elegantly written, and impeccably organized, the book, moreover, reflects Ellis's great familiarity with *The Papers of George Washington* and with other pertinent primary materials. The biography unfortunately lacks a bibliographical essay which might have suggested other major issues that require investigation. Moreover, Ellis might have devoted more attention to Washington's gentility, to his beliefs in a deistic civil religion, and to his active involvement in Freemasonry. Ellis also might have said more about Washington's ties to American Jews, who secured their civic rights and perceived him as their emancipator. A brief conclusion would have further enhanced this superb biography and well might have compared the achievements of Washington with those of other prominent American presidents. Nevertheless, this biography, which is intended for scholars and general readers, will certainly be another award-winning study.

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