

ESSAY REVIEW

The Washington Theme in Recent Historical Literature

The Papers of George Washington. Revolutionary War Series. Series editor W.W. ABBOT. Vol. 1: *June-September 1775*. Vol. 2: *September-December 1775*. Vol. 3: *January-March 1776*. Edited by PHILANDER D. CHASE. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985, 1987, 1988. Vol. 1, xxvii, 513p. Editorial apparatus, illustrations, index. Vol. 2, xxvii, 671p. Editorial apparatus, illustrations, index. Vol. 3, xxvi, 615p. Editorial apparatus, illustrations, index. \$35.00, \$47.50, \$47.50.)

The Papers of George Washington. Presidential Series. Series editor W.W. ABBOT. Associate Editor, DOROTHY TWOHIG. Vol. 1: *September 1788-March 1789*. Vol. 2: *April-June 1789*. Vol. 3: *June-September 1789*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987, 1987, 1989. Vol. 1, xxiv, 511p. Editorial apparatus, maps, index. Vol. 2, xxiii, 533p. Editorial apparatus, index. Vol. 3, xxvii, 651p. Editorial apparatus, index. \$37.50, \$37.50, \$42.50.)

The First of Men: A Life of George Washington. By JOHN E. FERLING. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988. xiii, 598p. Illustrations, maps, select bibliography, index. \$39.95.)

The Invention of George Washington. By PAUL K. LONGMORE. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. x, 337p. Appendix, selected bibliography, index. \$25.00.)

The several works under review provide an organizational scheme for a rather extended commentary on the Washington theme in recent historical literature. *The Papers of George Washington* are indispensable to any investigation of the Virginian, not only because of the editors' strategies and standards but also because, among other things, the documents in the aggregate indicate some hitherto unappreciated dimensions of the man. John Ferling's *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington* is a worthy addition to the already crowded library of Washington biography, and therefore deserves to be

compared with its competitors. Paul Longmore's *The Invention of George Washington* is one of several recent insightful accounts of how Washington's countrymen perceived him. By looking more closely at each of these Washington categories—papers, biographies, and images—it is possible to observe the new scholarly contours of the elusive and changing Washington and to suggest new lines of inquiry for Washington scholarship.

W.W. Abbot and his fellow staff members of the *Washington Papers* are not the first scholars to launch a serious Washington documentary project. In the 1930s John C. Fitzpatrick, curator of manuscripts at the Library of Congress and the premier Washington specialist of his day, set out to improve upon the work of his own editorial predecessors in the Washington field. Before Fitzpatrick's thirty-nine volumes of Washington's *Writings*, students of Washington had only the collections of Jared Sparks, who polished Washington's language and ignored letters unflattering to his subject's reputation (and in so doing sustained and perpetuated nineteenth-century Washington hagiography), and Worthington C. Ford, who experienced economic constraints in his efforts to publish most of the significant Washington letters and papers. Fitzpatrick, in contrast, assembled more than twice the number of documents previously printed and produced reliable texts, but his editorial practices nonetheless fell short of the standards introduced by Julian P. Boyd in the 1940s.¹

Surely the Abbot team owes a debt to Boyd, the long-time editor of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, whose creative craftsmanship revolutionized methodologies in the field. Like Boyd, and unlike Fitzpatrick, the editors of the *Washington Papers* include incoming correspondence and supply helpful identifications and explanatory notes, but they avoid Boyd's lengthy scholarly asides—really, often extended essays—that were so informative, even though they slowed the process of turning out volumes. In still other respects, the Washington editors have departed from the master's ways. They have returned, so far as is feasible, to a literal rendering of the materials (as opposed to the expanded method), and they have begun publishing several series simultaneously in order to proceed with greater dispatch and to make the correspondence of Washington's years of national service available as soon as possible. Thus far, they have published six volumes in the *Colonial Series*, three in the *Revolutionary War Series*, none in the *Confederation Series* (two are approaching completion), and three in the *Presidential Series*.²

¹ John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799* (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944).

² Richard K. Showman and Charlene Bangs Bickford, two veteran editors, evaluate the more technical aspects of the *Revolutionary War Series* and the *Presidential Series* in "Documenting a Consummate Politician: The Papers of George Washington," *Documentary Editing* 10 (1988), 11-15. Actually, the *Washington Papers* project first published *The Diaries of George Washington*, edited by Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (6 vols., Charlottesville, 1976-1979). Mention should also be made of two new one-volume Washington documentaries:

To date the *Colonial Series* primarily covers Washington's French and Indian War service (precious few scraps of information exist for his childhood and teenage years). The materials in this series are mostly those of Virginia's frontier military commander; they cover regimental administration, supply, recruitment, desertion, and relations with civilian authorities in Williamsburg and British military superiors such as Edward Braddock and James Forbes. The editors are extremely helpful in illuminating Washington's wartime letterbooks, for their annotations compare the literary blemishes and awkwardness of the wartime records with Washington's later emendations designed to make himself look more sophisticated than he really was in his middle twenties serving as colonel of the Virginia Regiment. Volume six, which includes his early marital life and conversion to the role of a postwar planter, brings the twenty-eight-year-old Washington to the year 1760.

In initiating the *Colonial Series*, the editors indicated they would print almost everything relevant they could unearth, but the documentary collections of Washington as Revolutionary commander-in-chief and the republic's first president confronted the editors with a daunting miscellany, both far larger than those of the colonial and Confederation years. In fact, materials deriving from the War of Independence form about half of Washington's corpus of papers. Even the older Fitzpatrick edition of his *Writings* accorded twenty-five volumes to the war years, and the Abbot edition will devote many more than that to the struggle against Britain. The published papers of no commanding general in American history will be anywhere nearly as extensive as those found in the Abbot undertaking.

The first three of those military volumes, now before us, cover a distinct period of the war—the siege of Boston, from June 1775 to March 1776. They reinforce my view that the months of the Boston siege were the most crucial of the war.³ At first Washington commanded an ill-disciplined and poorly equipped Continental army. Had his British counterparts realized the inadequacies of the American troops, Generals Thomas Gage and William Howe might well have destroyed the tattered militia force and cracked the rebellion in its early phase. But by the time the British sailed away on March 17, 1776, Washington had established order and improved training while surviving a difficult winter that saw his ranks thinned by expiring enlistments.

John P. Kaminski and Jill Adair McCaughan, eds., *A Great and Good Man: George Washington in the Eyes of His Contemporaries* (Madison, 1989); and W.B. Allen, ed., *George Washington: A Collection* (Indianapolis, 1988).

³ Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition* (Athens, 1985), chapter 2.

The letters show that the months during which Washington fronted the enemy across Boston Neck were crucial for yet other reasons. He was aware of the need to display great sensitivity in dealing with New England in general and Massachusetts in particular. The colonists' Puritan tradition and their familiarity with English anti-standing army writers would have made any military presence a touchy matter, but after a succession of controversies with British military forces during the imperial wars and, more recently, after the Boston Massacre and after General Gage's march to Concord, New Englanders looked upon organized military activity with deep suspicion. If Washington made every effort to avoid the kinds of controversies that had previously bedeviled civil-military relations, he also worked at making persuasive appeals for assistance. Volumes 1-3 of the *Revolutionary War Series* contain fifty-one letters to the president of Congress, thirty-four to the Massachusetts legislature, forty to Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, and thirty to Governor Nicholas Cooke of Rhode Island. We discover in these missives links between the behavior of the wartime chief executive and the future national chief executive: a tendency to recognize talent and reward it, be it a Henry Knox and a Nathanael Greene in 1775-1776 or a Thomas Jefferson and an Alexander Hamilton in 1789—to say nothing of a desire for written opinions on vital matters before calling councils of war and, in the presidential years, before assembling the cabinet.

Just as volumes 1-3 of the *Presidential Series* bear out some of these observations about approaches that Washington employed in assuming new and unprecedented positions of administrative leadership, they also serve as precedents for the editors. Indeed, the staff of no other major editorial project has yet had to confront the full body of presidential papers of any chief executive prior to 1900. The executive department generated tens of thousands of documents during Washington's two presidential terms. The editors face a monumental challenge in determining what to print, however narrowly they define a Washington document.

Their major problem of selection in dealing with volumes 1-3 concerned applications for office—hundreds of them from men and women desiring positions for themselves or for others. The temptation was to ignore such documents or to print only a small percentage of the total. The editors wisely chose to do otherwise because appointments constituted a huge job for Washington as the head of a new government. "I have no conception of a more delicate task," he wrote. "It is the nature of Republicans, who are nearly in a state of equality, to be extremely jealous as to the disposal of all honorary or lucrative appointments" (1:426). The applications began to pour in months before his election and months before he had made his decision to accept the presidency—a decision that his correspondents one and all (from confidants like Madison and Hamilton, to unknown ex-soldiers and

widows, to an Indian chief) assumed he simply had to make in the affirmative in order to bring the Revolution to its culmination, to insure the success of the new form of constitutional government, and to provide America respect in the eyes of the world. In sum, these letters tell us much about how Americans from all walks of life viewed Washington, their country, and themselves. Washington's time-consuming, carefully worded responses, in turn reveal his own unswerving determination to make his choices after careful consideration and without favoritism to acquaintances and friends.

If pressed to find only one other distinguishing feature of this first installment of the *Presidential Series*, it would be the documents that focus on the creation of the executive branch between April and September of 1789, the ending date of volume 3. They demonstrate how challenging was Washington's assignment and how much remained to be done after his first five months in office. Congress did little initially to create governmental machinery, and consequently Washington worked with the old departments of the Confederation, which functioned, after a fashion, until Congress established new ones. He wrote to each department—War, Treasury, and Foreign Affairs—asking for a detailed account of its procedures and responsibilities. In consulting widely on how he should conduct himself in office, he realized that he would, for better or worse, have the opportunity to mold the presidency for ages to come. As he explained to Vice President John Adams, "Many things which appear of little importance in themselves and at the beginning, may have great and durable consequences from their having been established at the commencement of a new general Government" (2:246-47).

These months found the president particularly concerned about working out the procedures to be followed in his sharing with the Senate their responsibilities for appointments and treaties. Where, for example, should the president and the Senate confer over such matters—in the executive quarters or in the legislative chambers? Volume 3 contains the celebrated account of how Washington, frustrated by the Senate's delays in responding to his questions about dealing with the southern Indian tribes, departed from that body without—according to Senator William Maclay—hiding his "Stern displeasure."⁴ Thereafter, the president eschewed previous consultation on treaties and instead drew up the final drafts before submitting them for the Senate's consideration. Still ahead of Washington lay more important legislative controversies over such matters as Hamilton's financial program and relations with Great Britain.

⁴ Kenneth R. Bowling and Helen E. Veit, eds., *The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes on Senate Debates* (Baltimore, 1988), 128-30.

Although reviews of *The Papers of George Washington* have been quite positive, one occasional criticism has some merit: that the editors should have provided each tome with an introduction outlining the highlights therein. No one knows each chronological segment—often no more than a few months—better than the staff. Moreover, as editors who read and re-read the documents and study the relationship of various letters and state papers to each other, their perspective on Washington is different from that of biographers and other researchers.

Editor-in-chief Abbot has himself published a superb essay in *Prologue* on how Washington's manuscripts reveal the great man's "Uncommon Awareness of Self." Abbot demonstrates that Washington was literally always thinking about himself in a reflective and purposeful manner. He had, avers Abbot, a "strong sense that what he decided and what he did, and how others perceived his decisions and deeds, always mattered." They mattered "because he saw life as something a person must make something of." His careful choice of language after 1775, for example, was not simply shyness or reserve but also a determination to show only so much of the inner man. What we have here is "Washington at work on Washington." He sought to guard his reputation for its own sake, not because of a lust for power. At the same time, he was keenly aware that because of his close association with the Revolution in the public mind, any ill-advised act or participation in a failing effort would damage the country as well as the man. For that reason, says Abbot, he agonized over accepting the presidency. It is also why—and here Abbot is most original—Washington so meticulously guarded his papers after 1775 and worried that they be organized and preserved for posterity.⁵

Washington's correspondence was so well-ordered that, in response to a missive from Jefferson about inland navigation, the future president could remind his friend he had already discussed aspects of that subject "in my several letters to you, dated the 29th of March 1784, the 25th of Febry 1785, the 26th of Septr 1785, the 30th of May 1787, the 1st of Jany 1788, & the 31st of Augt in the same Year" (1:300). Small wonder, then, that Abbot can speak of Washington's "appetite for paperwork" as "unrivaled by any Virginian of his generation, perhaps including even Thomas Jefferson."⁶

Biographers of Washington have probably considered the man's obsession with his literary remains as a mixed blessing. His plethora of papers—diaries, ledgers, letters, and state documents—has almost literally overwhelmed even the most talented of them, including John Marshall and Washington Irving

⁵ W.W. Abbot, "An Uncommon Awareness of Self: The Papers of George Washington," *Prologue* 21 (1989), 7-19 (quotations on p. 7).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

in the first half of the nineteenth century and Douglas S. Freeman and James T. Flexner in the middle of our own century, all of whom produced heavily detailed lives ranging in length from four to seven volumes. When John Adams, referring to Marshall's *Washington*, said that the substance of the man was buried in a mountain of facts (the "Father of Our Country" is not born until volume 2), he addressed one of the two universal flaws of Washington's chroniclers. The second flaw, also recognized by Adams in Marshall's work, is that they created a godlike abstraction, anything but a flesh-and-blood man possessed of human frailties.

Whatever the demerits of the debunking mentality of intellectuals in the 1920s, that decade witnessed the first meaningful efforts on the part of Washington biographers to bring the Virginian down out of the clouds. Beginning with the novelist-turned-historian Rupert Hughes in 1926,⁷ serious students of Washington have usually taken the "warts-and-all" approach, especially in dealing with the young Washington of the pre-Revolutionary years. Hughes's portrayal of a stormy adolescent, a temperamental colonial soldier, and a self-centered young man who fell in love with a married neighbor, Sally Fairfax, scandalized the historical profession—the *American Historical Review* did not deign to review his first volume—but his assessment in these respects is now mirrored in the carefully researched, beautifully written volumes of Freeman and Flexner.⁸

The statement applies equally to John Ferling's *The First of Men*. Ferling's study constitutes the most substantial single-volume Washington biography to appear in some years, and it offers an appropriate vehicle for viewing recent Washington scholarship, for it draws on much of that literature as well as the opening installments of Abbot's *The Papers of George Washington*. If anything, Ferling, like Bernard Knollenberg's monograph on Washington's Virginia years,⁹ is even more severe than Hughes, Freeman, and Flexner. Besides the standard litany of faults, Ferling finds that the master of Mount Vernon's land dealings was quite unethical, even in a day when the Old Dominion's planter potentates ruthlessly played the real estate game.

⁷ Rupert Hughes, *George Washington* (3 vols., New York, 1926-1930).

⁸ Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, with the assistance of J.A. Carroll and M.W. Ashworth (7 vols., New York, 1948-1957); James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington* (4 vols., Boston, 1965-1972).

⁹ Bernard Knollenberg, *George Washington: The Virginia Period, 1732-1775* (Durham, 1964), is indispensable for its new information and its critical attitude toward many of Washington's own statements. For this period, see the most recent work, which appears in "Our Bulwark in War, Our Guide in Peace: George Washington and His Family," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97 (1989), 133-214, the October issue devoted exclusively to the Washington theme.

Scholars are generally of one mind in accounting for Washington's frailties. They argue that his unattractive side stemmed from insecurities originating in the matrix of his family life. Most Washington sleuths, following Freeman's lead, place the lion's share of the blame on an allegedly grasping, querulous mother, who was widowed when Washington, her oldest child, was eleven, and who sought to dominate him for selfish reasons. With the principal exception of Knollenberg, Washington biographers, including Ferling, are extremely hard on Mary Ball Washington, who admittedly was a trial to her famous offspring when she was elderly. But Freeman, Ferling, and others have too little documentation for the pre-Revolutionary relationship between mother and son to sustain their collective indictment of the mother. For Washington, the loss of his Fairfax-connected older half-brother Lawrence, who was moving rapidly into the squirearchy's inner circle, represented both a personal deprivation and a lost touchstone to preferment. Lawrence's death was more deeply disturbing to Washington than the passing of his father and the influence of his mother.

Did Washington surmount his unbecoming qualities? How had he changed and how had he remained the same by 1775? Generally, Washington scholars see a marvelous transformation having taken place by the time of the Revolution. Explanations for Washington's metamorphosis vary from the influence of the Stoic philosophers (whose works he was somewhat familiar with), to the financial security he obtained by marrying Martha Custis, to his awareness of the need for compromise and conciliation that came from seventeen years' service in the House of Burgesses. Ferling, although acknowledging a higher level of maturity, denies that Washington had obtained peace of mind. To the contrary, he contends that Washington remained a "driven" man, determined to prevail in all he did, and a remarkably successful one, with few exceptions such as his frustrations at the hand of Sally Fairfax: "she was about the only thing that he had ever determined to pursue and attain that had eluded him" (p. 78).

A drive to prevail characterized Washington's Revolutionary years as much as (or perhaps more than) the unusual virtue and disinterestedness assigned him by biographers. Ferling asserts that there remained for Washington, notwithstanding his wealth and public respect, a feeling of "emptiness," which explains his "acquisitive" behavior and obsession for wealth, as well as his wearing his Virginia military raiment in his 1772 Peale portrait, even though his uniformed career had terminated more than a decade earlier.

If Ferling cannot quite account for Washington's lack of fulfillment, he may nonetheless be correct in maintaining, first, that it existed and, second, that Washington seemed to have identified his search for personal independence with his colony's need to resist Britain's threat to its autonomy. Ferling's second contention is undoubtedly sound. Both Curtis Nettels and Edmund

Morgan have persuasively made the same point.¹⁰ It accounts for Washington's early opposition to Britain's new imperial measures and for his being in the forefront of colonials willing to resist with arms and to advocate political independence.

Although Ferling hardly takes up new ground in his treatment of the Revolutionary war years, he is a pretty good military analyst, striking a balance between the detailed assertions of Dave Palmer (that Washington was an aggressive and at times daring commander) and those of Russell F. Weigley (that the Virginian was indeed something of a Fabian, who put a premium on preserving his forces and meeting British invasions with measured responses). Ferling gives less attention to civil-military relations, the central focus of *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*, in which I claim that Washington's requirements in that realm were unique in the history of American wars, for he had to explain the army's needs and attitudes to Congress and explain Congress's responses to the army, a critical communications task that would later belong to the President of the United States and his Secretary of War.

The most suggestive and doubtless controversial aspect of Ferling's war-time chapters, and of the book in general, is his psychological delineation of Washington. The commander-in-chief's distaste for Horatio Gates, Thomas Conway, Charles Lee, and Adam Stephen sprang from their all having crossed swords with him, and thus they were threatening to his "self-esteem," which had remained "fragile" since his youth. Like the young Colonel Washington on the Virginia frontier in the 1750s, General Washington blamed others for mistakes or failures that were his responsibility.¹¹ But in time, having disposed of his perceived enemies and having compiled a respectable (if uneven) combat record, declares Ferling, Washington felt less insecure, less pressured to prove his soldierly credentials, and, consequently, from 1779 onward, less intent on engaging the enemy in a major battle. The evidence is absent or conjectural, as is always so with psychological interpretations, but it all makes sense. It also leaves two nagging questions. What was the relationship between Washington's alleged feeling of emptiness and his self-esteem? And why did not the avalanche of praise and near-

¹⁰ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Meaning of Independence* (New York, 1976), chapter 2; Curtis P. Nettels, *George Washington and American Independence* (Boston, 1951).

¹¹ Although paying scant attention to Washington's psyche, the commander-in-chief's disputes with his fellow generals and his tendency to shift the blame for reversals to others are themes of Bernard Knollenberg, *Washington and the Revolution: A Reappraisal* (New York, 1940).

deification—which commenced at the outset of the war and grew steadily—assuage the internal gnawings of emptiness and low self-esteem?

Indeed, Ferling's may be the only serious Washington biography to hew so consistently to an unchanging psychological portrait. If the general was honest in voicing reluctance to attend the Constitutional Convention and in expressing doubt about his abilities to handle the presidency, he still took on those responsibilities, as he had the office of commander-in-chief in 1775, in order to meet his psychic needs, states Ferling. Never an internally secure man, Washington desperately required the adulation he received. A forthcoming study of David Humphreys and his efforts to write a biography of Washington presents a somewhat different slant on the presidential question. Humphreys, who lived at Mount Vernon at the time, believed that Washington initially was firmly set against returning to public life and that he had a hand in persuading the Virginian to respond again to his nation's call.¹² In contemplating Washington's return to public service, however, one should not neglect the concept of civic duty that was deeply imbedded in the culture of various early modern landed aristocracies, and probably nowhere more firmly than in eighteenth-century Virginia.

Ferling, like other Washington chroniclers, has few monographic studies to draw upon for the presidential years, and those that exist are deficient. Forrest McDonald's *The Presidency of George Washington*,¹³ a provocative if idiosyncratic tome, spotlights his hero Hamilton and all but ignores Washington himself, save for his symbolic and ceremonial significance. One can only speculate why the 1790s have drawn relatively scant attention from Washington scholars. Perhaps the battlefield is more exciting than the chief executive's mansion. Or perhaps the General's admirers have been fearful of what they would uncover: that is, an elderly man not fully in control of his faculties or his administration, a partisan Federalist dominated by Hamilton. Ferling leans moderately toward this unflattering view of Washington, as opposed to Flexner's claim that his decision-making favored neither party and that he was his own keeper, not overly swayed by Hamilton or anyone else, but both biographers end up giving Washington high marks as a "hands-on" chief executive who acquitted himself reasonably well in domestic policy and exceptionally well in foreign policy.

¹² Rosemary Zagari, *David Humphreys's "Life of General Washington"* (Athens, forthcoming).

¹³ Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of George Washington* (Lawrence, 1974). More helpful is "The Origins and Invention of the American Presidency: Special Bicentennial Issue," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 17 (1987), 227-432.

The difficulty in assessing Washington's presidential years no doubt also derives from Washington's own self-conscious invention of a republican self. As Washington measured the meaning of every action for its precedent-setting implications, so he also guarded his own image. Penetrating the public Washington to find the "real man" has proven exceedingly difficult, as Abbot has observed while editing the presidential papers. By the 1790s the cult of Washington had almost obscured the public man as well.

Washington's biographers have displayed minimal interest in probing the intellectual dimensions of his public image or in examining his part in creating it. The only noteworthy exception is Marcus Cunliffe's brief but thoughtful *George Washington: Man and Monument*, which ties American perceptions to classical influences and acknowledges Washington's remote persona as a factor in the image-sculpting process.¹⁴ But what other influences were at work and to what extent did Washington consciously endeavor to shape opinion of himself? The 1980s have witnessed the publication of three books that address these queries.

Gary Wills's *Cincinnatus* analyzes the symbolism in three of Washington's most famous acts—his resignation as commander-in-chief of the army in 1783, his crucial support for the Constitution of 1787, and his Farewell Address on leaving the presidency.¹⁵ Wills does so mainly by looking at Washington's depiction in the art of the time. Just as Cunliffe told us of Washington's place in Enlightenment literature, so now Wills charts his location in Enlightenment painting with seventy-nine black-and-white and six color illustrations. A "virtuoso" at resignations, Washington played on the Cincinnatus theme, perfecting the skill of gaining power by relinquishing power. If Wills is right, Washington's contemporaries saw the real man. Although the *Pater Patriae* had not read the *philosophes*, he was a man of reason and brought to reality the classical ideal of a republic. Like the Roman farmer-warrior with whom he was so often compared, the American warrior-statesman-farmer displayed his true character in his personal sacrifice, his exemplary virtue, and his preference for domestic pursuits. The Enlightenment, declares Wills, needed its heroes. In America the hero-needs were uniquely republican, and uniquely met in a single man, Washington.

With Wills's *Cincinnatus*, Barry Schwartz's *George Washington*¹⁶ agrees that the temper of the age and the accomplishments of the man combined to

¹⁴ Marcus Cunliffe, *George Washington: Man and Monument* (rev. ed., New York, 1982). His further reflections appear in "Gorgeous George," *New York Review of Books*, Oct. 11, 1984, pp. 47-50.

¹⁵ Gary Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment* (New York, 1984).

¹⁶ Barry Schwartz, *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol* (New York, 1987).

forge the Washington symbol. But Schwartz properly observes that the process surely predated the three dramatic events examined by Wills. He begins by asking "how Washington became a symbol in the first place and why he remained one despite a succession of serious military failures" (p. 4). Schwartz is partly correct in saying that "the quality of the duties he was charged to carry out" provides the answer (p. 17), but we can add that the newly appointed commander-in-chief was already a rather famous man, well-known for his French and Indian War exploits and one who had traveled widely and had many connections in the northern colonies. Schwartz parts company with Wills in stating that Americans initially had problems in praising Washington without resorting to venerational forms associated with kingship and that he also remained symbolically a monarch until Americans crowned themselves in the Constitution, which placed sovereignty in the people. For all the virtues of both the Wills and Schwartz monographs, which contribute impressively to our appreciation of the "Cincinnatus of the West" symbolism (Lord Byron's phrase), they hardly advance Washington scholarship *per se* by contending that the man and the iconographic edifice were all but identical.

Longmore's *The Invention of George Washington*, based on a staggering assortment of sources, endeavors to disentangle the real Washington from the unreal one. It also seeks to reveal how Washington was himself involved in the invention of his image. Longmore does not exaggerate Washington's virtues, and he finds some of the same ambitions in the Virginian that are underscored in Ferling's biography. Those ambitions, especially as reflected in Washington's early military career, in his years in the House of Burgesses, and in his role in Virginia's protest movement and in the Continental Congresses, show Washington concerned about his image and how to improve it. Although Longmore and Abbot will not be of the same mind in some respects, Longmore would concur with Abbot's position that Washington always worked on Washington and considered that what he did always mattered. And yet a preoccupation with self-improvement, even self-invention, was hardly confined to Washington but was rather an Enlightenment idea that resonated forcefully with Jefferson, Franklin, and any number of other famous men in Europe and America at the time.

Longmore also stands with Schwartz in pinpointing the adulation of Washington as dating almost literally from his appointment as commander-in-chief. As satisfying as is much of Longmore's portrait of Washington, some scholars will dispute his claim that Washington was better read than we realized and that he was something of a political activist in the legislative arena of Williamsburg.

As for Washington's symbolism as a mirror of American cultural values, Wills, Schwartz, and Longmore, by somewhat different routes, all disclose

the General's countrymen as endeavoring to root him in a self-consciously emerging American republicanism; his character, self-sacrifice, and dedication were hallmarks of the republican creed. Like Schwartz, however, Longmore stresses that Americans often did so, in the early years at least, in the nomenclature of monarchy, which had been such a formative part of their British inheritance. But Longmore insists that it was Old World rhetoric with a particular twist, for Washington was compared with the ideal of a patriot king popularized by Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke: of a ruler who was above party or faction and concerned solely with the welfare of his realm. American essayists, drawing on the prose of English radical Whigs and Tory nonconformists, turned Washington into something of a "republicanized Patriot King."

There is a danger in interpreting all of American Revolutionary thought and culture within a highly restrictive republican model. Intentionally or not, all three authors border on doing just that. It is surely possible, even probable, that people revered Washington and even saw him as if he were a king or patriarch for reasons apart from republican ideology and the patriot-king idea. The Moses theme—of a savior leading his people out of another form of Egyptian bondage—hardly receives more than passing mention in Wills and Schwartz, and none at all in Longmore; it needs more attention in the context of an eighteenth-century American society that still owed much to Puritan values.¹⁷ Still other revolutionists may simply have not yet mentally and emotionally discarded old-fashioned monarchy, a concern voiced by numerous Federalists during the constitutional crisis of 1786-1788 and in the following decade by members of Jefferson's emerging party. Nor is it inconceivable that some of his countrymen could see Washington in both monarchical and biblical terms. The point is that Americans may not have been as ideological as they have been limned by the last generation of "republican" scholars. Or could it be that they carried in their heads different ideologies at the same time? For example, Richard Bushman's *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* shows how monarchical notions thrived in the Bay colony, the citadel of Puritanism, prior to the Revolution. Whatever the case, I would contend that many Americans thought of Washington in terms of state formation or national achievement not dissimilar to the way Europeans perceived Frederick the Great or Catherine the Great. (A favorite patriotic cry was "God save Great Washington.") In retrospect, it may be said that Washington was the means by which Americans finally got monar-

¹⁷ For a beginning, see Robert P. Hay, "George Washington: American Moses," *American Quarterly* 21 (1969), 780-91.

chy out of their system without having to pay a fatal price for doing so—John Adams's at times hysterical fears notwithstanding. It was a rare case of having one's cake and eating it too.¹⁸

The possibilities for fresh research on Washington are endless, as is true of all individuals who have a formidable impact on a major historical epoch. For two reasons, if not more, that truism is particularly relevant for Washington studies. First, the appearance of *The Papers of George Washington* is making available what will eventually come to seventy or more volumes of incoming and outgoing correspondence and state papers spanning approximately the last half of the eighteenth century. Second, Washington has never received the number and kind of high-quality specialized or monographic accounts that have been devoted to other great statesmen such as Jefferson and Lincoln. We need a book that traces Washington as a cultural symbol beyond his lifetime, which the admirable volumes by Wills, Schwartz, and Longmore scarcely do—one comparable to Merrill Peterson's *The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind*. We require a serious analysis of Washington's terms as chief executive which would measure up to Robert Johnstone's *Jefferson and the Presidency* and Noble Cunningham's *The Process of Government under Jefferson*.¹⁹ Except for his symbolic stature, Washington has been inadequately treated as an enlightened man of his age. If he could hardly boast of Jefferson's breadth and versatility, he nonetheless was an Enlightenment figure, with interests in scientific agriculture, religious freedom, and education, not to mention his concerns about slavery.²⁰

Besides the obvious opportunities to reassess familiar topics, such as his Virginia years, his generalship, and his connections with Hamilton, Jefferson, and Adams, Washington's relationships with the Continental Congress and the state governments are much in need of treatment. Those books, if and when they surface, will cast light on another lacuna in Washington scholarship: the Virginian's contributions to American constitutionalism.²¹

¹⁸ That "the two Georges had a surprising number of things in common" is the theme of Marcus Cunliffe, "The Two Georges: The President and the King," *American Studies International* 24 (1986), 53-73.

¹⁹ A useful survey of Washington's handling of international questions, designed for the general reader, is Frank T. Reuter, *Trials and Triumphs: George Washington's Foreign Policy* (Fort Worth, 1983). Less successful, but not without some value, are Marvin Kitman, *The Making of the President 1789: An Unauthorized Campaign Biography* (New York, 1989), yet another effort to make human "a marble statue"; and George W. Nordham, *The Age of Washington: George Washington's Presidency, 1789-1797* (Chicago, 1989), which focuses on Washington's presidential addresses and other state papers.

²⁰ A very fine exception is Paul Boller, *George Washington and Religion* (Dallas, 1963).

²¹ I have only scratched the surface of this subject in "George Washington's Contributions to American Constitutionalism," in Don Higginbotham, *War and Society in Revolutionary America: The Wider Dimensions of Conflict* (Columbia, 1988), 193-213.

Because he treasured his privacy, as did Jefferson, Washington's character will always remain elusive, but for that reason it will continue to elicit endeavors to peel back layers of the inner man. The effort is eminently worthwhile, since we still do not really understand how it was that Washington was able to command men and to win their loyalty in war and in peace, as a young colonel in his twenties and as a middle-aged general and president. No doubt the reasons, as always, are complex. Clearly his persona—however we define it—and his persistence in all he did were vital pieces of the Washington puzzle. And part and parcel of that puzzle was an indomitable will. A formidable adversary, Washington might prevail by questionable means when it came to acquiring western lands or as president when it came to locating the nation's capital at a site advantageous to Virginia's commercial and landed interests. But for the most part, he channeled his will into creating, sustaining, and culminating a revolution. Perhaps the magnitude of his accomplishment cannot be fully appreciated until we compare Washington with other revolutionary leaders in modern history. That would open a whole new dimension to Washington scholarship.

*University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill*

DON HIGGINBOTHAM

