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**THE MAKING OF
GEORGE WASHINGTON**

The Making of George Washington

DR. GARY L. GREGG

Editor's note: This is a condensed version of Dr. Gregg's September 2018 remarks delivered in Pittsburgh, PA.

There are two stories that many Americans do not know about one of the most well-recognized Founding Fathers—George Washington. Dr. Gary Gregg explains why every American should know about these important experiences that shape George Washington's true legacy.

Today I want to talk about a George Washington that few of our fellow Americans know much about, but from whom our fellow Americans could learn quite a lot. George Washington is not exactly a revered fellow on college campuses today, or even in our public life. Seldom do you hear him mentioned, seldom is he contemplated, seldom are his precedents discussed. He is less contemplated (probably) and thought about in our classrooms than ever in American history. I think one example would be, if you think back 100 years ago or so, there wouldn't be a classroom in the United States without a painting of Washington on the wall. Now I defy you to go into most entire schools and find a picture of Washington on any of the walls.

What do the American people know about our Founding Father? That he had wooden teeth? That he chopped down a cherry tree? That his giant visage is carved on the side of a mountain in South Dakota? Or he's the cartoonish figure that tries to sell us mattresses on Presidents' Day every year.

We all know that he is the first president of the United States and most Americans know he was the general in the American Revolution. Where once knowledge of Washington and Washington's example served as an exemplar to sustain us during difficult times and during divisive times, he's now forgotten largely or sometimes even worse, dismissed and disparaged.

I want to introduce you to two moments in Washington's life.

This is the 21-year old who walked into the Governor's Mansion in Williamsburg, Virginia, and volunteered for a dangerous mission into the wilderness, and who Lt. Gov. Dinwiddie called nothing but 'a raw laddie.' A young man who set off in the Ohio country in late October 1753. He would cross thick mountain passes in the snow, negotiate his way



Gary Gregg

between native villages, flooding streams, ice-choked rivers. He stumbled upon a slaughtered family who was being eaten by their own pigs. And he would gain a new name. The Indians called him 'Conotocarious,' which interestingly means 'devourer of villages.' For an ambitious, arrogant braggard like George Washington, at 21 years old, to get a nickname that means devourer of villages, it's pretty big stuff.

After months in the wilderness the mission called on this inexperienced young man to deliver himself into the hands of the enemy and to deliver a message from the Governor of Virginia, telling the French to remove themselves from this land and go back to Canada. Along the way Washington discovered this very land that we sit on today. And he made it here, to the bluffs overlooking the confluence of the rivers. He knew its vital strategic importance for the future of North America. He would make his way through this wilderness area and headed north to Fort Le Boeuf, which is near Erie, Pennsylvania, today, where he delivered that message to the French, and then that mission done, turned himself into a spy. He discovered from counting the boats they had, counting the men, counting their armament and having his Native American guides listen to their conversations in French (which he didn't speak). But he learned of their plan. He figured out that they planned to come down this river as well and takes the forks of the Ohio. He set off with this knowledge in the dead of winter 1754, snow in some places up above his knees. His horses ended up starving from under him and he ended up sending all of his men except one to find shelter in native villages. But he said he had to move on. He had vital information that he had to get to Virginia. He was celebrated at the time in England and Scotland and of course up and down the east coast. Within months of this first mission he was given his first military command despite never having drilled with a military unit. He would be sent back here to the wilderness, a military greenhorn but with the over-confidence and the ambition that gave him the ability to take on the challenge.



George Washington
(Portrait by Gilbert Stuart
Williamstown)

It was on this first, real military mission that he allowed his bravado and pride to get the best of his judgment. As he oversaw the ambush of the French, with which they were not at war, a massacre of surrendering soldiers, and the war crime of the brutal murder of a fellow officer. He would build a fort in the middle of a field that we now know as Fort Necessity. If you've been there, you know that even you knew more about military strategy than George Washington. Because even you would not build a fort in the middle of a bowl surrounded by trees. Washington built Fort Necessity in the middle of that field and when Ensign Jumonville's brother came to wreak his revenge, they had an easy time hiding behind trees and shooting into the fort.

It rained that night, the place became muddy, his men were bloody, muddy and broke into the rum stores. Young Washington lost all control that evening and had to

surrender in the middle of the night. In the surrender papers, because he did not speak French, he admitted that he, personally, had assassinated Ensign Jumonville, making him an international war criminal. But he did end up starting the French and Indian War, thereby changing the world.

That moment of humiliation did not keep Washington down. Less than a year later he would return, this time as a volunteer to help General Braddock's attempt to take back this land on which we stand today. He was a volunteer because he was too proud and boastful to accept a commission that would have put him under the authority of British Regular Officers. On the way to Fort Duquesne, near the forks of the Ohio, Braddock's forces were ambushed in the wilderness. Washington had warned them against just such an ambush, but his warnings as a hot-headed young colonial were ignored.

Washington's fellow Virginians rushing into the woods to take the fight to the Native Americans, aligned with the French who were hiding behind rocks and hiding behind trees and logs and firing down into the field. When they rushed into the woods, the British Regulars lined up in the field in Regular order and fired into the woods against the Native Americans. Washington's fellow Virginian's were stuck in the middle of a bloody crossfire and were shot up from both sides. The Native Americans also considered this, under the French orders, to be a decapitation strike. Not just to stop Braddock's forces from moving toward Fort Duquesne, but a decapitation strike would eliminate all British leadership. It essentially did.

As you know, Braddock was killed, buried in the road by George Washington three days later. What you may not know is every single British officer was either badly wounded or killed in that battle. Every one.

The Indians had taken aim, their snipers in the woods, at anyone on horseback and had just picked them off. There was, however, one volunteer left with the guts to ride into that battle on horseback and rally the troops to organize a surrender. That, of course, was our George Washington. How many lives he saved that day, we don't know.

Washington, that day, had two horses shot out from under him and four bullet holes in his clothes. But he never gave up. He fought to the end and saved many lives. He emerged that day with two more nicknames. "The hero of Monongahela" was one. The other was "the most favored of heaven." An Indian sniper gave him that name, because the sniper had taken aim at him over and over again, after having already killed numerous officers, and he said it was like heaven had a forcefield around this man. The bullets sort of peeled away and didn't hit him.

In 1758, Washington was again called to serve here in this area, in what we now call Pittsburgh. This time to help General John Forbes in his assault on Fort Duquesne. This time his advice was taken, and the battle went a different way. But partly because of Washington again being called upon to be the hero of the day. For the morning of the battle, a deep fog descended here at the forks of the Ohio. A deep fog that confused

Forbes' forces and Washington realized they were shooting each other. Washington ascended his horse, unsheathed his sword, and rushed into the middle of the firefight. Barking orders to stop firing, swinging his sword as he did, and knocking up his own men's guns as they fired to keep them from killing their own men.

At the end of Washington's life, as you look back on his entire life, all of the battles of the French and Indian War and the Revolution, he said that was the moment where his life was the most in danger than it had ever been. It is one that he wanted everyone to remember about him. I would say that the percentage of the American people that knew anything about this would be miniscule. But at the end of his life that's where he said he wanted his legacy.

I want to go to the end of the American Revolution now to look at Washington in maturity. At a moment where, I will argue, Washington saved the Republic. But again, almost none of our fellow Americans remember it.

Take a journey with me to the end of the American Revolution. Years are 1782-1783. Washington's Army is encamped along the shores of the Hudson near Newburgh. The war had been won, the Battle of Yorktown had been won many months before, but the peace treaty ending the war had not been negotiated and British forces remained on the continent, including in New York City. Washington had every reason to believe that the British would continue the war. He said this, "The King will push the War as long as that Nation will find men and money admits not a doubt in my mind." He had to hold the Army together and in good fighting condition while the treaty was being negotiated, until the treaty was in place and the Redcoats were gone and a peace established.

The Continental Congress, you see, had continued to prove impotent throughout the War. There was no money. The soldiers had not been paid. Washington would write this to Major General John Armstrong, "The Army, as usual, are without pay and a great part of the soldiery without shirts. And though the patience of them is equally threadbare, the States seem perfectly indifferent to their cries." How startling it is if you read that letter, or any of the letters of this time, where he is writing for Congress to take up the plight of his soldiers. He's writing for his soldiers and for the cause. And you go back and compare the letters he wrote here, from western Pennsylvania, during the French and Indian War. In those he complains about not having a high enough rank. He complains about his own pay. He complains about not having enough wine to entertain people the way that he should be accustomed to.

Rumors of resignations and mutiny were in the air. You have soldiers and you're organized, and Congress isn't paying you. Do you actually think they're going to pay you when you disband and you go home to your farms spread all around the country? Why not then, while you are at your strength, move on Congress and press your demands rather than hope, that in your weakness, they will follow their promises?

The War was won but the road toward true peace and free government would be equally treacherous. All could be undone at this moment if it wasn't handled just right.

A small delegation of Officers was dispatched to Philadelphia to petition Congress directly and reported to them, "We have born all that men can bear. Our property is expended. Our private resources are at an end." They met with James Madison. They met with Alexander Hamilton. And though I know that Hamilton is our hero of the hour right now, and half of us can probably start singing the soundtrack from the play, Hamilton is not innocent in the events that were about to unfold. He would even write himself to General Washington on February 13, 1783 and say this, "A moderate revolt of the Officers, if kept within bounds, might actually prove helpful to persuade the weak minds of Congress." If Hamilton would have had his way, a revolt of the Officers, against the civilian authority, against Congress—What precedent would have been set at this moment for the rest of American history? How would America be different today if the military had that precedent to fall back on?

Fortunately, General Washington was more prudent and more republican than his former aide. He replied despairingly to Hamilton of what he called, "the forebodings of evil within the camp," which he felt, "may be productive of events which are more to be deprecated than prevented." But he added at the end, "I am not without hope." He then warned Hamilton, "Soldiers are not mere puppets and an Army is a dangerous instrument to play with."

The crisis came to a head on March 11 when the conspirators circulated an anonymous pamphlet calling a meeting of the Officers to voice grievances and coordinate action against Congress. Then a second anonymous note was circulated. This one warning them, "to suspect the man who would advise to more moderation and longer forbearance." This was a direct challenge to Washington, and Washington was furious.

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Washington countered that invitation declaring that no one other but he, as Commander in Chief, had the power to assemble the Officer Corp. And then he did just exactly that. He called for a meeting of all officers and called for it to occur on March 15. What's March 15 mean to you? The Ides of March, when his own men killed their Caesar. Fascinating. Did Washington know that? I don't know whether he realized that or not. It's an amazing moment—the potential.

Now the drama unfolds as if produced for the stage. On Washington's orders, 500 officers crowded into the auditorium of the recently constructed building nicknamed the Temple of Virtue.

It remained unclear whether Washington himself would attend the meeting or what his intentions were. Some hoped that their General has called the meeting because he is tired of the inaction of the politicians and he is prepared to take the government. A new monarchy, perhaps a new military junta, may be on verge of its birth and they were there to be part of it. Others seemed ready to move on Congress regardless of what Washington decided. Washington's top, most loyal aides enter and fan into the audience.

At precisely noon, the doors open in the back. Washington enters. Everyone stands, stiff and rigid and at shocked attention. He walks slowly, silently, deliberately to the podium. His very presence, his dignity and his strength, serve to strike the souls of his men for this is no mere mortal, this is their Washington. This is His Excellency. This is the 'most favored of heaven.' This is their Commander in Chief. This is the Father of their Country. And he begins by apologizing to them for appearing in person, for it's not his usual mode of operation, but he said that the gravity of the situation is such that it demanded that he be there and address them personally.

He began his remarks like this, "Gentlemen, By an anonymous summons, an attempt has been made to convene you together—how inconsistent with the rules of propriety! How unmilitary! and how subversive of all order and discipline—let the good sense of this Army decide." He ends with these stirring words, telling them that if they resist the temptation to act now, if they resist the calls to take up arms and enforce the demands upon the civil Government, "You will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism & patient virtue, rising superior to the pressures of the most complicated sufferings; And you will, by the dignity of your Conduct, afford occasion for Posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to mankind, 'had this day been wanting, the World had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining.'"

I want to shame us all now for a moment. Because his promise to them was that we would remember them.

But in case he hadn't won the day yet with his speech, he also had a letter that he had commissioned a sympathetic delegate from Congress to write declaring Congress dedication to the Army and their plans to fulfill their promises. Washington pulled the letter from his pocket, unfolded it and began to read. He stumbled over the words. He looked a little confused. He had difficulty pronouncing them. He pauses. Tension builds in the room. He reached into his waistcoat and pulled out a pair of spectacles. He said, "Gentlemen, you must forgive me, for I have grown not only grey but nearly blind in service of my country."

No one had ever seen Washington wear spectacles before. If his stern dressing-down of those Officers did not have its intended effect, this gesture proved devastating to the hopes of the lead conspirators. For Washington stood before his Officers, this most favored of heaven, this most flawless of men, and bared a flaw to save the Republic.



General George Washington Resigning His Commission by John Trumbull

There was almost not even a grumble of dissent in what was called the general speechlessness of the assembly. The motion to express trust in Congress and in the Commander in Chief, as well as to denounce the anonymous addresses were passed. Civilian control of the military preserved. The Army would bide its time until peace was made and colonial independence accepted by the British Crown. We took a major step toward what has become our glorious tradition, so different from so much of the world, of civilian control of the military.

In the ending of the war, Washington changed the world, refusing power, refusing the Crown, teaching military deference to civilian authority, no matter its level of competence. Voluntarily resigning his position and retiring from public life. These acts which seem so basic to so many of us today shook the world. We refer to Washington as our Cincinnatus. Not far from Newburgh, New York, now there is a Cincinnatus, in Cortland County and there are similar named places all over America. Why? Because George Washington did, in our world, an act that almost no one in human history had done, except the Roman General Cincinnatus. He did that more than 2,000 years before Washington. He won a war, he liberated a nation and then instead of taking power, he ended the war by going home to his farm. He changed the world.

The thing I want to leave you with today is that he changed the world because he first changed himself. Washington's example taught the men of the Philadelphia Convention that there was hope. There was at least one man who could be entrusted with power and who might then set the precedents for a republican executive and a republican government unlike the world had ever seen before. They created the

American presidency with relatively vague language and entrusted him to bring it to life. And to create the precedence that would last the ages. He set in motion the precedence that the military takes orders from the civilian president, whether they agree with his decisions or not. He set in motion the cultural expectations that fill in the blanks of the constitution. From his own retirement from the presidency after two terms, to the general officers of our own time giving sharp salutes and accepting the military decisions of our presidents with which they disagree. These have worked tolerably well to give us a republican political system resting on the eternal tension between order and liberty.

He won a war, he liberated a nation and then instead of taking power, he ended the war by going home to his farm. He changed the world.

How did he do it? How did George Washington transform from the brash, young, arrogant braggard named Conotocarious out here in the Ohio country into the hero that was strong enough to bare his flaws publicly in the name of his country? That story took him a lifetime to live and takes us much beyond this time to discuss.

I want to sum it up with a quote from Marcus Tullius Cicero, a man who our founders knew very well. The quote comes from his book, *On Duties*, which we would all do well to revisit, and which the founders knew, some nearly by heart. In that book, Cicero's admonition is, "to become the man you want others to think you are." George Washington did not set out to be authentic, or to find himself, or to bend the rules to suit his natural inclinations. Instead he set out to better himself and became one of the greatest men of the millennium.

To me, Washington's story is inspiring and exciting and edifying. If the brash youngster could become the man that we came to know as the patient and disciplined founding father, we can all become better than we are today. My admonition to you is to become the people that we want others to think we are.

I wish you well along your journey in that endeavor.

Note: If you would like to view the entire lecture by Dr. Gregg, please visit: www.faithandfreedom.com

STUDENT FELLOW SPOTLIGHT



Jack Everett '21 is a senior studying economics and finance. Economics' ever-evolving theory and the dynamic field of finance attracted him immediately upon entrance into undergraduate studies.

Jack is a 2019 George Gilder Fellow, served as fraternity treasurer, researches investment opportunities for the Crimson Collegiate Investors, and is the senior chair of the American Enterprise Institute Executive Council. In January of 2020, he left Grove City College to study finance in New York City at The King's College. He greatly looks forward to pursuing a vocation which utilizes his education in economics and his passion for the Kingdom.



Elizabeth Finnegan '21 is a senior at Grove City College, studying entrepreneurship and political science. On campus, Elizabeth serves as a Resident Assistant, a Teaching Assistant for Professors Tim Sweet, Kenneth

Smith, and Yvonne English, a writer for The Collegian, and has served on the Pan Hellenic Council as an active member of the Theta Alpha Pi Sorority.

Elizabeth has interned as a product specialist at John Hiester Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram of Sanford, NC and worked in marketing and development as the Alumni Affairs Coordinator for Cary Christian School. Elizabeth is actively involved in the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation and has spent time traveling the United States and Europe, studying different dimensions of Entrepreneurial Leadership and Regional Political Structures. Upon graduation, Elizabeth hopes to pursue a career where she can combine her passions for politics, travel and entrepreneurship.

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