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The Aspirations and Ascent of George Washington in the  
Context of His Times: From His Early Years to the End of the  
Revolutionary War

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

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## ABSTRACT

George Washington's relatively obscure beginnings did not preclude him from admiring and acquainting himself with chivalrous role models and genteel guidelines. Longing for recognition, Washington sought opportunities to serve his influential patrons to merit their further approbation. The dissertation sets Washington's aspirations in the context of honor-based sociocultural milieu of his day and thus provides the reader with an insight into the conventional aspects of his ascent to the upper echelons of the colonial society of Virginia. At the time of the Revolution, Washington's military reputation, leadership, and admirable character earned him a unanimous election to the chief command of the American armies. The complexity of Washington's venture of accepting, exercising, and ultimately resigning the supreme military powers in relation to his reputation and sense of patriotic duty is thoroughly analyzed.

Key words: *George Washington, convention, ascent, ambition, patriotism, virtue*

I declare that I have worked on this dissertation independently,  
using the sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author's signature

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## INTRODUCTION

The literature on George Washington is extensive, but the focus keeps changing. “Celebration of ‘the character of Washington’” in biographies composed during the few decades after his death (e.g., John Marshall’s 5-volume biography), argues Barry Schwartz, upheld the “universal sanctity of Washington’s memory,” but the popularization of contemporaneous hagiographic narratives tended to apotheosize the American hero through various fictitious accounts (e.g., Mason L. Weems’s publications).<sup>1</sup>

Largely in consequence of Washington being so “grandly idealized” in the early 19th century, people eventually began to be “tired of hearing of him” and there was a general decline of interest in publishing about the Founding Father after the Civil War. Naturally, between 1865 and 1920, the memory of the “non-democratic” general and president was becoming increasingly “democratized,” but the transformation of his image and Union’s victory in the Civil War contributed to the fact that since the beginning of the 20th century, the number of articles printed in the United States about Abraham Lincoln began to outnumber those about Washington.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1920s, the Washington historiography tended to treat the “Father of his Country” as a “complete businessman and captain of industry,” but at the turn of the following decade, his popular image (bolstered by his bicentennial birthday celebrations) was

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Schwartz, “Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington,” *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 2 (April 1991): 221, 223-24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095781>; John Marshall, comp., *Life of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the American Forces, during the War Which Established the Independence of His Country, and First President of the United States*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: C. P. Wayne, 1804-1807), <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/1063430.html>; Mason L. Weems, *A History of Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits, of General George Washington* (Philadelphia: John Bioren, [1800]), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t6pz52m8z>; Mason L. Weems, *The Life of George Washington; with Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself, and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen* (Philadelphia: Joseph Allen, [n.d.]), <http://www.archive.org/details/lifeofgeorgewashweem>.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial, *New York Times*, March 1, 1880, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=990CE0DC173FEE3ABC4953DFB566838B699FDE>; Schwartz, “Social Change and Collective Memory,” 221, 224.

disfigured by “cynical debunking.” Following the World War II, impressively detailed accounts of Washington’s life were produced by Douglas S. Freeman (1948-57) and James T. Flexner (1965-72). The seminal multivolume biography by Freeman, in particular, remains in the vanguard of Washington scholarly literature.<sup>3</sup>

In his classic biography, Marcus Cunliffe (1958) hoped to humanize the American legend still largely entombed in what he termed “a metaphorical Washington Monument” that secreted his real character. Washington was, writes Cunliffe, “a good man, not a saint; a competent soldier, not a great one; an honest administrator, not a statesman of genius; a prudent conserver, not a brilliant reformer. But in sum an exceptional figure.”<sup>4</sup> Bernhard Knollenberg’s object in providing a publication “of a scholarly bent” on various aspects of Washington’s pre-Revolutionary years (1964) also constitutes a meritorious contribution to authoritative literature.<sup>5</sup>

The 1980s witnessed a literal “outpouring” of Washington studies, which included notable Paul K. Longmore’s *The Invention of George Washington*, John Ferling’s *First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, and Garry Wills’s *Cincinnatus: George Washington and The Enlightenment*.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in the past two decades, scholars have again begun to point out that Washington is studied less than other great American leaders like Jefferson and Lincoln (the

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<sup>3</sup> Schwartz, “Social Change and Collective Memory,” 221; Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, 7 vols., vol. 7 completed by John A. Carroll and Mary W. Ashworth (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948-57); James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington*, 4 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965-72); David Hackett Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 446-47, <http://books.google.com/books?id=Oreq1YztDcQC>.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Cunliffe, *George Washington: Man and Monument* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), 5, 212, <http://www.archive.org/details/georgewashington005796mbp>.

<sup>5</sup> Bernhard Knollenberg, *George Washington: The Virginia Period, 1732-1775* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1976), v.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth R. Bowling, “An Extraordinary Man: A Review Essay on George Washington,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 73, no. 4 (summer 1990): 287, 289-91, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/archives/search.aspx?area=browse&volume=73&articleID=37802>; Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988; reprinted Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); John E. Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Garry Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment* (New York: Doubleday, 1984).

American hero has likewise not drawn long due attention from Czech authors).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, scholarly attention has been repeatedly called to a lack of high-quality studies and new perspectives on the “Father of his Country.” Joseph Ellis recently remarked that “we do not need another epic painting, but rather a fresh portrait” of Washington.<sup>8</sup>

One of the repetitive motifs still appearing in the Washington historiography of the several past decades is an endeavor to discover the “real man” behind the many myths that have accumulated around his persona since the early nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The aim to humanize the distanced and somewhat deified Washington is now eased by the extensive University of Virginia project, which is in the process of transcribing and digitizing a complete incoming and outgoing Washington’s correspondence (*The Papers of George Washington* is projected to comprise 88 printed volumes).<sup>10</sup> The possibility of not only browsing but also searching the Washington’s papers through a full text mode opens new venues for research that were unavailable to the past historians.

The most recent scholarly attention has focused on several aspects of Washington’s life, such as dispelling widely circulated fictitious stories about Washington, his political philosophy, religious beliefs, and the nature of his character and ambition.<sup>11</sup> The latter two

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<sup>7</sup> The only Czech publication on GW (with over 50 pages) accessible in Czech libraries is Ivan Brož, *George Washington* (Praha: Petrklíč, 1994). While the biography treats all significant aspects of GW and highlights several historical details that could be of interest to the Czech reader (e.g., Bohemian or Moravian immigrants and descendants), it contains no source references or bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> Don Higginbotham, “The Washington Theme in Recent Historical Literature,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114 no. 3 (July 1990): 436, <http://dpubs.libraries.psu.edu/>; William Guthrie Sayen, “‘A Compleat Gentleman’: The Making of George Washington, 1732-1775” (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1998), 1; Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey H. Morrison, *The Political Philosophy of George Washington* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), xiii-xiv.

<sup>10</sup> *The Papers of George Washington: Newsletter* 12 (Spring 2011): 16, <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/project/newsletter/11.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> On myths about GW: Edward G. Lengel, *Inventing George Washington: America’s Founder, in Myth and Memory* (New York: Harper, 2011), <http://books.google.com/books?id=DktjbvbR07gC>. On GW’s political philosophy: Morrison, *Political Philosophy*. On GW’s religious beliefs: Mary V. Thompson, *“In the Hands of a Good Providence”: Religion in the Life of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), Jim Pingel, “Influence and Impact of Religion on George Washington” (PhD diss., Cardinal Stritch University, 2008). On GW’s character and ambition: Longmore, *Invention*; Ellis, *His Excellency*; John Ferling,

themes constitute an especially sensitive field to explore since Washington, given his indispensable merit in deserving to be called the “Father of his Country,” is as “a popular icon” still held in considerable esteem in the twenty-first century.<sup>12</sup>

Paul K. Longmore’s effort at explaining the self-fashioning image of Washington through the prism of “reigning social and political ideology” in his *The Invention of George Washington* very ably set the stage for exploring Washington’s not merely publicly perceived, but genuine ambitions.<sup>13</sup> John Ferling’s publication of *The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon* during the time I was working on this dissertation provided a welcome assurance of the topicality of my chosen thesis. Focusing on the aspirations of the Founding Father, Ferling claims unequivocally that “the real Washington burned with ambition” and that his ambition was visibly “overweening” from his early age.<sup>14</sup> The author also maintains that “Washington additionally crafted the story that he had not sought the appointment” to the chief command of the American army.<sup>15</sup> One of the key conclusions he draws in his publication is that Washington’s “reluctance to hold power” was largely “mythological.”<sup>16</sup>

Longmore’s and Ferling’s assertions that Washington exerted assiduous effort to ascend to positions of power and that “he wanted the appointment” of the commander in chief challenge the long-held assumptions that the American general was sincerely modest and reluctant to be vested with such grand military powers.<sup>17</sup> Their arguments provoke the following two questions: How is one to understand the numerous accounts of Washington’s reserve, modesty, and diffidence since the time of the Revolution? How is this perception of

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*The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Morrison, *Political Philosophy*, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Longmore, *Invention*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>17</sup> Longmore, *Invention*, 160.

his persona reconcilable with his former vying for recognition and prominence during his early military years?

To provide adequate answers to such questions, one needs to understand the honor-based context of Washington's ambitions and explain the the eighteenth-century meanings and connotations of ambition, honor, fame, or glory, to an aspiring gentleman of those days. In other words, I believe that Washington's aspirations and ascent could hardly be comprehended correctly without juxtaposing them with the sociocultural milieu of his day, including the prevailing conventions among colonial Virginians.

Invariably, no historical event occurs in a vacuum and each is attended with diverse historical forces that merit the attention of the reader. This dissertation suggests that the delineation of Washington's status seeking using the dichotomy of modesty and ambition ought to be obtained by applying the point of Washington's day. For instance, ambition, in itself, did not always entail negative connotation at that time; much of its meaning depended on what objectives were one's efforts exerted for. A number of eighteenth-century sources demonstrate that one's "*ambition may be rational and laudable,*" if that which is sought deserves such modifiers.<sup>18</sup>

Paradoxically, the "Father of his Country" was born to an undistinguished family, was bereaved of his father at an early age, and was deprived of a college education. Nevertheless, his proclivity for activity and assiduousness made him prepared when expedient opportunities for service arrived. In harmony with *audacem fortuna iuvat*, Washington was fortunate in becoming a protégé of highly influential patrons and in espousing a very wealthy bride.

Washington's public image of a reserved and modest gentleman becomes noticeable especially after his retirement from service in the French and Indian War and marriage to Martha. Such a presented personality may appear to stand in contrast to his earlier youthful

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<sup>18</sup> "On Ambition," *Weekly Magazine* (Philadelphia), February 3, 1798, <http://books.google.com/books?id=mJ0wAAAAAYAAJ> (my italics).

disposition, but I contend that he conscientiously cultivated this unassuming character with an aim not to merely appear like possessing but to truly internalize such merits.

This dissertation also indicates that it is incorrect to assume (as may be implied by Longmore's and Ferling's arguments) that Washington was deliberately dishonest when he wrote to his wife after being chosen to head the Continental Army that "far from seeking this appointment I have used every endeavour in my power to avoid it." His reasoned judgment that arms be used as the "the de[r]nier resort," his overcoming of personal inclinations, and his compliance to accept whatever Providence had in store for him to answer "some good purpose" were all part of real forces that acted upon his decision at this crucial junction of history.<sup>19</sup>

Pre-eminently, this dissertation treats how for Washington, the greatest reward consisted of "esteem and respect of [his] countrymen and . . . [his] place in history."<sup>20</sup> His lifelong endeavor to merit such laurels was attended by virtues, many of whom were commonly associated with the classical antiquity. Washington's aspiration was to emulate the ancient Cincinnatus model of accepting military authority to defend his nation and to ultimately give all of his delegated powers back to civil authorities and return to his "ploughshare."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, in this dissertation, I undertake to explore the formation and nature of Washington's aspirations in the context of his times within the categories of his military career, business ventures, as well as civilian life.

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<sup>19</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>20</sup> W. W. Abbot, "An Uncommon Awareness of Self: The Papers of George Washington," in *George Washington Reconsidered*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 281-82, [http://books.google.com/books?id=L0qGWo\\_NGIAC](http://books.google.com/books?id=L0qGWo_NGIAC).

<sup>21</sup> GW to John Hancock, 20 December 1776, in *PGW*. See also "War & Washington; A Song Composed at the Beginning of the American Revolution," in J. M. Sewall, *Miscellaneous Poems, With Several Specimens from the Author's Manuscript Version of the Poems of Ossian* (Portsmouth, [NH]: Printed for William Treadwell, 1801), 53, <http://www.archive.org/details/miscellaneouspo00sewagoog>; Sir George Cornwall Lewis, *An Inquiry into the Credibility of the Early Roman History*, 2 vols. (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1855), 2:176, 177n32, <http://www.archive.org/details/inquiryintocred02lewi>.

My research visit to Mount Vernon and the University of Virginia during the fall of 2009 not only primed my dissertation theses through helpful advice by almost a dozen Washington researchers but also facilitated an access to a plethora of valuable sources not available in Czech libraries (majority of printed sources listed in the bibliography are acquisitions from abroad). The seminal seven-volume biography by Douglas S. Freeman, an almost indispensable source for many a Washington scholar, became available to me after proposing its purchase to the National Library of the Czech Republic.

In an effort to evaluate Washington's aspirations and ascent in the context of his times, I relied heavily on the *The Papers of George Washington* of the University of Virginia. During the process of writing, I perused or browsed through Washington's complete (i.e. preserved) outgoing as well as incoming correspondence from his earliest years until nearly the time of the Declaration of Independence. Washington's rather oblique and discreet language of his letters and diaries makes it more difficult to decipher his sentiments at times, but on the other hand it discloses much about the uncommon circumspection of a man who was constantly concerned about being held in high esteem.

The "Father of his Country" was so concerned about how he would be perceived by future generations that after the Revolutionary War he revised parts of his correspondence copies from his earlier years. Despite the deletions and interpolations, the original text is still in many cases legible, which facilitates an evaluation of how Washington's aspirations were hoped to be interpreted after his mortal sojourn.

Since the contents of *The Papers of George Washington* primarily include his correspondence, the precarious nature of colonial postal service needs to be given critical consideration. In the American colonies, many correspondents in Washington's day had reasons for mistrusting that private letters would always remain private. In 1758, when in command of the Virginia Regiment, Washington discovered that some of his letters had

“fallen into the Hands of the curious.”<sup>22</sup> The confidentiality of private communication did not improve much by the time of the War of Independence, for Washington continued to hold a low opinion of the quality of the mail service. Learning that his younger brother Samuel received only one of his letters, the American general answered wryly that it was “more than I expected (notwithstanding I have wrote you several). Several of his letters to Martha and Lund Washington (distant relative and superintendent of Mount Vernon estate) did not reach their destination at all. “Such is the infernal curiosity of some of the Scoundrel Postmasters,” groaned Washington.<sup>23</sup>

John Adams, who circumspectly curtailed some details he wrote about during the Revolution, explained to Joseph Warren, “I wish I could give a Loose to my Pencil and draw Characters for your Inspection by the Dozen. But Letters dont always go safe.”<sup>24</sup> In another letter, he again warned Warren, “We cannot be too cautious I find what We write, whom We write to, and how it is conveyed.”<sup>25</sup>

During the war, letters were in danger of being intercepted by the enemy or subject to accidental delays. Mercy Warren, replying to Abigail Adams, wrote, “I wonder where Mr. Adams’s letter has been for a whole month. It might have traveled to Quebec and back again since it was wrote.”<sup>26</sup> Referring to the prevalent curiosity of furtively viewing private

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<sup>22</sup> Presley Thornton to GW, 26 September 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>23</sup> GW to Samuel Washington, 30 September 1775, in *PGW*; GW to Lund Washington, 26 November 1775, in *GWG*, see note; DSF 3:125-26.

<sup>24</sup> John Adams to James Warren, 25 October 1775, in *Warren-Adams Letters: Being Chiefly a Correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren*, 2 vols. ([Boston:] Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 1:165, <http://www.archive.org/details/letterscorrespond00warrich>.

<sup>25</sup> John Adams to James Warren, 11 February 1776, in Paul H. Smith, et al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, 25 vols., vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1976-2000), <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html/>.

<sup>26</sup> Mercy Warren to Abigail Adams, 7 February 1776, in *Warren-Adams Letters*, 1:205.

correspondence, Abigail considered her letters to her husband “a child of chance.”<sup>27</sup> Opening others’ private letters remained “to be a very Fashionable Vice” for years after the War.<sup>28</sup>

It is evident that throughout the eighteenth century, perhaps especially in times of military conflicts, personal correspondence in the American colonies was liable to interception or indiscreet handling by curious carriers. Moreover, the day after Washington wrote to Martha averring that he did not seek the chief command of the Continental Army, he penned another letter to John Parke Custis, his adoptive son, in which he mentioned his awareness of the public nature of personal communications. “As the publick Gazettes will convey every article of Intelligence that I could communicate in this Letter, I shall not repeat them,” wrote he.<sup>29</sup> In other words, despite being a primary source, Washington’s personal correspondence is treated with a sound critical approach since private letters were obviously liable to the curious eyes of those who handled them.

For the sake of original research, I deliberately avoided probing Washington’s aspirations and ascent from secondary sources as far as it was reasonable, irrespective of their level of authoritativeness within the current scholarship. The secondary sources were principally used to determine to what extent Washington’s idiosyncrasies could be considered *sui generis* on one hand or reflected conventional patterns of alike gentlemen of his times on the other.

In this dissertation, I intentionally cover some periods of Washington’s life more closely than others because of their greater relevance to my theses. While it is not possible to sequester Washington’s ascent from the rest of his life entirely, a study of Washington’s involvement in battles during the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War, for

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<sup>27</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, 15 September 1776, in *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

<sup>28</sup> Leonard Gansevoort to Peter Gansevoort, 5 March 1788, in GLMP 7, Gansevoort, General Peter, Jr. Military Papers, 1782-1795, *Gansevoort-Lansing Collection*, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

<sup>29</sup> GW to John Parke Custis, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

instance, are left out, except for pivotal events that directly influenced his ascent or respectability. His estate management and diverse farming and business pursuits during the interwar period are likewise largely skipped, except for evaluation of the most pertinent matters that reflected his unusually industrious and enterprising disposition. In some respects, Washington's ascent was culminated by his resignation at the end of the Revolutionary War rather than by his retirement from his presidential office.<sup>30</sup> My research, therefore, follows the "Father of his Country" to the pinnacle of his ovations, and not beyond, which would likely expand the dissertation into unreasonable length.

By attempting to brush away the layers of interpretation that have heaped up with the passage of time, I aim at illustrating the radically different sociocultural milieu of colonial period from the more familiar post-Revolutionary world. For the definitions of key terms such as "ambition," "honor," and "fame," I provide the reader with citations from the original edition Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language...* (1755), which immediately became the standard reference work in the Anglophone world. In several instances, the connotative meanings of crucial terms are also illustrated by excerpts from contemporary gazettes or pamphlets.

The dissertation follows Washington's ascent more or less chronologically in order to better illustrate the context of his previous achievements, conventional aspects of his rise, and the prospects he relished before anticipated events. This approach has been combined with thematic divisions, which enable an in-depth study of Washington's aspirations in relation to a specific pursuit or while occupying a particular post.

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<sup>30</sup> Wills, *Cincinnatus*, 18.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EARLY INFLUENCES

The basis of George Washington's early ascent was very similar to patterns observable in the lives his forefathers. Although both his paternal and maternal line could claim "Cavalier" descent, the "Father of his Country" had only a superficial knowledge of his ancestry. Some of his forebears served the Stuarts, and "one held Worcester for the King for a few months in 1646."<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Washington, Washington's great-great-grandfather, was born into a lesser gentry family in Northamptonshire in central England and succeeded in climbing the rungs of a social ladder to pursue a distinguished academic career.<sup>32</sup> Lawrence was elected a fellow of the Brasenose College merely days after his B. A. graduation and after receiving his M. A., Lawrence was appointed to the position of a lector, a chief disciplinarian of undergraduates, and eventually a proctor of the college. His academic career changed dramatically in about 1632 when he was offered the rectorship of the Purleigh parish in Essex. Lawrence got married and begat a son, and since marriage went against the Oxford's statutes of restricting fellowships to bachelors, he had to leave the college. Additionally, the English Civil War's fervor had a hand in Lawrence's expulsion from his parish in 1643 on probably spurious charges that he was "a common frequenter of ale houses" and "oft drunk."<sup>33</sup>

Lawrence's son John did not attend college but became involved in London's oversea commercial trade, through which he took the opportunity to visit the colony of Virginia as part of his business trip in 1657. Incidentally, he "found a patron and a wife, so he stayed."<sup>34</sup> Despite his bleak beginnings, John, like his father in his early adult years, incrementally grew

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<sup>31</sup> John R. Alden, *George Washington: A Biography* (Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 3, <http://books.google.com/books?id=sz3zHVWfocwC>; Esmond Wright, *Washington and the American Revolution* (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1973), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Martin H. Quitt, "The English Cleric and the Virginia Adventurer: The Washingtons, Father and Son," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 2 (1989): 164, 167.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-68; DSF 1:15.

<sup>34</sup> Quitt, "The English Cleric and the Virginia Adventurer," 175, 177, 179.

in social prominence. John not only married a daughter of a prosperous northern Virginia merchant, but also acquired two hundred eighty hectares of land and some capital. He served as a “vestryman, burgess, magistrate, and militia colonel . . . and died owning more than three thousand two hundred hectares, including an estate at Hunting Creek” . . . which later became Mount Vernon.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine, George Washington’s father, “owned a plantation, four thousand hectares and forty-nine slaves,” was a vestryman and a third-generation county justice, but his primary occupation was managing six iron forges near Fredericksburg, Virginia.<sup>36</sup> Among the Virginia’s gentry in the early eighteenth century, Augustine’s wealth was mediocre, but sufficient to sponsor prestigious education for his sons Augustine and Lawrence at Appleby, England, the same school he had attended. The fact that he ordered his clothes from England is an indication that he followed at least some of the distinguishing features of gentility.<sup>37</sup>

George Washington mentions his father only three times in his preserved personal correspondence, probably due to his premature death when George was only eleven years old. On the other hand, Mary Ball, George’s mother, required more filial attention from her son than he probably felt due.<sup>38</sup> Although Washington’s biographers often refer to his mother in a somewhat distant manner, Mary Ball helped young George imbibe the principles of obedience, deference, and devotion to religious matters, which traits Washington increasingly embraced in his life.<sup>39</sup>

Some of the interesting patterns within George’s bloodline reveal that his male ancestors were of an unquenchable thirst for acreage, of respectable build and stature, but

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Johnson, *George Washington: The Founding Father* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5; Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 28; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 3, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *George Washington*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; Ferling, *First of Men*, 8; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 4; James Thomas Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensable Man* (New York: Little, Brown, 1974), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Pingel, “Influence and Impact of Religion on George Washington,” 81.

were all rather short-lived (all died before reaching fifty).<sup>40</sup> Washington was acquainted with these three tendencies to some extent from conversations with his parents or older brothers. Realizing that his life echoed the first two patterns faithfully, Washington assumed his mortal sojourn was not likely to last long either.<sup>41</sup>

At the time of George's birth (February 22, 1732), the Washingtons belonged to the "second tier" of Virginia upper class society. They were in good social standing but of insignificant influence beyond their home county.<sup>42</sup> When young George began to bend his steps toward a chosen career, it was not in the direction of his father but rather of his eldest half brother Lawrence.<sup>43</sup>

Lawrence was a distinguished figure in the province when he died middle-aged. Having been educated at a renowned school in Appleby, England, Lawrence obtained a king's commission to serve as a captain in a British expedition against the Spanish during the War of Jenkins' Ear at Cartagena (today's Colombia).<sup>44</sup> Although the battle was ill-fated for the British, Lawrence retained a deep respect for his Admiral Edward Vernon, after whom he renamed his habitation at Little Hunting Creek to Mount Vernon. The ensuing decade marked a period of Lawrence's greatest prosperity. Besides inheriting a good share of property upon his father's death, he was also appointed adjutant general of the Virginia militia, a Fairfax County's justice of the peace, and elected as his county's representative to the Virginia House of Burgesses (which with the governor's council constituted the Virginia General Assembly).

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<sup>40</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> "I was now descending the hill . . . I was of a short lived family—and might soon expect to be entombed in the dreary mansions of my father's." GW to Marquis de Lafayette, 8 December 1784. See also GW to Marquis de Lafayette, 1 February 1784, GW to Adrienne, Marquise de Lafayette, 10 May 1786, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition, The American Founding Era Collection*, ed. Edward G. Lengel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2007-2010), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/GEWN.html/>; DSF 6:62, 7:582-83.

<sup>42</sup> DSF 1:frontispiece. The record of GW's birth in the family bible states February 11, 1731/32 "Old Style", the British Calendar was not adjusted until 1752 ("New Style"); Thompson, "*In the Hands of a Good Providence*", 16.

<sup>43</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 6, 45; Ferling, *Ascent*, 10; Don Higginbotham, "George Washington and Revolutionary Asceticism: The Localist as Nationalist," in *George Washington and the Virginia Backcountry*, ed. Warren R. Hofstra (Madison, WI: Madison House Publishers, 1998), 227.

In 1743, Lawrence married Anne, daughter of Colonel William Fairfax of Belvoir, whose plantation residence was neighboring that of Mount Vernon. This matrimonial connection with the Fairfaxes opened up a world of new prospects not only for Lawrence but especially for his younger brother George as well.<sup>45</sup>

Colonel William Fairfax was a respectable gentleman, whose prominence was confirmed by an appointment to the governor's council, which consisted of only twelve men. Colonel Fairfax was also an agent for his cousin Thomas Lord Fairfax, the proprietor of the Northern Neck and the largest owner of land in Virginia. George also became friends with the colonel's son, George William Fairfax, with whom he faithfully maintained a neighborly friendship. George Washington was very grateful to the Fairfaxes for their assistance in offering advantageous career opportunities. Years later when writing to his younger brother John Augustine, Washington said: "I should be glad to hear you live in Harmony and good fellowship with the family at Belvoir, as it is in their power to be very serviceable upon many occasion's to us as young beginner's . . . for to that Family I am under many obligation particularly to the old Gentleman [William Fairfax]."<sup>46</sup> Such associations with the Fairfaxes provided George with broadened horizons of opportunities and invaluable lessons of polite manners from one of the leading highborn families of Virginia.<sup>47</sup>

The "Father of his Country" did not leave behind a detailed account of circumstances with regard to his early formal schooling, therefore his biographers have typically dealt with the subject very succinctly and often with only probable inferences. Yet, I believe that Washington's awareness of his "defective education" metamorphosed into additional fuel to

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<sup>45</sup> Alden, *George Washington*, 6; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 36; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 6; GW to John Augustine Washington, 28 May 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>47</sup> Ferling, *First of Men*, 76; Alden, *George Washington*, 6.

his flaming desire to align his life with the proper standards of a respectable gentleman.<sup>48</sup> Bereaved of his father in 1743, George could not afford to attend the school at Appleby, England, like his father and both of his older half brothers.<sup>49</sup> Prior to mid-eighteenth century, there were only four colleges in the American colonies, including the relatively close College of William and Mary in his home province, but none of these academic institutions has a record of Washington's matriculation. It may be assumed that it was so in consequence of his mother's likely injunction for frugality and a need for additional helping hand at home after her husband's passing.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, Washington "began his adult life without the liberal education that was considered proper to an ideal gentleman."<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, an education young George Washington did obtain. One piece of evidence serves a seemingly insignificant letter from George Mason, Washington's neighbor and friend. In the letter (dated June 12, 1756), Mason addresses Washington "on Behalf of my Neighbour & Your old *School-fellow*, Mr Piper."<sup>52</sup> Washington Irving, one of Washington's early multivolume biographers, claims that besides the tuition of Hobby, a convict servant working as the local sexton, there was another school in the neighborhood, kept by Henry Williams, and considered more suitable for the young George.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Douglas S. Freeman allows for the possibility that young George may have attended two schools, the first taught by Hobby, and the latter taught by Reverend James Marye, which opened in

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<sup>48</sup> GW to David Humphreys, 25 July 1785, in *PGW*; Sayen, "'A Compleat Gentleman,'" 1; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> DSF 1:46; Ferling, *First of Men*, 3; Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 29; Charles Moore, ed., *George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation* (Boston: New York: 1926, reprinted 1931), 24.

<sup>50</sup> Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Sayen, "'A Compleat Gentleman,'" 17. A few members of the Virginia gentry had similarly truncated education, but such individuals were becoming increasingly detached from the colony's leadership (*ibid.*, 17n10).

<sup>52</sup> George Mason to GW, 12 June 1756, in *PGW* (my italics); Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 5, 142n27. Given the alleged proximity of Mr. Piper's residence to that of Mason's, I concur with Knollenberg that the letter probably refers to Harry Piper, who appears repeatedly in GW's correspondence and diaries, as well as in the Fairfax County Poll Sheets for 1765 and 1768, where in both cases he cast a vote for GW.

<sup>53</sup> Washington Irving, *Life of George Washington*, 5 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864), 1:22; Johnson, *George Washington*, 8.

Fredericksburg in 1740. Freeman's conclusion acknowledges some credibility of these mostly oral histories, but emphasizes that there is "no authentic record whatever of his instructors."<sup>54</sup>

However, neither Irving nor Freeman was able to read David Humphreys's long-lost manuscript of *Life of General Washington*, the only biography actually written under Washington's supervision. In it, Humphreys did mention that Washington had been taught by a "domestic tutor" (by alternate manuscript reading as "private Tutor"), which was then, as Humphreys also indicates, a common practice among those not able to afford a college education. Since Washington did not correct or add details to this part of Humphreys's manuscript, it may be supposed that despite its terseness it is reliable information.<sup>55</sup>

In Washington's day, indentured servants of shrewd intellect, or local ministers usually provided the tutoring for those not privileged to enroll in collegiate studies. One Virginia newspaper advertisement sought "a Sober Person, of good Morals, capable of teaching Children to Read English well, and to Write and Cypher, by applying to the Subscriber, at the Capitol Landing of this City, may depend on meeting with good Encouragement, as a School Master." Another one looked for "a Tutor for a private family, who, among other things, thoroughly understands the mathematics."<sup>56</sup> For instance, Virginia's

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<sup>54</sup> DSF 1:64n112; Moncure Daniel Conway, *George Washington's Rules of Civility Traced to Their Sources and Restored* (London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly, 1890), 11-12, 21-22, 33-34, 36, <http://www.archive.org/details/ofcivilitytraced00washrich>.

<sup>55</sup> Rosemarie Zagari, ed., *David Humphreys' "Life of General Washington" with George Washington's "Remarks"* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), xiii-xiv, 6, 10n 11. Freeman died in 1953, about a decade before a part of Humphreys's lost manuscripts was discovered by the historian James Thomas Flexner. Since GW's "Remarks" correct only some mistakes and leave other passages inaccurate, such as GW's birth in February 1734, Humphreys's biography should also be consulted with some caution.

<sup>56</sup> "Education in Colonial Virginia: Part II, Private Schools and Tutors," *William and Mary Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (July 1897): 5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1914792>; "Itinerant Observations in America," *London Magazine, Or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* 15 (July 1746): 329-30, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015021278463>; Matthew Moody, "Williamsburg, June 13, 1751," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), June 27, 1751, James Mercer, "October 10," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), October 15, 1767, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>.

four celebrated brothers, Richard Henry, Francis Lightfoot, William, and Arthur Lee received their “early education . . . by a private teacher.”<sup>57</sup>

Although George’s preserved schoolbooks do not disclose the name or status of his tutor, they provide the historian with a valuable record of the contents of George’s early education. The records evidence that his studies focused on arithmetic, geography, astronomy, geometry, and measuring the land, all which aptly prepared young George for his apprenticeship in land surveying which he began shortly after his studies.<sup>58</sup>

The orderliness and neatness of George’s handwriting in his schoolbooks also indicate some attempts at calligraphy. The curlicues and frequently changing handwriting suggest that George’s transcription of “Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation” was likely one of these penmanship exercises combined with social etiquette instructions his tutor led him to.<sup>59</sup> But for George’s upbringing, it was the content rather than the form of this school exercise that mattered most. The transcription of these 110 rules furnished the Virginian youth with a solid theoretical grounding that befitted, in large measure, the expectations of genteel manners at his time.

Inculcating etiquette rules into young men was nothing unusual in the early eighteenth century. The source George transcribed these maxims from was probably an extract of *Youth’s Behaviour, or Decency in Conversation Among Men*, a well-known courtesy book translated by Francis Hawkins in the previous century. The book went through about a dozen of editions and advised a good number of English gentlemen on proper bearing. Hawkins is

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Henry Lee, *Life of Arthur Lee, LL.D.*, 2 vols. (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1829), 1:12, <http://www.archive.org/details/lifeofarthurleel01leer>; Lyon Gardiner Tyler, ed., *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography*, 5 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1915), 2:19, 21-22, <http://www.archive.org/details/encyclopediavir06unkngoog>. Later, Arthur studied at Eton as well as Edinburgh, and Richard Henry enrolled in Wakefield Academy, Yorkshire.

<sup>58</sup> *George Washington Papers, 1592-1943 (bulk 1748-1799)*, *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*, Archival Manuscript Material (Collection), Library of Congress. Washington, DC, Series 1a, School Copy Book: 2 vols., 1745, <http://lcnc.loc.gov/mm78044693/>. GW’s school books were written in 1745.

<sup>59</sup> Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 5; Series 1a, Forms of Writing, and The Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation, ante 1747, in *GWPLC*, images 27-36.

believed to have drawn inspiration from late sixteenth century treatise on the subject by French Jesuits and which was used for instilling rules of conduct among those wishing to become affiliated with the “decent society” in both French and English colleges.<sup>60</sup>

Richard L. Bushman reminds us that many courtesy books, in their modern form, began to be imported into the colonies in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Concomitantly, courtesy manuals began to be published by American printing presses as well, most notably a reprint of Richard Lingard’s *Letter of Advice to a Young Gentleman* (New York, 1696) and Eleazar Moody’s, a Boston schoolmaster, *The School of Good Matters* (Boston, 1715). The *Tatler* and *Spectator* magazines, which also advised on genteel conduct, enjoyed a large readership in the American colonies.<sup>61</sup>

Like “Rules of Civility,” many commonly used genteel instruction manuals in eighteenth-century America were copies of much older books intended to reflect European aristocratic society, which only increased their value in the eyes of North American colonists. In Washington’s case, the “Rules of Civility” offered a highly practical instruction as he began to make connections with members of the Virginian fashionable elite.<sup>62</sup>

Most of the rules that George transcribed prescribe consideration and civility when in company of others. For instance, rule 1, “Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present;” rule 6, “Sleep not when others Speak, Sit

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<sup>60</sup> Conway, *Rules of Civility*, 8, 12, 17; Moore, *Rules of Civility*, 20, 26; Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 26, [http://www.uncpress.unc.edu/browse/book\\_detail?title\\_id=958](http://www.uncpress.unc.edu/browse/book_detail?title_id=958); Virgil B. Heltzel, “The Rules of Civility (1671) and Its French Source,” *Modern Language Notes* 43, no. 1 (January 1928): 18-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2914493>; Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 32. The French work was first published in 1617 under the title “Bienséance de la conversation entre les hommes.”

<sup>61</sup> Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 31-32; Richard Lingard, *Letter of Advice to a Young Gentleman Leaving the University Concerning His Behaviour and Conversation in the World* (Dublin: 1670; New York: [McAuliffe and Booth], 1907), <http://www.archive.org/details/letterofadviceto00lingrich>; [Eleazar Moody], *The School of Good Manners: Composed for the Help of Parents in Teaching Their Children how to Behave during Their Minority* (Boston: 1715; Windsor, VT: Jesse Cochran, 1815), <http://www.archive.org/details/schoolofgoodmann00wind>; Cox, *Proper Sense of Honor*, 26-27; “Settlement of the Daniel Parke Custis Estate, Appendix D: Inventory of the Books in the Estate, c. 1759”, in *PGW*.

<sup>62</sup> Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 32-33.

not when others stand, Speak not when you Should hold your Peace, walk not on when others Stop;” rule 76, “While you are talking, Point not with your Finger at him of Whom you Discourse nor Approach too near him to whom you talk especially to his face.”<sup>63</sup>

A considerable number of these rules address proper conduct with respect to social rank. For instance, rule 26, “In Pulling off your Hat to Persons of Distinction, as Noblemen, Justices, Churchmen &c make a Reverence, bowing more or less according to the Custom of the Better Bred, and Quality of the Person;” rule 37, “In Speaking to men of Quality do not lean nor Look them full in the Face, nor approach too near them at lest Keep a full Pace from them;” rule 40, “Strive not with your Superiers in argument, but always Submit your Judgment to others with Modesty.”<sup>64</sup>

Such guidelines must have been highly appreciated by young Washington, for his later years manifest giving continuous heed to the proper decorum and deferential manners. From his early age, Washington was privileged to interact with men of notable status, and as an aspiring youth he probably soon recognized the veracity of rule 56 to “associate yourself with Men of good Quality if you Esteem your own Reputation.” Esmond Wright notes, “Washington learnt his code of conduct carefully, perhaps pedantically, and he never found it easy to relax under it.”<sup>65</sup> Adhering to such “civility” and “decent behaviour” was essential in mid-eighteenth-century Virginia, if one thought of gaining respect from one’s peers.

“No testimonial to the importance of the ‘Rules’ in his personal conduct is known to exist, but circumstantial evidence” in form of eloquent and polished expressions Washington employed in his personal correspondence and the surviving accounts of the many contemporaries who found his manners particularly refined, “suggests they were formative.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Series 1a, Forms of Writing, and The Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation, ante 1747, in *GWPLC*, images 27, 34.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, images 29, 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, image 32; Wright, *Washington*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Sayen, “‘A Compleat Gentleman’,” 23.

Eighteenth-century Virginia was a “highly competitive, honor-and-shame society,” which emphasized genteel breeding, awareness of one’s position within the social rank, and cultivation of personal as well as public virtue. Paul K. Longmore posits that Washington sought adherence to the dicta of polite behavior mainly because the Virginian culture upheld them as the beau ideal of one’s self-presentation. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that George was in his teenage years already familiarizing himself with the code of conduct “by which he would win or lose good repute.”<sup>67</sup>

Another highly formative influence on young Washington may have been a book he purchased when fifteen years old from Baily Washington, his second cousin of about the same age. The book which was in his cash accounts abridged to “Scomberg” in all probability corresponds to H. de Luzancy’s *A Panegyrick to the Memory of His Grace Frederick Late Duke of Schonberg . . .*<sup>68</sup> So far, not much has been written about George’s purchase of this panegyric, much less how it may have related to his early aspirations.<sup>69</sup>

The panegyric was penned by a renegade Catholic priest who served under Schomberg in the capacity of a chaplain. Although it was published just weeks after the duke’s death, it never reached large audience.<sup>70</sup> A rare collections catalog of 1842, distributed to over two

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 29; Longmore, *Invention*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> “Gen. Washington’s Memorandum Cash Account, Sept. 10, 1747 to Oct. 14, 1749,” *Lloyd W. Smith Archival Collection* (Morristown, [NJ]: National Historical Park); Horace Edwin Hayden, *Peyton, of England and Virginia: From Virginia Genealogies* (1891; Reprinted by lulu.com, 2008), 521, <http://books.google.com/books?id=RuWSgcMrTusC>; H. de Luzancy, *A Panegyrick to the Memory of His Grace Frederick Late Duke of Schonberg, Marquess of Harwich, Earl of Brentford, Count of the Holy Empire, State-Holder of Prussia, Grandee of Spain, &c. General of All His Majesties Land Forces, and Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* (London: Garden, 1690). The original French version was printed as *Abbrégé de la vie de Frédéric duc de Schomberg* (La Haye, 1690).

<sup>69</sup> GW’s purchase of this panegyric and the possible influence it had on his life was first brought to my attention in 2009 by Theodore J. Crackel, the then editor of the *PGW*. The topic was probably first addressed in William Hale Wilbur, *The Making of George Washington* ([s.l.: Wilbur?; DeLand, FL: distributor, Patriotic Education], 1973).

<sup>70</sup> Matthew Glozier, *Marshal Schomberg 1615-1690, “The Ablest Soldier of His Age”: International Soldiering and the Formation of State Armies in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 148, <http://books.google.com/books?id=uwkBYNioUIkC>; Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 3.

dozens of libraries in Europe, listed Luzancy's panegyric under the section of *livres omis*.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that this title was not included in the comprehensive library holdings of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Montgomerie, Thomas Prince, or James Logan suggests that there were only a few copies available in the American colonies as well.<sup>72</sup>

Importantly, the fact that George was willing to spend more than two shillings for the brief panegyric suggests that its subject was highly appealing to him.<sup>73</sup> The panegyric lauds the noble virtues of the late duke whom the author considered on a par with other distinguished military leaders of his day such as Montecuccoli, Turenne, and Condé. In recounting “the Nobleness of his Mind; and of that Character of Honour, Truth, and Justice,” Luzancy refers the reader to Schomberg's strict obedience to certain set of “Rules of Civility, Breeding, and all the Accomplishments of Men of Quality.”<sup>74</sup>

I believe that Luzancy's referring to Schomberg's being “Exact” in following “the Rules of Civility” gave the fifteen-year-old George additional impulse to take the “Rules of Civility” he kept in his school exercise book to heart and emulate the manners befitting a well-bred gentleman. Delineating the illustrious achievements and moral qualities of the military hero, the panegyric was likely of particular interest to the young aspiring Virginian.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Catalogue de livres et manuscrits rares et précieux, ayant formé la bibliothèque de feu M. Rymenans* (Ghent, Belgium: Chez Hoste, 1842), 454, <http://books.google.com/books?id=HgFOylRMmo4C>.

<sup>72</sup> *Thomas Jefferson Foundation*, Thomas Jefferson's Library in LibraryThing, <http://tjlibraries.monticello.org/>; Edwin Wolfe 2nd, and Kevin J. Hayes, *The Library of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, Library Company of Philadelphia, 2006), <http://books.google.com/books?id=ibgiSlbMDPUC>; Kevin J. Hayes, *The Library of John Montgomerie, Colonial Governor of New York and New Jersey* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), <http://books.google.com/books?id=ZZtnYNZHMh0C>; *A Catalogue of the Collection of Books and Manuscripts Which Formerly Belonged to the Reverend Thomas Prince, and Was by Him Bequeathed to the Old South Church, and Is Now Deposited in the Public Library of the City of Boston* (Boston: Alfred Mudge and Son, 1870), <http://www.archive.org/details/catalogueofcolle00bost>; Edwin Wolfe, *The Library of James Logan of Philadelphia, 1674-1751* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1974), <http://books.google.com/books?id=j0i5AAAAIAAJ>.

<sup>73</sup> “Washington's Memorandum Cash Account,” *Smith*. GW purchased the panegyric for 2 shillings and 6 pence.

<sup>74</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 30.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*; Moore, *Rules of Civility*, 19.

Duke of Schomberg's life, whose military career ranked among the most prominent ones in seventeenth-century Europe, very likely has embedded some youthful aspirations in George's mind.<sup>76</sup> Luzancy spared no encomiums for the late hero, whose "Greatness and Goodness, so seldom united in others" behooves us to cultivate "admiration which us'd to attend all the Actions of his Life."<sup>77</sup> Even if George's thoughts had not been animated by an ambition of achieving wreaths of glory after reading the panegyric, in all likelihood he felt an urge for the sense of accomplishment in pondering such a figure.<sup>78</sup> After all, the eighteenth century was an era in which aspiring men read of heroes commonly with a hope of becoming more like them.<sup>79</sup>

I contend that hardly anybody else's panegyric (objectivity of the text aside) that Washington may have read in his teenage years would eventually resemble his own moral attributes as either claimed by himself or described by others. Schomberg's alleged "ample a Catalogue of his Vertues" corresponds well to many firsthand delineations of Washington's virtuous character. A few days after Washington's congressional appointment to head the American forces in 1775, Thomas Cushing attributed what may be also termed as the "Catalogue of his Vertues" to the new general: "He is a complete gentleman. He is sensible, amiable, virtuous, modest, & brave." Fisher Ames, a Congressional Representative from Massachusetts known for his eloquence and frankness, said of Washington at the time of his first inauguration to be a "virtue . . . personified."<sup>80</sup> Ames's allegorical description may seem

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<sup>76</sup> Glozier, *Marshal Schomberg*, vii-viii; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., s.v. "Schomberg, Friedrich Hermann," <http://www.archive.org/details/encyclopaediabri24chisrich>. Although orphaned within a few months after birth, Schomberg received his education under the auspices of Frederick V of Palatinate, in whose service his father had also been. He began his military career under Frederick Henry, the prince of Orange, then passed into the Swedish, French, and Dutch service. He was honored by the rank of Grandee by the king of Portugal and became marshal of France and general in the English armies. He was second in command to William III, the prince of Orange in 1688, campaigned in Ireland against James II, after which he was soon made knight of the Garter, baron, marquis, duke, and master-general of the ordnance.

<sup>77</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Wilbur, *Making of George Washington*, 133.

<sup>79</sup> Moore, *Rules of Civility*, 20; Wills, *Cincinnatus*, 110, see also 109, 111-17, 126, 129-30.

<sup>80</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 27; Richard Norton Smith, *Patriarch: George Washington and the New American Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 265, 284; John P. Kaminski, ed., *The Founders on the*

inordinately inflated verbal expression by contemporary norm, but the attention to one's pursuit of virtue was in large measure associated with the prevalent influence of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in the western world.<sup>81</sup>

In Luzancy's panegyric, young Washington read that "to be as intent to overcome our Selves, as our Enemies, is the highest improvement of Vertue," which was said to have been mastered by the late duke.<sup>82</sup> Significantly enough, Washington, too, was perceived to have developed an inner strength to subdue his temper and passions. Gilbert Stuart, author of the *Athenaeum* and the Lansdowne portraits of Washington, is said to have commented on the general's physiognomy as "indicative of the strongest and most ungovernable passions, and had he been born in the forests . . . he would have been born the fiercest man amongst the savage tribes."<sup>83</sup>

Another parallel is found in the duke's alleged fearlessness. "The most surprising dangers, never betray'd in him any fear," Luzancy recorded in his panegyric. But exactly the same was often written of the American hero as well. Since his earliest military actions, Washington demonstrated great courage and equanimity during the heat of battle. One of his biographers contended that he was endued with a "soldier's knack of fatalism that permitted him to ignore the bullets."<sup>84</sup>

Schomberg's depiction as of "an affable, Candid, and Obliging Nature" is again closely analogous to what Washington is remembered for. David Ramsay, one of the earliest Revolution's historians and Washington's biographers, noted that the general possessed

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*Founders: Word Portraits from the American Revolutionary Era* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 473, 500.

<sup>81</sup> Wills, *Cincinnatus*, 228.

<sup>82</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 28.

<sup>83</sup> Isaac Weld, *Travels Through the States of America, and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797*, 2 vols. (London: John Stockdale, 1799; repr., 1807), 1:105. <http://www.archive.org/details/travelsthroughs00weldgoog>.

<sup>84</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 31; Thomas A. Lewis, *For King and Country: George Washington: The Early Years* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 183.

“modesty without diffidence . . . politeness without affectation, affability without familiarity.”<sup>85</sup>

Young Washington may have been inspired by the fact that Schomberg’s “*duty* was his greatest Passion; and the discharge of the Noble Trusts put into his hands, his only pleasure.”<sup>86</sup> Likewise, Washington developed a patriotic sense of duty that compelled him to service throughout his life. At the depths of the Revolutionary War, Washington’s private letter to Lund, his third cousin, discloses what constituted the general’s ultimate reward no matter what the outcome of the war: “The consciousness of having done my *duty* with the strictest rectitude, and most scrupulous exactness.”<sup>87</sup> John Adams, who had nominated Washington to the command of the armies, commended him at the end of the Revolution for having been guided by “*duty*, not interest nor glory, which I think has been strictly true with the General from the beginning.”<sup>88</sup>

In matters of the standards of living, the European hero’s household and equipage were “noble . . . yet nothing of Luxury, Pride, Ostentation,” a depiction equally applicable to the American general.<sup>89</sup> If Schomberg “did not praise his own Actions,” but was “silent, as if he had not been concern’d in the things that were said of him” as Luzancy recorded, then Washington followed suit in this respect as well.<sup>90</sup> While on his tour of the United States, Brissot de Warville, a prominent Girondist, was privileged to meet with Washington one year before his election to the presidency. On this occasion, Warville remarked that the general

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<sup>85</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 28; David Ramsay, *The Life of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America: Throughout the War Which Established Their Independence; and First President of the United States* (New York: Hopkins and Seymour, 1807), 331, <http://books.google.com/books?id=TRcFAAAAYAAJ>.

<sup>86</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 29 (my italics).

<sup>87</sup> DSF 3:125-26, 7:588n149; Higginbotham, “George Washington and Revolutionary Asceticism,” 231; GW to Lund Washington, 19 May 1780, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, 39 vols., ed. John Clement Fitzpatrick (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Library, 1931-1944), <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/washington/> (my italics).

<sup>88</sup> Kaminski, *Founders on the Founders*, 485 (my italics).

<sup>89</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 29; Carol Borchert Cadou, *The George Washington Collection: Fine and Decorative Arts at Mount Vernon* (Manchester: Hudson Hills Press, 2006), 169, <http://books.google.com/books?id=GN0RmDq-8nkC>.

<sup>90</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 29.

“speaks of the American War as if he had *not* been its leader, and of his victories with a greater indifference than even a foreigner would.”<sup>91</sup>

The duke’s “sincere Attachment to any thing that was a part of Religion” resembles Washington’s support of piety. During the Revolutionary War, the general bid all his soldiers to “attend carefully upon religious exercises.” In his carefully worded Farewell Address, he viewed “religion and morality” as indispensable aids that lead toward achieving a national prosperity.<sup>92</sup>

The duke was venerated for having “finish’d a long course of Vertue and Honour.” Likewise, Washington’s character traits were often described using the same terms. In his famous eulogy, General Henry Lee employed these words: “Vice shuddered in his presence, and virtue always felt his fostering hand.” Less than a year before his election to the presidency, Washington confided to Alexander Hamilton, “I hope I shall always possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain (what I consider the most enviable of all titles) the character of *an honest man*.”<sup>93</sup>

From these passages, it is evident that Luzancy’s panegyric contains a number of plaudits that were later equally ascribed to the American general. Although I have not been able to find any explicit reference to Schomberg (or Luzancy’s panegyric) in Washington’s correspondence, there is no need to assume that this brief book had no impact on Washington, who habitually wrote elliptically or even remained silent about his intentions and aspirations. In Paul Johnson’s words, despite the preservation of a plethora of Washington’s missives and other accounts, “no man’s mind is so hard to enter and dwell within.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> J. P. Brissot de Warville, *New Travels in the United States of America, 1788*, trans. Mara Soceanu Vamos and Durand Echeverria, ed. Durand Echeverria (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1964), 344 (my italics).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 34; General Orders, 9 July 1776, Farewell Address, 19 September 1796, in *GW*.

<sup>93</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 39; Oration on the Death of General Washington, 10 *Annals of Congress* (1799), images 1305-11, <http://lccn.loc.gov/12036435>; GW to Alexander Hamilton, 28 August 1788, in *PGW*.

<sup>94</sup> Johnson, *George Washington*, 4.

To what degree Washington felt inspired to emulate Schomberg's heroic deeds and virtues based on this panegyric or to what extent Washington may have privately adjusted his perception of gentleman's role model is difficult to ascertain, but considering the fact that he cared for many of the characteristics that Schomberg was said to possess, it is reasonable to believe such a panegyric represented no trivial element in the formation of his aspirations.<sup>95</sup>

### *The Surveyor*

As far as George's early career is concerned, John E. Ferling in his *The Ascent of George Washington* writes that "young Washington was in a hurry, so much so that at age fourteen he sought to enter Great Britain's Royal Navy as a commissioned officer."<sup>96</sup> I believe that such a statement somewhat obscures the fact that "George was at a suitable age" to join the navy and his older half brother Lawrence was placed in the Royal Navy at about the same age. Besides, George did not seek this commission, it was procured and offered to him by Lawrence, who was fourteen years his senior and somewhat of a surrogate father, whom the young protégé highly respected.<sup>97</sup>

When George's widowed mother was weighing the options for her son's career, she determined to seek advice first from her bother Joseph Ball in England about sending George to sea. George's uncle recommended that "he had better be put apprentice to a tinker; for a common sailor before the mast has by no means the common liberty of the Subject; for they

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<sup>95</sup> "Settlement of the Daniel Parke Custis Estate, Appendix D: Inventory of the Books in the Estate, c. 1759", "List of Books at Mount Vernon, c. 1764" in *PGW*; P. C. Nash, comp., "Inventory and Appraisalment of the estate of Genl. George Washington Deceased (ought here to be Recorded) For inventory [book?] to Wills &c of August Court 1810 filed," in *Fairfax County Will Book J, 1801-1806, fol. 326*, "Loose Papers Files," Fairfax County Court Archives. Since Luzancy's panegyric is not listed in Mount Vernon's library inventory of 1759 or later inventories, it is conjectured that GW lent it to someone and it was never returned or possibly bestowed it to a close friend as a gift.

<sup>96</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Irving, *Life*, 1:27; Ferling, *First of Men*, 11; Zagari, "*Life of George Washington*", 7-8; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 9.

will . . . use him like a Negro, or rather, like a dog. And as for any considerable preferment in the Navy, it is not to be expected, there are always too many grasping for it here, who have interest and he has none.” Anticipating attempts at social advancement, Ball continued with a caution, “he must not be hasty to get rich . . . without aiming at being a fine gentleman before his time.” Ball’s dissuasion was accepted by his sister and George was saved from cruising the seas, where the chances of his potential advancement could not then be hoped for.<sup>98</sup>

With the navy no longer being a viable option to George, other alternatives began to be considered. It is worth mentioning that Lawrence Washington’s marriage into the wealthy and influential Fairfax family in 1743 significantly abridged the social distance between young George and the leading Virginia aristocracy—under whose auspices one could obtain various profitable vocations. One of these vocations was surveying and George’s practical education with an emphasis on geometry and geography appears to have been selected in view of its use in land surveying, possibly particularly the extensive lands in the possession of the Fairfaxes. After all, it was Lawrence and George William Fairfax, Lawrence’s brother-in-law, who provided young George with the first opportunities in survey and land speculation. George performed some initial surveys, perhaps only for practice, in August 1747, and the following spring he accompanied George William Fairfax and James Genn, the surveyor of Prince William County, on his first surveying tour in the Valley of Virginia.<sup>99</sup>

This or the following year, George was also employed in surveying Belhaven (Alexandria), a town just a few kilometers north of Mount Vernon. This was another work for the Virginian youth that was most likely secured thanks to kinship since Lord Fairfax,

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<sup>98</sup> Joseph Ball Letter Book, quoted in DSF 1:198-99; Alden, *George Washington*, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Longmore, *Invention*, 13; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 7.

William Fairfax, and George William Fairfax were then among the trustees of the town, and Lawrence, then a burgess, was assigned to report on the project to the governor's council.<sup>100</sup>

Around this time, young Washington must have resolved to make a career in land surveying since he qualified as an official surveyor of the newly created Culpeper County in July 1749 when he was only seventeen years old.<sup>101</sup> Obviously, the age at which a man began his career was closely tied to the kind of received education. Data indicate that shortly before the mid-eighteenth century, sons of Virginia gentlemen receiving a college education partly or wholly in the mother country usually matriculated between the ages of sixteen and nineteen.<sup>102</sup> It is assumed that those receiving their education by local tutors commenced their vocation earlier, yet the young age at which Washington qualified for county surveyorship was unusual. The post was usually bestowed on "well educated" and seasoned surveyors who, before they could begin their practice, "were required to submit to an examination from the learned faculty at William and Mary College."<sup>103</sup>

Among Washington's colleagues, James Wood, the founder of Winchester, was appointed the surveyor of Orange County in 1738 at the age of 31.<sup>104</sup> Drury Stith qualified for the same post for Brunswick County in 1740 when he was about 22 years old.<sup>105</sup> In 1744, Robert Harris began his practice as Louisa County surveyor when he was in his mid-forties,

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<sup>100</sup> H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Legislative Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 3 vols. (Richmond, VA: Colonial Press, E. Waddey, 1918), 2:1047, <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924031311131>. Some GW's biographers mistakenly credit Lawrence Washington for facilitating the surveying job since he was also one of the trustees of the town. Lawrence, however, was not added to the list of trustees until March 28, 1750, see DSF 1:232n65.

<sup>101</sup> Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Virginia: Containing a Collection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c. Relating to Its History and Antiquities, Together with Geographical and Statistical Descriptions* (Charleston, SC: WM. R. Babcock, 1852), 237, <http://www.archive.org/details/historicalcollec03howe>.

<sup>102</sup> "Education in Colonial Virginia: Part IV, The Higher Education," *William and Mary Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (January 1898): 174, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1914604>.

<sup>103</sup> William P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts...*, 11 vols. (Richmond, VA: R. F. Walker, 1875), 1:xxiii, <http://www.archive.org/details/calendarvirgini12palmgoog>.

<sup>104</sup> Lyon Gardiner Tyler, ed., *Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography*, 5 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1915), 1:362, <http://www.archive.org/details/encyclopediaofvi01tyleuoft>; Katherine Glass Greene, *Winchester, Virginia And Its Beginnings, 1743-1814* (1926; repr., Heritage Books, 2007), 13, <http://books.google.com/books?id=NyqePxwLkVoC>.

<sup>105</sup> Christopher Johnson, "The Stith Family," *William and Mary Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (January 1913): 188, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1914697>.

and James Shields was honored with the same assignment for York County when he was 43 or 44.<sup>106</sup> Joshua Fry qualified as the surveyor of Albemarle County in 1745 at the age of 45.<sup>107</sup> Thomas Lewis was commissioned to the same post in Augusta County in 1746 at age 28.<sup>108</sup> In 1754, Clement Read (or Reade) was appointed the surveyor of Lunenburg County when he was 47, and Buckner Stith was commissioned to this office in Bedford County when he was about 32.<sup>109</sup> William Preston did not become the official county surveyor until the creation of the Botetourt County in 1769 when he was 39.<sup>110</sup>

These findings attest that when Washington became the surveyor of Culpeper in 1749 he ranked among the youngest occupants of that office in the whole province. One of the reasons surveyors were appointed to this respectable post at an older age was that they were usually expected to first develop their surveying skills by first working as apprentices or at least deputy county surveyors (Washington served in neither of these capacities). Given his adventurous spirit and diligence, young Washington may have been deemed precocious in this field, but the fact that “the Culpeper County lay entirely within Lord Fairfax’s proprietary,” suggests that propinquity may have had a hand in lobbying for the job.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Gideon Dowse Harris, comp., *Harris Genealogy* (Columbus, MS: Keith Printing, 1914), 51, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89066158239>; Mary B. W. Edmunds, *Ancestry of Janie Blackwell Hughes (1879-1968)* (Lynchburg, VA: printed by author, 1969), 70, [http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_2tVAAAAMAAJ](http://books.google.com/books?id=_2tVAAAAMAAJ); Stella Pickett Hardy, *Colonial Families of the Southern States of America: A History and Genealogy of Colonial Families Who Settled in the Colonies Prior to the Revolution* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2003), 467, <http://books.google.com/books?id=YH69nxgFUBgC>; “Shields Family,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (October 1896): 117, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1914910>.

<sup>107</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:240; Philip Slaughter, *Memoir of Col. Joshua Fry, Sometime Professor in William and Mary College, Virginia, and Washington’s Senior in Command of Virginia Forces, 1754, Etc., Etc., with an Autobiography of His Son, Rev. Henry Fry, and a Census of Their Descendants* (Richmond, VA: Randolph and English, 1880), 20, <http://www.archive.org/details/memoirofcoljoshu00slau>.

<sup>108</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:278.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:312; “Journal of the Meetings of the President and Masters of William and Mary College,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (October 1893): 122-23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1920135>; W. S. Morton, “Clement Reade,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (July 1926): 243, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921273>; Landon C. Bell, *Cumberland Parish, Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1816: Vestry Book, 1746-1816* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1994), 150, <http://books.google.com/books?id=BHEg20JpDWkC>; Sarah S. Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Surveyors Foundation : Virginia Association of Surveyors, 1979), 82, <http://books.google.com/books?id=52XbAAAAMAAJ>; Johnson, “Stith Family,” 187, 190.

<sup>110</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:308-09; Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen*, 91.

<sup>111</sup> Conway, *Rules of Civility*, 26, 42-43; Longmore, *Invention*, 13.

In Washington's day, county surveyors were appointed by a commission from none other than the president and master of the William and Mary College. The office was also conditioned by one's subscription to "the abjuration oath and test" to ascertain one's eligibility and qualification.<sup>112</sup> Several advantages were connected with such a vocation. First, it did not require a college education, second, surveyors were regarded as occupying a social status similar to that of doctors, attorneys, or clergymen. The vocation of a county land surveyor was typically occupied by gentlemen.<sup>113</sup>

If the Fairfaxes' paternalism toward young Washington would be out of keeping with modern standards of impartiality, there was a rational justification for such a patronage in the eighteenth century. In the hierarchical colonial society, men were expected to occupy posts only commensurate with their station, but there were some parvenus and others whose rising status traversed these social barriers. The rapid upward social mobility was also Washington's case.<sup>114</sup>

Washington could not have opted for this post at a more opportune time. The population of Virginia was growing rapidly and new frontiers to the west were steadily opening up for exploration. "Since nearly all parties interested in gaining title to an area of land were required to deal with the surveyor," a skilled surveyor's wage could have been twice as large as that of a prosperous tradesman such as a weaver or tanner. Additionally, due to a shortage of cash, surveyors were often granted untenanted land—and there was plenty of it—which could then be rented or sold, thus providing further income to the owner.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Howe, *Historical Collections of Virginia*, 237.

<sup>113</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 12; Longmore, *Invention*, 13.

<sup>114</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 83.

<sup>115</sup> Edward Redmond, "George Washington: Surveyor and Mapmaker," *Map Collections*, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gwmaps.html#5>; Ferling, *Ascent*, 12.

Evidently, surveying could open the doors to substantial wealth, especially if one worked under the auspices of a member of the local elite.<sup>116</sup>

Interestingly enough, bargaining with lands had been part of the Washington family for some time. John Washington, George Washington's great-grandfather, began to acquire land soon after establishing himself in the New World. John and his brother-in-law imported at least sixty-three servants, and by claiming their "headrights," they jointly were allowed twenty hectares for each servant. By 1668, John accumulated some 2,000 hectares by additional purchases, original patents, or taking up grants of deserted land.<sup>117</sup> Augustine Washington, George's father, "was in the first heat" of purchasing new lands Robert Carter's reappointment as agent of the proprietary and signing of the Treaty of Albany (1722). So involved was Augustine in land speculation that he probably was not far from depleting his financial resources.<sup>118</sup>

George Washington's older half brothers, Lawrence and Augustine, were involved in the Ohio Company, an association engaged in trade and settlement of the Ohio River region, then a disputed territory claimed by both the British and French. The informal organization of the Ohio Company took place by fall 1747 and two years later, the company was chartered with an impressive grant of two hundred thousand hectares west of the Allegheny Mountains, between the Monongahela and Kanawha Rivers. The members of the company were absolved of paying quitrents for ten years, were to settle one fifth of the area with one hundred families within seven years, and construct a fort for defense against the French and the Indians. Among the founding members were such notables as Robert Dinwiddie, lieutenant governor of Virginia, and the Hanbury brothers, respected London merchants.

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<sup>116</sup> Turk McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects: Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98, no. 3 (July 1990): 451.

<sup>117</sup> DSF 1:17.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:34.

George Washington's eldest half brother Lawrence was even appointed its president following the death of Thomas Lee, the founder of the company.<sup>119</sup>

The early eighteenth-century Virginia was, according to Freeman, “an ambitious landed society.”<sup>120</sup> Many gentlemen in the Old Dominion were proficient in land speculation because the possession of land itself was actually one of the factors of determining one's gentry rank.<sup>121</sup> Due to the prevalence of the “landed ethos” in the Virginian culture, landed wealth was also considered more “genteel” than wealth accumulated by commercial pursuits. Eight years before the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin—no landed gentleman himself—conceded that “the only honest way” of getting rich is neither by military conquest nor trade but by “agriculture.”<sup>122</sup> As the ownership of land was a vital component of one's genteel status and prestige, young Washington's connections with the Fairfaxes, who controlled the Northern Neck, an area of over 2 million hectares, “could count themselves among the luckiest.”<sup>123</sup>

Young Washington was undoubtedly conducting himself responsibly, if not somewhat obsequiously, in his surveying responsibilities, as is apparent in his letter to Lord Fairfax, his employer, informing him of his visit the previous week (and not finding him home) just “to see whether you had any further Commands or directions to give concerning the

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<sup>119</sup> Irving, *Life*, 1:45-47; Alfred Procter James, *The Ohio Company: Its Inner History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1959), 10, <http://books.google.com/books?id=qCQdR67-YNEC>; Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington; Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private Selected and Published from the Original Manuscripts; with a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations*, 12 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847-48), 2:481, <http://www.archive.org/details/writingsofgeorge02washuoft>; William Cruise, *A Digest of the Law of Real Property*, 7 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 3:74, <http://www.archive.org/details/digestoflawofrea02cru>. Quitrent was a land charge through which the tenant was “quit and free from all other services.”

<sup>120</sup> DSF 1:1.

<sup>121</sup> Richard Beale Davis, ed., “The Colonial Virginia Satirist: Mid-Eighteenth-Century Commentaries on Politics, Religion, and Society,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 57, no. 1 (1967): 48, quoted in Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 118.

<sup>122</sup> Michal J. Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 65, 61; Ralph Louis Ketcham, ed., *The Political Thought of Benjamin Franklin* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003), 229, <http://books.google.com/books?id=mOEjB0Pd8oC&dq>.

<sup>123</sup> Sayen, ““A Compleat Gentleman?” 48.

Surveying.”<sup>124</sup> Marcus Cunliffe in his reputable biography of Washington contended that “the Proprietor was a dull, suspicious-minded man who did less to help George than his sometimes alleged.” Yet, he was the only English peer residing in the American colonies at that time and therefore his respectability was naturally such, as Cunliffe says, that it aroused awe and admiration when he came to visit Virginia in 1747 to inspect his possessions.<sup>125</sup> By this time, George recognized the great value of land as he began his purchases by obtaining a grant for 181 hectares from Lord Fairfax for “a certain Tract of waste and ungranted Land in Frederick County.”<sup>126</sup>

### *The Adjutant*

The way George Washington secured a commission to a county adjutancy discloses much about his personality and aspirations. The circumstances that led him to this office resulted from his eldest half brother Lawrence’s troubles with persistent coughs (probably tuberculosis of the lungs) in 1749 and his “thoughts of leaving Virginia” in hopes of recovering in a more balmy climate. Two years later, Lawrence’s thoughts were materialized by visiting the island of Barbados—and it was a logical choice due to its dry winters and the offer of hospitality by Gedney Clarke, a brother of Lawrence’s mother-in-law, who lived there—and since it was hazardous for him to travel alone in such health, George agreed to accompany him.<sup>127</sup> While there, George contracted smallpox, which confined him for more than three weeks, and Lawrence’s health did not improve either. “This climate has not afforded the relief I expected from it,” Lawrence wrote to William Fairfax, his father-in-law.

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<sup>124</sup> GW to Thomas, Lord Fairfax, October – November 1749, in *PGW*.

<sup>125</sup> Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 39; DSF 1:200.

<sup>126</sup> Land Grant, from Thomas, Lord Fairfax, 20 October 1750, in *PGW*.

<sup>127</sup> GW to Lawrence Washington, 5 May 1749, in *PGW*; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 8, 144n55; DSF 1:247-248.

It was decided that he sail north to Bermuda to give another island a try while George was to return home. Lawrence's health kept deteriorating and soon he also returned to Virginia only to pass away in July 1752.<sup>128</sup>

As far as George's military career is concerned, his experiences from his trip to Barbados were enriched by mingling with men of some prominence "in commercial, political, and military circles," but perhaps the most consequential event occurred on his return via Williamsburg, where he paid a visit to Robert Dinwiddie, a recently appointed governor of Virginia.<sup>129</sup> From the preserved portions of Washington's mutilated diary pages, we learn that he was to deliver some letters (presumably from some gentlemen in Barbados) to the governor, by whom he was "received Graceously" and was "enquired kindly after the health of my Br.[other] and invited me to stay and dine."<sup>130</sup>

This was the first time Washington met with an influential statesman through whom he would be offered advantageous career opportunities. Governor Dinwiddie was a fifty-nine-year old Scottish veteran with some twenty-five years of service experience while Washington was a nineteen-year old stripling "just making his way in the world." The most likely reasons Washington was offered an invitation to dinner may have been Dinwiddie's concern in prospects of Lawrence's fulfillment of his military and political offices in Virginia in view of his deteriorating health. The governor was probably also interested in George's recent stay in Barbados—Dinwiddie had been employed as the customs collector in Bermuda and later as customs inspector in Barbados—so the stately host and the young guest certainly had common topics to address.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, Dinwiddie, too, had been a frequent guest at

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<sup>128</sup> Ferling, *First of Men*, 15; DSF 1:254; *The Diaries of George Washington*, 6 vols., ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1976-79), 1:73, 31-34, <http://lccn.loc.gov/75041365/>.

<sup>129</sup> *DGW* 1:33-34.

<sup>130</sup> 26 January 1752, in *WGW*.

<sup>131</sup> DSF 1:256-57; Sayen, "'A Compleat Gentleman,'" 51-52; R. A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751-1758, Now First Printed from the*

the home of Gedney Clarke of Barbados, who like Lawrence, had married into the Fairfax family.<sup>132</sup>

In a society dominated by hierarchical patronage associations, this seems to have been a prime opportunity for George to put himself in the best light and earn confidence in the eyes of the new governor. Although only scant records have been preserved pertinent to this occasion, circumstantial evidence points to the fact that George hoped to put himself in the best light before the governor, for Lawrence still held the honorable office of Virginia's adjutant general, responsible for instructing all of the colony's militia, and both the governor and George were aware that he "would not be able to resume his duties anytime soon, if ever."<sup>133</sup> William Guthrie Sayen posits that George "may have used this occasion to position himself as the next incumbent." Dinwiddie must have received a favorable impression of the Virginian youth as is manifested in his trust in advancing George from one office to another in the following three and a half years.<sup>134</sup>

In the spring of 1752, when Lawrence neared his death and could no longer resume his military duties, it became known that due to "insufficiency of one [adjutancy]," the office was to be divided into three districts. Sensing that several vacant offices for the adjutancy increased his chances for the military post, George sent the governor what could be termed an application for the office, "If I could have the Honour of obtaining that [adjutancy] . . . should take the greatest pleasure in punctually obeying from time, to time, your Honours commands."<sup>135</sup>

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*Manuscript in the Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, 2 vols. (Richmond, VA: Virginia Historical Society, 1883), 1:xiii-ix, <http://www.archive.org/details/officialrecordso01virg>.

<sup>132</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to William Fairfax, 13 July 1739, in *DGW* 1:34.

<sup>133</sup> Wilmer L. Hall, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 6 vols., (Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library, 1945), 5:412, [http://www.archive.org/details/executivejournal\\_e05virg](http://www.archive.org/details/executivejournal_e05virg); Lewis, *For King and Country*, 33.

<sup>134</sup> Sayen, "'A Compleat Gentleman,'" 52-53.

<sup>135</sup> Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:412; *DSF* 1:266; Lewis, *For King and Country*, 33; GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 10 June 1752, in *PGW*.

On November 6, 1752, the Virginia council divided the adjutancy into not just three but four districts and named George Washington adjutant of the Southern District. The post included the bestowal of the military title of major and a salary of £100 per annum. George “was gratified” for the honor he received, “but not satisfied” fully because he had solicited and earnestly hoped to obtain the adjutancy of the Northern District since the Southern District was impractically distant for him to visit on regular basis.<sup>136</sup>

George did not give up. Learning that the new incumbent of the Northern District adjutancy was not likely to fulfill his responsibilities properly because of his recent move out of the district, George did not abandon his efforts to seek favors from men of prominence in case of a possible vacancy there. One of these gentlemen that George contacted was William Nelson, an influential member of the governor’s council, whom he acquainted with his situation. In his reply, Nelson stated that he regarded George’s argumentation “reasonable that I wish you may succeed.” How George actually succeeded is not known, but before long, his responsibilities shifted to the Northern Neck, his home district.<sup>137</sup>

George’s effort in positioning himself as a fitting candidate for the adjutancy was not a unique step in his day. Some five years later during the French and Indian War, Captain Robert Stewart of the Virginia Regiment sought the adjutancy also. Apprehensive that the colonial corps would soon degenerate into a dissolute crowd, Stewart begged Washington, who was then the commander in chief of Virginia forces, “to use your Interest with the Governor to make me an Adjutant to the Militia.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Commission as adjutant for southern district, Williamsburg, 13 December 1752, Spotsylvania County Order Book, 1749–55, p. 284, Vi Microfilm, in *PGW*; DSF 1:268; Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:412-13. GW’s commission is dated December 13, 1752, and he took the oath February 10, 1753, see *DGW* 1:118n2.

<sup>137</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 12 June 1752, William Nelson to GW, 22 February 1753, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:70; Ferling, *First of Men*, 17. Ferling claims GW was assigned to the Northern District by the end of 1753, but provides no evidence. My research yielded no specific date, but it appears it occurred between February 22, 1753 (William Nelson to GW, 22 February 1753, in *PGW*) and January 21, 1754 (Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:458).

<sup>138</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 12 December 1758, in *PGW*.

Apparently, Dinwiddie advised Stewart to take such “a back door” in case he would be disappointed in his even more ambitious military hopes. Aware of “how disagreeable it is to ask a favour of a great man,” Stewart assured Washington that he would not have entreated him, had it not been requisite in his dire circumstances. Stewart claimed that he was not influenced by pecuniary motives, which was an important disclaimer of any gentleman, for “he that wou’d for the sake of money swerve from the Principles of Honr does not merit the Title of Officer and for my own part I solemnly Declare I would rather Serve in the Ranks than deviate from my Honr.”<sup>139</sup>

When a district adjutant could not perform his duties because of other obligations, he was typically substituted by a deputy who rendered the service in return of roughly half the pay deducted from the adjutant’s. Therefore, the adjutancy was a sort of sinecure, which kind of offices was rather common in the British colonies. When George’s newly appointed deputy expected for his services more than the allegedly customary amount of money, young Washington promptly turned to the governor in hopes of justice. Explaining that the sum required by his deputy was exorbitant when it was not duly deserved, Washington justified his reasoning by referring to “Publick advantage,” as opposed to private interest.<sup>140</sup> Dinwiddie resolved the issue the following month equitably, but Washington’s reference to the fair management of the colony’s finances indicates his conviction that his service was strictly public-spirited.

With respect to Washington’s securing the adjutancy (even the district of his choice), one may wonder how could he as a young man with no military experience or training land such a plum post. But Washington’s accelerated social rise in his adolescent years could be accredited to a couple of factors. First, that he grew up in the shade of propitious family connections and acquaintances is not to be disputed.

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 20 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>140</sup> Alden, *George Washington*, 9; DSF 1:430; GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 21 August 1754, in *PGW*.

Lawrence Washington's regular commission in the Cartagena expedition, Virginia's adjutancy, marriage into the Fairfax family, trusteeship of Alexandria, membership in the House of Burgesses (and in an influential Committee of Propositions and Grievances), and leadership in the Ohio Company were some of the credentials of a man who could proficiently lobby in the interests of his younger half brother.<sup>141</sup>

George was also fortunate to be employed under the auspices of Lord Fairfax, a legendary figure in his own right, and was privileged to befriend and accompany Lord Fairfax's cousin George William on his surveying expeditions. William Fairfax, Lawrence's father-in-law, was a member of the upper house of the General Assembly, thus one of the closest associates of the colony's governor. Freeman regards him as a "man who had done more than any other single individual to counsel and to advance young George."<sup>142</sup> It was also advantageous that on his way back from Barbados, George met with a newly appointed governor who had previously spent two decades working in the Caribbean and had been a frequent visitor at the Clarkes' household, George's principal hosts.<sup>143</sup>

Second, as Ferling explains, although George cultivated his kinship ties with a degree of assiduousness, "his patrons had not gone to bat for him solely because of family ties and kindness." They knew that George had not only demonstrated high degree of industry on his own but he was physically conspicuous as well. He was of a very large stature.<sup>144</sup> If the median height of American males in mid-eighteenth-century Virginia was merely 165 cm and Washington rose to at least 183 cm, he towered over most of his contemporaries.<sup>145</sup> His

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<sup>141</sup> Sparks, *Writings of George Washington*, 2:481; DSF 1:66, 71, 76, 229, 266; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1742-1747, 1748-1749*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1909), 7:78, 157, 258, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouseo07virg>. Lawrence's grandfather and great-grandfather had also served on the same committee, see DSF 1:229n40.

<sup>142</sup> DSF 1:266.

<sup>143</sup> Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:xiii-ix; Robert Dinwiddie to William Fairfax, 13 July 1739, in *DGW* 1:34.

<sup>144</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 13.

<sup>145</sup> John Ferling, "Soldiers for Virginia: Who Served in the French and Indian War?," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 94, no. 3 (July 1986): 307-28. There are some discrepancies of statements

physique was imposing as well. The earliest known physical description of Washington comes from Captain David Kennedy, who depicted him during the French and Indian War as “about 6 foot [183 cm] high of a Black Compection, Black hair which he then wore in a Bag, looks like a Forrener, a Strong Man . . . his uniform . . . Bleau faced with Red and Laced.”<sup>146</sup>

However, perhaps the most detailed account of Washington’s personal appearance comes from Captain George Mercer, who is said to have included the following comprehensive description (which deserves its rather lengthy transcription here) in his letter in 1760 to his friend in England:

Straight as an Indian, measuring six feet two inches [188 cm] in his stockings, and weighing 175 pounds [80 kg] . . . His frame is padded with well-developed muscles, indicating great strength. His bones and joints are large, as are his hands and feet. He is wide shouldered but has not a deep or round chest; is neat waisted, but is broad across the hips and has rather long legs and arms. His head is well-shaped, though not large, but is gracefully poised on a superb neck. A large and straight rather than a prominent nose; blue gray penetrating eyes which are widely separated and overhung by a heavy brow. His face is long rather than broad, with high round cheek bones, and terminates in a good firm chin. He has a clear though rather a colorless pale skin, which burns with the sun. A pleasing, benevolent, though a commanding countenance, dark brown hair, which he wears in a cue. His mouth is large and generally firmly closed, but which from time to time discloses some defective teeth. His features are regular and placid with all the muscles of his face under perfect control, though flexible and

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concerning GW’s height. For 183 cm, see GW to Robert Cary & Company, 30 November 1759, or GW to Richard Washington, 20 October 1761, or GW to Charles Lawrence, 26 April 1763 and 20 June 1768, in *PGW*. For “clear six feet high [183 cm] without his shoes,” see Zagari, *Life of General Washington*, 7. For 188 cm, see Lewis, *For King and Country*, 6. For 191 cm, see Ferling, *Ascent*, 13. For “6 ft. 3-1/2 inches [192 cm] exact,” see Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 14 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893), 14:252, <http://books.google.com/books?id=AT12AAAAMAAJ>. The size of GW’s ordered clothes cannot be taken at face value as is explained by GW himself, “I shoud have Inclosed you my measure but in a general way they are so badly taken here that I am convinced it woud be of very little service” GW to Charles Lawrence, 26 April 1763, in *PGW*.

<sup>146</sup> Captain David Kennedy’s description of GW in Gen. Loudoun’s diary, 27 February 1757, Loudoun Papers, Huntington Library, quoted in Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 47. Kennedy’s description is based on his personal observations of the young colonel in early 1756.

expressive of deep feeling when moved by emotions. In conversation, he looks you full in the face, is deliberate, deferential and engaging. His voice is agreeable rather than strong. His demeanor at all times composed and dignified. His movements and gestures are graceful, his walk majestic, and he is a splendid horseman.<sup>147</sup>

When evaluating this detailed and estimable depiction of Washington, one needs to take into account at least a few facts pertaining to the historical context. Mercer had not only been a member of Washington's First Regiment, but also served as his aide-de-camp during which time he struck up a personal acquaintanceship with Washington who was basically his peer. If the author truly penned these lines in 1760, it was at a time when he cooperated with Washington in surveying frontier lands and shortly before Washington endorsed his candidacy by "join[ing] interests" (the then term for a political alliance) in an effort to help him succeed in the Frederick County's Burgess election. With that in view, one cannot be surprised by Mercer's favorable representation of his close associate; but despite the fact that amity is suspected to have influenced the author's diction, the account remains credible mainly because it is corroborated by numerous later depictions of the American hero.<sup>148</sup>

Taking into consideration Washington's felicitous kinship ties, great industry, imposing physical appearance, and self-possession, one comes to a better understanding why he was perceived profitably by men of high standing and could, therefore, ascend the social scale faster than others. At age seventeen and without first becoming an apprentice, George became the official surveyor of the newly created Culpeper County, which earned him 50

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<sup>147</sup> Quoted in Joseph Meredith Toner, *George Washington as an Inventor and Promoter of the Useful Arts* (Washington, DC: Gedney and Roberts, 1892), 20, <http://www.archive.org/details/georgewashington00tone>; Karin Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America," in Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 263; Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 162. In contrast to the fashionable and formal wear of a wig by gentlefolk, GW preferred to have his hair powdered for social occasions.

<sup>148</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:289; GW to Van Swearingen, 15 May 1761, in *PGW*; Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 45; DSF 3:6n. Despite the fact that the original letter is nowhere to be found, scholars generally regard it as a plausible description—though Freeman suspects it may have been "touched up."

pounds annually. Despite no military training, he secured the adjutancy of the Southern District, which post required minimal duties from Washington and was thus “largely honorary and used as a route to preferment.”<sup>149</sup> Believing that the reasons for relocation of his adjutancy to his home district were reasonable and came at an opportune moment, George persisted in his efforts until Dinwiddie consented. Besides his eight hundred hectares in the Shenandoah Valley and additional holdings at Ferry Farm and Deep Run, George also gained more property after Lawrence’s death. Soon afterward, he transferred from the modest Ferry Farm to Mount Vernon, which neighbored Belvoir, an estate of the Fairfaxes. By this time, George was well established with respect to his age and the only thing that would complete his domestic felicity was a wife.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Zagari, “*Life of George Washington*”, 103; *DGW* 1:118.

<sup>150</sup> Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 42; *DGW* 1:118.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “HONOUR AND GLORY”

Washington lived in an age during which the European forces prepared for their final struggle for domination of the North American continent. The British had permanently settled Virginia since 1607 and the French established their first permanent settlement in Canada only one year later. “Thereafter hostilities, intermittent but sometimes intense, had been waged between the two nations in North America for 150 years.” The Dutch ambitions had been minimized by the British in 1667 when New Amsterdam was renamed New York. The grand colonizing endeavors included the Spanish as well, who claimed territories in the south, including Florida and threatened to invade the neighboring Georgia.<sup>151</sup>

Although the British greatly outnumbered the French, their major competitor for the American colonies, the English-speaking population was concentrated only along the Atlantic coast, leaving the extensive interior regions under the French domination. The Franco-British border, especially in the upper Ohio Valley (the Virginians referred to it as the Ohio country), was not clearly fixed, causing additional tension between the two powers.<sup>152</sup> In 1749, the French authorized Céloron de Bienville to repel Virginian and Pennsylvanian traders that had crossed the mountains and disturbed the Indian fur trade in territory the French claimed as theirs. The tensions between the two powers escalated in 1753, when a French force of some 1,500 soldiers was positioned on the southern banks of Lake Erie and began constructing a series of forts.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Johnson, *George Washington*, 23-24.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 25; Ferling, *Ascent*, 15.

<sup>153</sup> Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe: France and England in North America*, part VII, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1907), 1:40, 93, 136, <http://www.archive.org/details/montcalmwolfe01parkuoft>; Jacob Nicolas Moreau, *Mémoire contenant le précis des faits, avec leurs pièces justificatives, pour servir de réponse aux observations envoyées par les ministres d'Angleterre, dans les cours de l'Europe* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1761), 16, <http://www.archive.org/details/mmoirecontenant00napigoog>.

“Of all the colonial governors, only Dinwiddie [governor of Virginia] seems to have been exercised by these considerable encroachments,” partly because other colonies had their western boundaries already established. Pennsylvania could have become involved in the clash of interests as well, but since the western boundary was set at “five degrees in longitude” of the Delaware River, their concerns were only marginal. Moreover, their Quaker-dominated government eschewed involvement in any military hostilities.<sup>154</sup>

Dinwiddie’s vexation went hand in hand with his generally dynamic nature, but economic interests were in play as well. The Ohio Company, some of whose shares the governor purchased, had been granted from the British government extensive land (two hundred thousand hectares) between the Monongahela and Kanawha Rivers, with the stipulation that it would be settled and protected.<sup>155</sup>

In June 1753, the Virginian governor dispatched a clear message to London, “I hope you will think it necessary to prevent the French taking Possession of the Lands on the Ohio.”<sup>156</sup> Meanwhile, steps were being taken by the governor’s council to expedite defensive measures. William Russell was entrusted with the task of delivering a letter of inquiry to the French, but he did not succeed in calling on the French commandant.<sup>157</sup> Washington was probably apprised of the increasingly strained situation in the upper Ohio in general terms, but the person from whom he learned the most updated and accurate details was most likely William Fairfax. This gentleman was a member of the governor’s council and its executive journals show that he was typically assigned to handle issues related to the frontier regions.

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<sup>154</sup> Lewis, *For King and Country*, 39; Francis Newton Thorpe, comp. and ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America*, 7 vols., (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 5:3036, <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924019912066>.

<sup>155</sup> Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:xi, 18n23; James, *Ohio Company*, 45-47, 46n53; Irving, *Life*, 1:46.

<sup>156</sup> *Public Record Office*, Colonial Office 5, 1327, quoted in *DGW* 1:126.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to the Lords of the Board of Trade, 17 November 1753, in Sparks, *Writings of George Washington*, 2:430.

William Fairfax is the most likely person from whom Washington could have gotten word of Russell's only partially accomplished mission and the need for a second-stringer.<sup>158</sup>

Washington contemplated and weighed this opportune prospect that had arisen. His recent appointment to the adjutancy of the Southern District, though appreciated, was not expected to give him that kind of military action he may have hoped for. In all probability, reflecting on his modest inheritance and education, Washington continued to seek for opportunities for recognition that would, to an extent, supplement these early deficiencies. Washington did not hesitate. He determined to volunteer to inspect the French forces in the upper Ohio himself. Washington set out for Virginia's capital to meet the governor in person.<sup>159</sup>

The details of their meeting is unknown, but at a council session held October 27, 1753, Dinwiddie "acquainted the Board that George Washington Esq<sup>r</sup> Adjutant General . . . had offered himself to go properly commissioned to the Commandant of the French Forces, to learn by what Authority he presumes to make Incroachments on his Majesty's Lands on the Ohio." Subsequently, the proposal was sanctioned and Washington was issued official gubernatorial documentation to accompany him on his journey.<sup>160</sup>

The governor's authorization to become his official emissary evinces his great trust in the precocious Virginian youth. Surely, there were others that Dinwiddie could have assigned to go, but Washington's spirit and enthusiasm for the service seems to have tipped the balance in his favor. Despite suffering from the effects of paralysis, Dinwiddie, too, was a man of

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<sup>158</sup> DSF 1:273; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 11. Fairfax's earlier persuasion of Russell to act as a messenger and warn the French is mentioned in Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:433. For Fairfax's management of frontier issues, see Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:420, 427-29, 433-34, 440.

<sup>159</sup> DSF 1:273.

<sup>160</sup> Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:443-44; Commission from Robert Dinwiddie, Instructions from Robert Dinwiddie, Passport from Robert Dinwiddie, 30 October 1753, in *PGW*; Robert Dinwiddie to M. de St. Pierre, 31 October 1753, in E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons, 1858), 10:258, <http://www.archive.org/details/documentsrelativ10brod>. GW was presented with the governor's commission, instructions, passport, and letter to the French commandant.

“vigilance, zeal, and activity,” whose administration records evidence an amount of work that would have been creditable to one whose health was one’s forte. Thus, Washington’s unusual alacrity to serve the colony’s interests must have accorded well with the governor’s objectives.<sup>161</sup>

Hardiness and audacity were expedient qualities of a man willing to fulfill this uneasy assignment. The French forts were constructed on the southern banks of the Lake Erie, some eight-hundred-kilometer distance from the Virginia’s capital. The route included crossing the Allegheny Mountains, traversing through long stretches of wilderness and being exposed to the harsh conditions of the wintry weather as well as dangers of an unexpected encounter with any unfriendly Native Americans. True, Washington had explored the Shenandoah Valley and some of the lands beyond to the northwest up to the Wills Creek as part of his earlier surveying expedition as a sixteen-year old, but this time, he would have to travel twice as far and enter a disputed territory now occupied by armed French soldiers.<sup>162</sup> The fact that Washington volunteered for such a task unveils some of the fearless and daring nature of his young ambitious character.

Washington spared no time and the very day he received the commission he set out from Williamsburg. He did not undertake the journey alone, for he was joined by an interpreter Van Braam, an experienced explorer Gist, and four other men.<sup>163</sup> On the way there, Washington met with a number of Indians, including the Seneca’s chief Half-King (Tanacharison) who turned out to be a faithful English ally.<sup>164</sup> Arriving at Fort Le Boeuf, Washington delivered Dinwiddie’s letter to Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, the French

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<sup>161</sup> Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:xi.

<sup>162</sup> *DGW* 1:6-23.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:130.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 133n29.

commandant, waited for his reply, and inspected and took notes as far as he could of the French garrison, their numbers and force, as he had been instructed.<sup>165</sup>

In the rather detailed narrative of his experiences, which he intended to submit to Dinwiddie, Washington also related a couple of life-threatening incidents that occurred to him during the return journey—being shot at by a duplicitous Indian guide and falling off a raft and plunging into an icy river during an “extream[ely]” freezing day. Washington’s journal not only contains valuable strategic information that was serviceable to the governor but, inferentially, it also shows the character of a young and sturdy Virginian who could be entrusted with further alike duties.<sup>166</sup>

Washington’s account of his journey was concluded subserviently, “I hope it will be sufficient to satisfy your Honour with my Proceedings; for that was my Aim in undertaking the Journey: & chief Study throughout the Prosecution of it.” Arguably, Washington apprehended that history could be in the making in that increasingly contested region. Taking particular care in complying with the Dinwiddie’s prescriptions not only gratified his natural craving for distinguished patriotic service but the tall Virginian may have also sensed that it could further increase his credibility in the governor’s eyes and thus lead to a potentially promising turn in his early career.<sup>167</sup>

Shortly after Washington’s mission to the French commandant was accomplished, things hardly ever appeared more auspicious to the young man. Dinwiddie was impressed to the extent that he ordered Washington’s journal be set in print without delay. Moreover, the governor sent a copy to the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, to the Board of Trade, and a number of other British colonial governors. The journal appeared in full in the

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:147-52. The English translation of Saint-Pierre’s answer to Dinwiddie is printed in *DGW* 1:151.

<sup>166</sup> *DGW* 1:155-56.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:158.

*Maryland Gazette* and *Boston Gazette*, in large part in the *London Magazine* for June 1754, and in England it was additionally distributed in the form of a pamphlet.<sup>168</sup>

Washington's firsthand account of his journey was published at a time of growing tension between Britain and France, when citizens of both nations were increasingly hungry for reports on the developing conflict in the strategic region of the upper Ohio Valley. Thus, Washington's name became familiar to a number of military and political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic when he was merely twenty-two years old. It seemed as though the timing of historical events were on the young and aspiring man's side.

#### *"The Art Military"*

Having won his governor's confidence, Washington's career prospects soon began to shift from land surveying to soldiering. Less than a week after Washington's arrival from his successful mission to Fort Le Boeuf, the governor's council motioned for "a Draught of One Hundred Men" from the Frederick and Augusta Counties for the defense of English settlements on the Ohio and that "the cheif [*sic*] Command be given to Major Washington," now adjutant of the Northern District. Dinwiddie instructed Washington "to use all Expedition . . . to finish & compleat in the best Manner, & as soon as You possibly can the Fort which I expect is there already begun by the Ohio Compa." at the confluence of the Monongahela and

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<sup>168</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; to Which Are Added the Governor's Letter and a Translation of the French Officer's Answer; with a New Map of the Country as Far as the Mississippi* (Williamsburg, VA: Williamsburgh Printed, 1754; London: T. Jefferys, 1754), <http://www.archive.org/details/journalofmajorge00wash>; Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:93, 98, 85-88, 91, 129; Sparks, *Writings of George Washington*, 2:431; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 15-16; *London Magazine, Or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* 23 (June 1754): 271-74, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015021267755>.

Allegheny Rivers.<sup>169</sup> To encourage enlistment of volunteers, the governor pledged to apportion 80,000 hectares of land by the Ohio River among them after their service.<sup>170</sup>

Washington accepted the command without hesitation but before departing, he sent out an aspirant application to Richard Corbin, a prominent member of the governor's council, in which he expressed his belief that he deserved a promotion "above that of a Major, and to be ranked among the chief officers of this expedition." In other words, Washington hoped to be a visible figure among the servicemen. And since Corbin's word had a direct influence upon the appointment of officers for the expedition, Washington's hopeful prospects were soon materialized; on March 15, 1754, Dinwiddie sent him the commission as lieutenant colonel of the Virginia Regiment.<sup>171</sup> It was another instance in which Washington's astuteness was manifested by knowing whom, when and how to contact to achieve his purposes.

Besides his negotiating competence, Washington appears to have been truly appreciative to the governor for the assignment and vowed to "implicitly obey your Honour's Commands," employing the word "honour" eight times in his letter of only two paragraphs.<sup>172</sup> As lieutenant colonel, Washington was to serve under Colonel Joshua Fry, a distinguished mathematician and cartographer as well as a member of the House of Burgesses.<sup>173</sup>

But it did not take very long before Washington's acute sense for justice and fairness identified a few issues of colonial army service. What was particularly vexing to him and allegedly to his officers was a great discrepancy of pay between forces commissioned by the colony and forces commissioned by His Majesty with almost double their pay. Washington expatiated on the subject in his letter to Colonel William Fairfax, whom he expected to

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<sup>169</sup> Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:460; *DGW* 1:162; Robert Dinwiddie to GW, January 1754, in *PGW*. The site of the fort had been recommended by GW, see *DGW* 1:132.

<sup>170</sup> Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:462.

<sup>171</sup> GW to Richard Corbin, [February – March 1754], Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 15 March 1754, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:158-59; *DGW* 1:174.

<sup>172</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 20 March 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>173</sup> Slaughter, *Memoir of Col. Joshua Fry*, 18, 27-29; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1752-1755, 1756-1758*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1909), 8:vii, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouse08virg>.

accompany the governor to Winchester, where a conference was planned with the chiefs of the Six Nations on an allied resistance against the French, and hoped that the respected member of the governor's council could put in a word for him on the way there.<sup>174</sup>

“Slaving dangerously for the shadow of pay . . . upon such ignoble terms” was degrading to Washington. But lest he be misunderstood and accused of avarice, the young Virginian stated emphatically, “let me serve voluntarily” if needs be, for then it would prove that his expectation of reward consisted of nothing else “than the satisfaction of serving my country.”<sup>175</sup>

Dinwiddie found Washington's complaints inopportune and unfounded since the terms of service were known from the beginning and Colonel Fry's corps, though they served on the same conditions, did not complain to him. Nevertheless, Dinwiddie's cutting rejoinder avouched his continuing patronage, “You may believe I shall not let Your Merit pass unnoticed.”<sup>176</sup> Proving his worthiness, after all, was one of Washington's prime goals on this expedition.<sup>177</sup>

While on his march to the upper Ohio, Washington received the news that the French had already seized the British fort. Rather than continuing the march and facing the French forces, which were estimated at one thousand, Washington determined to halt at the Redstone Creek and construct another fort while awaiting further reinforcements.<sup>178</sup>

Having been warned by Seneca's Half-King that he had discovered tracks leading to what he believed was a party of French soldiers that was lurking “in a low obscure Place” a few kilometers off, Washington took forty of his men and set out to a nearby Indian camp to

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<sup>174</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 18 May 1754, 27 May 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>175</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 18 May 1754, 27 May 1754, in *PGW*. GW's letter to Fairfax has not been preserved, but is referred to in the former of these two letters.

<sup>176</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 25 May 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>177</sup> GW to Richard Corbin, [February – March 1754], in *PGW*. For GW's lengthy refutation of Dinwiddie's arguments concerning colonial soldiers' wages, see GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 29 May 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>178</sup> *DGW* 1:177, 180.

counsel with the Half-King about what steps should be taken.<sup>179</sup> The historical records show that the spied French troop under commander Jumonville had been ordered by Captain Contrecoeur to reconnoiter the British positions in the region and deliver to them his letter of warning. If the British were unwilling to retreat from the French territory peacefully, then Contrecoeur, as he had sternly warned in his message, would “repousser la force par la force.”<sup>180</sup> Obviously, an armed clash was imminent.

Washington’s and the Half-King’s council at a nearby Indian camp occurred in the early hours of May 28, 1754. The resolution of the council was unambiguous, they would “fall on them together.” Thereupon, they set out and quietly approached the French force within sight. Upon being discovered, the French “ran to their Arms” and Washington ordered his company to fire. The skirmish lasted only about “a Quarter of an Hour, before the Enemy was routed,” Washington wrote. In the ambush, the British lost only one man and had a couple of men wounded, while the French lost ten men, including their commander, had one wounded, and twenty-one were made prisoners.<sup>181</sup>

The clash was not left unanswered and the French later retaliated. The conflict then developed into a general war known as the French and Indian War, which was part of the Seven Years War—sometimes termed as the first world war since it was fought in North, Central, and South America, the Caribbean, the Atlantic, Europe, and Asia.<sup>182</sup> In that initial skirmish, Washington said he stood in the direction of most of the enemies’ fire, where the British suffered most of their casualties, but remained unharmed. In his letter to his younger

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 1:191-95; GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 29 May 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>180</sup> Moreau, *Mémoire*, 104-106. The instructions of Contrecoeur to Jumonville were alike those of Dinwiddie to GW, cf. Robert Dinwiddie to GW, January 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>181</sup> *DGW* 1:195; GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 29 May 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>182</sup> Johnson, *George Washington*, 30.

brother John Augustine (Jack), Washington wrote of his first taste of battle, “I heard Bullets whistle and believe me there was something charming in the sound.”<sup>183</sup>

Given the great thirst for information on the developing conflict, Washington’s letter reporting what turned out to be one of the key initial skirmishes of the French and Indian War was copied by an unknown hand and sailed to the other side of the Atlantic. Thus, for the second time in 1754, Washington’s remarks enjoyed a wide readership by appearing in the famous *London Magazine*.<sup>184</sup> Not surprisingly, Washington’s catchy phrase about finding whistling bullets charming intrigued even the very George II who is said to have commented wryly, “He would not say so, if he had been used to hear many.”<sup>185</sup>

Whatever opinion the British monarch may have formed about the rising Virginian soldier, Washington kept acting on a stage closely watched by an international audience. The area Washington was sent into was the focus of the developing struggle for supremacy over the upper Ohio region, and if he hoped to achieve some visibility among military officers of his day, he was clearly at the right place at the right time.

As far as Washington’s clash with Jumonville’s men was concerned, it was decried by the French for being a breach of military protocol. Dinwiddie, on the other hand, found Washington’s report of his first engagement “very agreeable.”<sup>186</sup> And since more fighting was expected, Washington was promised to receive reinforcements from Colonel Fry’s and Captain McKay’s men. However, before arriving, Colonel Fry suffered fatal injuries after

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<sup>183</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 31 May 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>184</sup> GW’s letter was published in full in *London Magazine* 23 (August 1754): 370-71.

<sup>185</sup> Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Second*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1846), 1:400, <http://www.archive.org/details/memoirsreignkin01hollgoog>.

<sup>186</sup> *DGW* 1:195n59; GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 29 May 1754, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 1 June 1754, in *PGW*. For the French account of the attack, see Monsieur Druillon to Robert Dinwiddie, 17 June 1754, in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:225-27. Half-King claimed to have killed Jumonville to avenge the death of his father at the hands of the French, see Frederick Webb Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, 2 vols., (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1907-10), 1:526-27, <http://www.archive.org/details/handbookamerica04unkngoog>; Stuart Leibiger, “‘To Judge of Washington’s Conduct’: Illuminating George Washington’s Appearance on the World Stage,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 107, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 37-44. My interpretation of GW’s role in the skirmish tends to be less judgmental than Leibiger’s.

falling from his horse.<sup>187</sup> Upon learning of Colonel Fry's (Washington's superior in command) death, Dinwiddie promptly dispatched a commission to none other than Washington authorizing him to command the Virginia Regiment. Even though Washington was to yield command after the arrival of James Innes of North Carolina, the commander in chief of all the colonial forces, and other anticipated companies with royal commissions, it was the highest military honor hitherto bestowed on Washington.<sup>188</sup>

In his verbose letter, Washington duly acknowledged his gratitude for his commission to the governor and charted out his objectives in his military service, "I want nothing but opportunity to testify my sincere regard for your Person, to whom I stand indebted for so many unmerited favours." Like after his commission to lieutenantcy earlier that year, the rate of Washington's use of the word "honour" in his letter to the governor reflected subservience. He used the honorific not less than forty times now in an effort to requite the governor's favors.<sup>189</sup>

In the British colonial society of mid-eighteenth century, the term "honour" served many functions. The diverse definitions of the word fill the full folio page of Samuel Johnson's renowned *Dictionary*. Douglass Adair explains that the concept of honor served as "an instrument of social control" and was traditionally reserved to the "elitist . . . small male in-groups" of gentry descent.<sup>190</sup> The frequent (if not excessive in this case) repetition of that word signaled Washington's intention to show proper deference to his superior.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> "Copy of a Letter from a Gentleman Who Attended His Honour the Governor to Winchester," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 11, 1754, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>; Slaughter, *Memoir of Col. Joshua Fry*, 34; Horatio Sharpe to John Sharpe, 19 April 1755, in William Hand Browne, ed., *Archives of Maryland: Correspondence of Governor Horatio Sharpe*, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1888), 1:198, <http://aomol.net/000001/000006/html/index.html>.

<sup>188</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 4 June 1754, in *PGW*; Robert Dinwiddie to James Innes, 4 June 1754, in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:194-95; Lewis, *For King and Country*, 148.

<sup>189</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 20 March 1754, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>190</sup> *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. "honour"; Douglass Adair, "Fame and the Founding Fathers," in *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair*, ed. Trevor Colbourn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 10.

<sup>191</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, "The Classical Theory of Deference," *American Historical Review* 81 (1976): 516.

Additionally, Washington did not fail to notify the governor of an event of significant deferential connotations. Aware of the declining years of her old age, Queen Allaquippa, a Delaware sachem, desired her son “who is really a great Warriour” to be honored by receiving an English name.<sup>192</sup> By the advice of the Half-King, Washington sat in council with the Indians and presented the sachem’s son with a medal in remembrance of the British monarch and called him after Colonel Fairfax, which allegedly signified “the first of the Council,” which was accepted with great satisfaction. Washington was then told that the Half-King would be pleased by an English name as well, “which made me presume to give him that of your Honour’s, and call him Dinwiddie—Interpreted in their Language the head of all.”<sup>193</sup> At the solemn ceremonial occasion of bestowing a name (a seal of friendship between the Indians and the white man), Washington paid tribute to the two individuals who had been instrumental in providing him with service opportunities he had sought. Washington’s early career had been much advanced with the help of these two patrons.<sup>194</sup>

If Washington indicated that he sought “oppertunity to testifie” of his high regard for the colonial governor, Dinwiddie’s subsequent expressions of approbation of his dutiful conduct gave him “more pleasure than any thing.” But one thing was disquieting for the young colonel. Expecting that James Innes would soon assume command over his troops, Washington felt he would be deprived of opportunities to “convince yr Honr, my Friends, and Country of my diligence, and application to the Art Military.” Washington’s sentiments were based on his awareness that the chief commander typically receives the closest public

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<sup>192</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*; Hodge, *American Indians*, 1:45. On his earlier expedition to the Fort Le Boeuf, GW received from the Half-King the name of *Caunotaucarius*, which translates into English as “the Towntaker”, see Zagarri, “*Life of General Washington*”, 10.

<sup>193</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 27 June 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>194</sup> Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:222n143. GW’s beloved half brother Lawrence was another significant patron in his early career. I do not know whether GW intended to honor his eldest half brother at this occasion, but due to having the same last name, the bestowal of Lawrence’s surname could have been misunderstood as self-seeking on GW’s part, had he done so.

attention. “A Head will soon arrive to whom all Honour and Glory must be given,” groaned Washington.<sup>195</sup>

So far, Washington had taken the lead in carrying out the colony’s orders and asserting the British right for the Ohio territory. The tall Virginian may have thought that having been in the forefront of the developing conflict enabled him to convince others of his diligence and dedication to his office. In this context, Washington’s plea for further opportunities to convince Dinwiddie of his military diligence and apprehension that honor would be given only to the commander ring with an intimation for a desire to remain in the foreground of military action.

It is presumable that Washington’s intimated hopes for maintaining a conspicuous role in the Franco-British conflict were most likely undergirded by a desire to achieve that which he mentioned would be accredited to the chief commander, “Honour and Glory.”<sup>196</sup> Besides the fact that honor typically connotated with men of high birth and was thus a means of regulating social relations, Adair also notes that one’s “sense of honor,” which is associated with “a sense of due self-esteem, of proper pride, of dignity appropriate to his station,” primarily represents an individual’s private ethic with respect to his social status and identity.<sup>197</sup> Honor, extolled one English poet, may even act as “the moral Conscience of the Great!”<sup>198</sup>

Gordon S. Wood adds that honor served as another term for a good reputation, “and was akin to glory and fame.”<sup>199</sup> Honor implied the existence of a “public drama” where gentlemen’s roles were subject to either a praise or censure. Thus, the pursuit of honor could have entailed refraining from certain acts as well as seeking action. In fact, “honor and

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<sup>195</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Adair, “Fame and the Founding Fathers,” 10.

<sup>198</sup> William d’Avenant, *Gondibert: An Heroick Poem* (London: Printed for John Halden, 1651), 195, <http://www.archive.org/details/gondibertheroick00dave>.

<sup>199</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 39.

Reputation” was, as Samuel Osgood explained to John Adams, “as strong an incentive to Action as self Preservation and perhaps much more so.”<sup>200</sup>

“Honor was a stimulus for ambition,” which was primarily considered a passion of the highborn. Given the element of “public drama” in one’s pursuit of honor, a war setting, in particular, was a good stage for gaining one’s honor for an eighteenth-century gentleman.<sup>201</sup>

“The more danger the greater glory,” realized young John Adams during the French and Indian War. Yet, Adam’s physique was not that of a soldier and he instinctively knew he would hardly “make a Figure in Arms”—an attainment he came to view with a jaundiced eye.<sup>202</sup>

The military setting was also appealing to Alexander Hamilton who, as a fourteen-year-old living on the obscure island of St. Croix, “wish[ed] for a war” so that he could place his life at risk for the sake of his country and gain honor.<sup>203</sup> Similarly, Robert G. Harper, to whom is attributed the quote, “Millions for defense, not a cent for tribute,” recognized that a potential war would present him with favorable opportunities for “acquiring glory in the field.” Said he, “what a pity that so many Suwarroffs and Bonapartes in embryo, should be chilled into mere Lawyers Planters & Merchants by the cold breath of Peace!”<sup>204</sup>

Washington’s use of the word “glory” denoted in his day not only postmortem felicity of the righteous in a religious sense but also a “praise paid in adoration.”<sup>205</sup> Glory was often

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.; Samuel Osgood to John Adams, 30 November 1775, in C. James Taylor, ed., *The Adams Papers Digital Edition*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/ADMS/>.

<sup>201</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 39-40.

<sup>202</sup> John Adams to Charles Cushing, 19 October 1756, John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 3 January 1775, in Taylor, *Adams Papers*.

<sup>203</sup> John C. Miller, *Alexander Hamilton: Portrait In Paradox* (New York: Harper, 1959), 5, in Wood, *Radicalism*, 39-40.

<sup>204</sup> Yates Snowden, “Millions for Defense,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1901): 100-03, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27574900>; Robert G. Harper to James McHenry, 29 July 1799, in Bernard C. Steiner, “Letters on Military Matters among the Papers of James McHenry,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 12, no. 4 (April 1905): 409, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4242707>.

<sup>205</sup> *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. “glory.”

used to express one's good reputation in the army, as in "acquiring military glory" or "glory in the field."<sup>206</sup> But glory was also defined as "fame."<sup>207</sup>

W. W. Abbot, former editor of *The Papers of George Washington*, posits that the "Father of his Country" as well as the other Founding Fathers "believed that the greatest rewards for public service were not" an accumulation of property or acquisition of high social status "for the sake of power." Rather, their longed-for "rewards took the form of esteem and respect of their countrymen and of their place in history." In other words, "what they wanted was what they called 'fame.'"<sup>208</sup>

Fame, in contrast to honor, is viewed as more transcendent in space and time, implying larger human audience.<sup>209</sup> Fame is defined as "celebrity" or "renown," it implies an attainment by an eminent individual who is distinguished not only by many of his contemporaries but also by succeeding generations.<sup>210</sup> The quest for fame "is thus a dynamic element in the historical process," characterized by force of personality. Such an individual is not complacent with merely being "static" in his society, but endeavors to be an "event-making" figure.<sup>211</sup> Appetites and interests were intrinsic to all men, "but only the restless-minded, the great-souled, the extraordinary few, had ambition—that overflowing desire to excel, to have precedence, and to achieve fame."<sup>212</sup> A "passion for Fame," maintained Edmund Burke before the British Parliament, was "a passion which is the instinct of all great souls."<sup>213</sup>

Washington's concern for military "Honour and Glory" in the summer of 1754 was associated with his apprehension that such tributes would be reserved only to the chief

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<sup>206</sup> Robert G. Harper to James McHenry, 29 July 1799, in Steiner, "Letters on Military Matters," 409.

<sup>207</sup> *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. "glory."

<sup>208</sup> Abbot, "Uncommon Awareness of Self," 275-76.

<sup>209</sup> Adair, "Fame and the Founding Fathers," 10-11.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*; *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. "fame."

<sup>211</sup> Adair, "Fame and the Founding Fathers," 11.

<sup>212</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 39.

<sup>213</sup> [Edmund Burke], *Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq. on American Taxation, April 19, 1774* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1775), 81, <http://www.archive.org/details/speechofedmundbu00burkuoft>.

officer.<sup>214</sup> Indeed, the proper ranking of officers was always a touchy subject for Washington. Besides Washington's men, under James Innes's command were expected to serve also two independent companies, both of them regular troops, one from New York and the other from South Carolina.<sup>215</sup> "You will therefore consult & agree with Yr Officers to shew them particular marks of Esteem," advised Dinwiddie to Washington in advance.<sup>216</sup> It was a reasonable request, for the South Carolina troops were led by Captain James Mackay, who was not only Washington's senior, but had a considerably longer military career with a cachet of a royal commission.<sup>217</sup>

Washington pledged to show due respect to Mackay's royal commission, but was in the dark if that meant his troops were inferior or superior in command. Besides rank, Washington considered it unjust that officers commissioned by the king had far greater financial benefits, for "we have the same Spirit to serve our Gracious King as they have . . . when their Lives, their Fortunes, and their Characters are equally, and I dare say as effectually exposd as those who are happy enough to have Kings Commission's." Importantly, the Virginian colonel in a long and carefully worded missive assured Dinwiddie that his eagerness to settle the issue of rank resulted not from vainglory but from his genuine attachment to his "Countrys Interest."<sup>218</sup> Again, Washington's expressed conviction that his interests were solely patriotic apparently did not fall on deaf ears, for the governor, in order to quell the dispute, ranked the officers later that month in the following order, Colonel Innes to be the chief commander, Colonel Washington second in command, Captain Clark third, and Captain Mackay fourth.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>215</sup> Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 21.

<sup>216</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 4 June 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>217</sup> *DGW* 1:188n.

<sup>218</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*; Robert Dinwiddie to Henry Fox, 24 July [1754], in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:246.

<sup>219</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to Governor Sharpe, 20 June 1754, in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:212-13.

The Virginian governor not only placed Washington over regularly-commissioned officers, but promptly annexed reassuring words of approbation in his following letters, such as “Yr Conduct gives me great Satisfactn & Pleasure & I am, Sr Yr real Friend,” or “be always assured that I have a true regard for Yr Merit & good Conduct, & I shall be very carefull in representing the same when I have the opportunity of serving You.”<sup>220</sup> Such highly condescending remarks by the colonial governor represented another indication of his affability toward the aspiring Virginian colonel. To the American colonies were transplanted and maintained “vertical connections of dependency or patronage” of the traditional British hierarchical society until the social upheavals generated by the Revolution. While those of the subordinate clientage status were expected to show due deference—in Washington’s case “sincere regard for your Person”—the social superiors clung to the “accepted code of paternalism or stewardship” which obliged them to behave in a benevolent, fatherly way.<sup>221</sup> Such reciprocal ties were observed in various walks of life, including politics, civil matters, as well as military, and by all accounts, Washington believed that he merited such attention from his superiors.<sup>222</sup>

Having the delicate issue of superiority of rank settled, Washington and Mackay promptly gathered for a council of war in preparation of an imminent reprisal by the French who wished to avenge the British-Indian ambush against the late Jumonville. Washington and Mackay determined to repair to their newly constructed Fort Necessity at the Great Meadows (nearby the locale of the skirmish with Jumonville) in hopes of taking advantage of the

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<sup>220</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 18 June 1754, 27 June 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>221</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London: Routledge, 1972), x, <http://books.google.com/books?id=E689AAAAIAAJ>; Wood, *Radicalism*, 57, 77; Richard R. Beeman, “Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-Century America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (July 1992): 410, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2947105>; R. C. Simmons, “Colonial Patronage: Two Letters from William Franklin to the Earl of Bute, 1762,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 123, 127-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3491640>; GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 105.

<sup>222</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 57, 77; Richard R. Beeman, “The Varieties of Deference in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Early American Studies* (Fall 2005): 326.

fortifications. But to their detriment, the fort, whose name—Necessity—indicated Washington’s despairing efforts in procuring sufficient ammunition and provisions for the troops during the campaign, afforded but a feeble protection.<sup>223</sup>

On a rainy July 3, 1754, a French force of nine hundred attacked the three hundred British soldiers garrisoned at the yet incomplete Fort Necessity. Washington’s and Mackay’s men resisted their enemy for most of the day, but the French found an effective shelter behind the trees while the hastily dug out trenches were soon filled with water up to the soldiers’ knees; a capitulation of the fort was inevitable.<sup>224</sup>

The articles of capitulation, which were composed by Captain de Villiers, a brother of the deceased Jumonville, stipulated a surrender of the fort, a release of prisoners, and a withdrawal from the territory.<sup>225</sup> Captain Van Braam, the only interpreter the British had at their disposal that night, allegedly read the articles to them in a somewhat unfaithful translation, making the British unwittingly acknowledge, among other things, a censurable “assassination” of Jumonville.<sup>226</sup>

Although suffering a defeat and capitulation of the fort, Washington and Mackay were commended for their bravery by Dinwiddie.<sup>227</sup> On behalf of the House of Burgesses, the Speaker John Robinson delivered to Washington, Mackay, and other officers under their command “the Thanks of this House . . . for their late gallant and brave Behaviour in the Defense of their Country.” Washington duly acknowledged the receipt of the resolution by frankly admitting that “nothing could have given . . . greater satisfaction” than a continued

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<sup>223</sup> Minutes of a Council of War, 28 June 1754, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>224</sup> Account by George Washington and James Mackay of the Capitulation of Fort Necessity, 19 July 1754, in *PGW*; Robert Dinwiddie to the Lords of Trade, [24 July 1754], in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:239-40.

<sup>225</sup> Articles of Capitulation, 3 July 1754, in *PGW*; Neville B. Craig, ed., *The Olden Time: A Monthly Publication Devoted to the Preservation of Documents and Other Authentic Information in Relation to the Early Explorations and the Settlement and Improvement of the Country Around the Head of the Ohio*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke, 1876), 2:210-13, <http://www.archive.org/details/oldentimeamonth00craigoo>.

<sup>226</sup> Sparks, *Writings of George Washington*, 2:458-61; James Mackay to GW, 28 September 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>227</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to Henry Fox, 24 July [1754], Robert Dinwiddie to Earl of Albermarle, 24 July [1754], Robert Dinwiddie to J & C Hanbury, 24 July [1754], in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:245, 247, 253.

approbation of his service to the country. Washington's patriotic sentiments made him particularly appreciative of such an approval, for he believed it was his "indispensable *duty* to endeavour to deserve it."<sup>228</sup> By extension, Washington somehow considered it almost his obligation to aspire to esteem.

During the months following the defeat at Fort Necessity, Washington tried to keep his regiment in order, but the sustained injuries, deaths, and incessant desertions eventually reduced his troops to only 150 men. However, Virginia was not the only colony that had suffered a radical reduction of its army; the North Carolina forces, for example, disbanded altogether due to lack of funds.<sup>229</sup> Amid such difficulties, the command of all British forces in North America was undergoing a major change. Governor Sharpe of Maryland, a retired British officer, had been commissioned by the king as the chief commander of the "Combined Forces that shall be Assembled in America to oppose the Hostile Attempts Comitted by the French."<sup>230</sup> At a special conference in Williamsburg, a consolidated British attack on Fort Duquesne was then planned. Presumably, the ever-sensitive subject of seniority of officers with a royal commission was also discussed, for shortly afterward, Dinwiddie, who participated at the said conference, issued a consequential order for dissolving all the colonial troops and creating independent companies with only captaincy as the highest rank.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 8:198; John Robinson to GW, 15 September 1754, GW to John Robinson, 23 October 1754, in *PGW* (my italics). By way of a censure for mistranslation, Van Braam's name was omitted from the resolution of thanks to the officers. Although accused of treachery, Van Braam's mistake was by all accounts unintentional. He was taken by the French as one of the hostages and after his return several years later, he was voted a back pay, a bonus, and a recommendation for a promotion by the House of Burgesses, see H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1758-1761*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1908), 9:166, 227, 238, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouseo09virg>.

<sup>229</sup> GW to James Innes, 12 August 1754, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 20 August 1754, in *PGW*; Robert Dinwiddie to Horatio Sharpe, 6 September 1754, in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:304.

<sup>230</sup> Thomas Robinson to Horatio Sharpe, 5 July 1754, in William Hand Browne, ed., *Archives of Maryland: Proceedings of the Council of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1911), 31:52-53, <http://aomol.net/000001/000031/html/index.html>; Browne, *Horatio Sharpe*, 1:v.

<sup>231</sup> Horatio Sharpe to Thomas Robinson, 25 October 1754, in Browne, *Horatio Sharpe*, 1:104-05; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 25. For the seniority of regular officers over those commissioned by American governors, see "Sketch of an Order About the Rank &ca of the Provincial Troops in North America,"

Washington, for whom “the Rank of Officers” was “dearer than the Pay” took issue with this new regulation and threatened to resign his commission.<sup>232</sup> To William Fitzhugh of Maryland, he explained, “if you think me capable of holding a Commission that has neither rank or emolument annexed to it; you must entertain a very contemptible opinion of my weakness, and believe me to be more empty than the Commission itself.” Although Washington was offered to retain his colonelcy, submitting to those over whom he had previously commanded was unacceptable to him, for “every Captain, bearing the King’s Commission; every half-pay Officer, or other, appearing with such commission, would rank before me.”<sup>233</sup>

That Washington hoped to keep ascending in the army is obvious, but his reluctance to submit to the command of those over whom he once had authority is certainly not unique in that period. For instance, four years later during the French and Indian War, Captain Robert Stewart of the Virginia Regiment obtained a lieutenancy in the royal American corps but was assigned to serve with the same division of the battalion he had served in the previous campaign. “My often well grounded hopes of Military Preferment is too likely to terminate in a pittance barely sufficient to keep Soul and Body together,” Stewart repined, pointing out his ambition for military promotion. He knew that his royal, but low rank would place him “under the Orders of many I have long Commanded which would be grating to the last degree.” As other examples of this type of subordination, Stewart mentioned Colonel Glazier of the New York Regiment and Colonel Parker of the New Jersey Regiment.<sup>234</sup>

It is beyond dispute that Washington upheld certain boundaries in his patriotic service that he was unwilling to cross. Dissatisfied with the conditions of service (especially with

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in Stanley Pargellis, ed., *Military Affairs in North America 1748-1765* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936), 43-44, <http://www.archive.org/details/militaryaffairsi00cumb>.

<sup>232</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], William Fitzhugh to GW, 4 November 1754, GW to William Fitzhugh, 15 November 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>233</sup> GW to William Fitzhugh, 15 November 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>234</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 16 January 1759, in *PGW*.

reduction of rank of officers without a commission from the king), Washington resigned his commission in the fall of 1754. In his stead, Adam Stephen, Washington's second in command, acceded to the command of the Virginia forces.<sup>235</sup>

*“To Merit Its [Country’s] Esteem—And the Good Will of My Friends Is the Sum of My Ambition”*

Upon receiving the news of the British surrender at Fort Necessity, General Lord Albemarle, an ambassador to France, wrote to one of his correspondents, “*Washington & many Such, may have courage & resolution, but they have no Knowledge or Experience in our Profession; consequently there can be no dependence on them! Officers, & good ones must be sent to Discipline the Militia, & to Lead them on.*”<sup>236</sup> The British government, desiring to leave nothing to chance, determined to send further reinforcements. Edward Braddock, who was commissioned the chief commander, was instructed by George II “to drive the French from their Posts upon the Ohio.”<sup>237</sup>

By the time Braddock arrived in Virginia, Washington was well situated. He had leased Mount Vernon from Ann, former wife of his eldest half brother Lawrence. The estate measured 1,119 hectares and through inheritance from Lawrence and additional purchase

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<sup>235</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 4 June 1754, in *PGW*; Robert Dinwiddie to Thomas Robinson, 16 November 1754, Robert Dinwiddie to Adam Stephen, 12 December 1754, in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:403, 420; David A. Clary, *George Washington’s First War: His Early Military Adventures* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 75, <http://books.google.com/books?id=cq7Mwvru8nAC>.

<sup>236</sup> Lord Albemarle to the Duke of Newcastle, First Lord of the Treasury, 11 September 1754, Add. MSS 32850:289-91, British Library, quoted in Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 29.

<sup>237</sup> George II’s non-secret Instructions to Edward Braddock, in Winthrop Sargent, ed., *The History of an Expedition Against Fort Du Quesne, in 1755* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1856), 393, <http://www.archive.org/details/historyofexpedit00sarg>; George II’s Secret Instructions to Edward Braddock, in E. B. O’Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons, 1855), 6:920, <http://www.archive.org/details/documentsrelativ06newy>.

Washington employed about three dozens of slaves there.<sup>238</sup> But since the rental was almost double of his yearly earnings as adjutant of the Northern District, he was running short of cash. Turning to the governor with a request to collect some arrearages for his adjutancy he was still awaiting, Washington received a reply which was unusually terse, suggestive of Dinwiddie's vexation over his recent resignation from the army, but was promised that attention to this matter would be paid at the upcoming council session.<sup>239</sup>

In any case, Washington did not turn his back on the military altogether. His "inclinations" were, as he said, "strongly bent to arms." So when General Braddock finally set ashore the American colonies, Washington promptly sent a welcoming letter and congratulated him on his safe arrival.<sup>240</sup> Given his hitherto prominent role in the Franco-British conflict, Washington may have anticipated that an invitation to rejoin the army would be offered. The offer came in March 1755 and Washington accepted the invitation to take part in the "[t]he Ensueing Campaigne as a Volunteer." His decision to serve as a private volunteer was well calculated so as to avoid serving under officers with a lower rank than his, even if their commissions were from the king. Again, Washington informed his superior that his motives were not "selfish," but were inspired by a "laudable desire . . . to serve . . . my King & Country."<sup>241</sup>

Since Washington anticipated a prolonged absence, he arranged with his younger brother John Augustine to act as his manager of the estate.<sup>242</sup> To William Byrd of Westover, a

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<sup>238</sup> I. - II. Memorandum, 10 December 1754, Lease of Mount Vernon, 17 December 1754, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:241; Fritz Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery: A Documentary Portrayal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 11-12, <http://books.google.com/books?id=4YX3czE0SGYC>.

<sup>239</sup> DSF 2:3-4; Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 20 December [1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>240</sup> GW to William Fitzhugh, 15 November 1754, GW to Robert Orme, 15 March 1755, in *PGW*. Orme served as Braddock's aide-de-camp, see Sargent, *Fort Du Quesne*, 139, 369.

<sup>241</sup> GW to Robert Orme, 15 March 1755, Robert Orme to GW, 2 March 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>242</sup> DSF 2:19; GW to John Augustine Washington, 6 May 1755, GW to Robert Orme, 2 April 1755, in *PGW*. GW originally planned to meet Braddock's military staff earlier, but due to the solicitations of his mother, who came over for a visit to Mount Vernon, he was obliged to stay home longer. The twenty-three-year Virginian colonel was still under such maternal supervision that he was permitted to accompany the new general only under the condition of returning home at the earliest opportunity and settle pressing domestic affairs at Mount Vernon.

member of the governor's council and bearer of one of the patrician family names in Virginia, Washington disclosed he would serve in the ensuing campaign with "different views" than in the previous one. Now, he intended to serve as an unpaid volunteer with no expectations of a "reward but the hope of meriting the love of my Country, and friendly regard of my acquaintances."<sup>243</sup> Interestingly enough, Washington's phrase containing the claim of holding "different views" permits the interpretation that his previous views may not have been patriotic or that he had not been virtuously seeking the esteem of his friends prior to this campaign. But given the context of the letter, the claim most likely meant to emphasize that he was willing to serve with the most laudable intentions.

In fact, Washington always claimed that his motives had been purely patriotic. Before embarking on his expedition to the Ohio in 1754, he ascertained Richard Corbin, "I have too sincere a love for my country."<sup>244</sup> Taking the liberty to report the surrender of a British fort to the governors of Pennsylvania and Maryland, Washington explained that the express was occasioned by "the Warm" or "the glowing zeal I owe my country."<sup>245</sup> Later, shortly before his first military engagement, Washington made it clear to Dinwiddie that he was willing to serve without any monetary reward, only for the purpose of "the satisfaction of serving my country."<sup>246</sup> Furthermore, in his report of the skirmish with the Jumonville's men, Washington preceded the account with a disclaimer of any selfish pretensions he might be accused of, "The motives that lead me here were pure and Noble I had no view of acquisition but that of Honour, by serving faithfully my King and Country."<sup>247</sup>

It is worth noting that after the Revolutionary War, Washington had sound reasons to anticipate that his correspondence would be exposed to the scrutiny of future generations.

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<sup>243</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:161; GW to William Byrd, 20 April 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>244</sup> GW to Richard Corbin, [February – March, 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>245</sup> GW to James Hamilton, [ca. 24] April, 1754, GW to Horatio Sharpe, 24 April 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>246</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 18 May 1754, in *PGW*.

<sup>247</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 29 May 1754, in *PGW*.

Therefore, he took pains to carefully correct some of the “awkward constructions” of his earlier letters to achieve “greater clarity” of meaning.<sup>248</sup> One of the revisions he made then in his above-cited letter of May 1755 to Byrd, which contained the claim of holding “different views,” included the addition of the following assertion: “To merit its [country’s] esteem—and the good will of my friends is the sum of my ambition.”<sup>249</sup>

In 1755, Johnson’s *Dictionary* defined ambition as “the desire of preferment or honour” or as “the desire of any thing great or excellent.”<sup>250</sup> Ambition was thus identified with the initiative or drive through which one sought to obtain honor. If the aspirer adopted a course of action that was deemed improper or beyond conventional ethics, his ambition was despised as ignoble. Since the traditional hierarchical societies expected each man to fill positions only commensurate to his social status, ambition was typically regarded in the negative light.<sup>251</sup>

The key to comprehending Washington’s ambition lies in his understanding of his “desire of preferment or honour.”<sup>252</sup> An accurate judgment of ambition was based on the kind of motivation that stood behind one’s aspirations. For instance, if one lusted for a position of recognition for the sake of wealth or ascendancy itself, then he was worthy neither of honor nor of public approbation. But if one sensed that his abilities were such that he could contribute to the welfare and good of the society, he would probably act against his sense of duty to intentionally withhold his talents from proffering disinterested service to others. I believe the latter case was not distant from what Washington had in mind when he lamented to the speaker of the House of Burgesses in September 1758, “That appearance of Glory once

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<sup>248</sup> Abbot, “Uncommon Awareness of Self,” 281-82.

<sup>249</sup> GW to William Byrd, 20 April 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>250</sup> *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. “ambition.”

<sup>251</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 83.

<sup>252</sup> *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. “ambition.”

in view—that hope—that *laudable Ambition* of Serving Our Country, and meriting its applause, is now no more!”<sup>253</sup>

While it is true that ambition carried mostly negative connotations, there is a good number of eighteenth-century sources that pair ambition with a commendable incentive. In such cases, the modifier “laudable” was typically used to assure its correct import. The Virginia Gazette, for example, printed an article in 1754 praising ancient Roman figures like Cato and Regulus for their “*laudable Ambition*, which render’d them far more useful Members of Society . . . But in this Age so much is private prefer’d to public Good.” The Boston Evening-Post in 1757 reprinted a contemporary English article that credited the society with “the truly *laudable ambition*” of raising scores of seamen “that their hands may be taught to war, and their fingers to fight” in defense of their fellow citizens.<sup>254</sup>

If ambition in the negative sense was perceived to be egocentric and self-conceited, then its positive connotation reflected altruistic and selfless motives. The Philadelphia Weekly Magazine maintained that “*ambition may be rational and laudable . . . when it seeks and aims at the peace and happiness of human society, and the good of our fellow-creatures.*”<sup>255</sup> The public-spirited nature of laudable ambition customarily entailed the forfeiture of personal interests for the sake of others.

Washington was willing to sacrifice much to earn recognition for his services. He also liked to acquaint others with what sacrifices he was making. To a chairman of the Burgesses’ military committee in 1755, Washington confided about “the loss I sustaind” during his previous campaign, which included some £50 of arrearages due him as a paymaster, the death of his servant, the loss of some clothing, books, documents, horses, and a theodolite. “I have

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<sup>253</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, in *PGW* (my italics).

<sup>254</sup> “From the Virginia Gazette, of November 28, 1754,” *Boston Gazette, or, Weekly Advertiser*, January 7, 1755 (my italics), A Briton, “From a Late English Paper,” *Boston Evening Post*, November 28, 1757 (my italics), NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com>.

<sup>255</sup> “On Ambition,” *Weekly Magazine* (Philadelphia), February 3, 1798, <http://books.google.com/books?id=mJ0wAAAAAYAAJ> (my italics).

no views, either of profitting or rising in the Service as I go a Volunteer witht <illegible> of Pay,” he assured the chairman.<sup>256</sup>

Washington also apprised the chairman that his volunteer service “will prove very detrimental to my private Affairs, as I shall leave a Family scarcely Settled, & in gt disorder.” The Virginian colonel wished him to be aware of the fact that despite no command or pay, “it shall not stop me from going” to enter the campaign.<sup>257</sup> Washington also acquainted John Robinson, the speaker of the House of Burgesses and thus one of the most influential statesmen in Virginia, of his personal sacrifices and selfless motives in the service, partly because Robinson had already showed sympathy in Washington’s disappointments and aided him “to reinstate [him] in a suitable Command.”<sup>258</sup>

By no means did Washington obtain a good reputation for free, for he understood very well that the acquisition of honor requires one to earn it by proving himself sufficiently worthy. As already mentioned, Adams’s aphorism expressed during the French and Indian War, “The more danger the greater glory,” may not have been far from Washington’s thoughts during his early military career.<sup>259</sup>

Although a gentleman’s exaggerated zeal for his country carried a threat of isolation of “the patriot from the welfare of his cause by fostering a self-centered drive to prove personal worthiness,” it needs to be emphasized that the very values that denote one’s dedication to the patriotic cause were ironically “being expressed in the form of ego-serving ideals.” Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that patriotic service could, in a measure, be appealing to an aspiring gentleman because of its associated byproducts in the form of increased honor and reputation.

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<sup>256</sup> GW to Carter Burwell, 20 April 1755, in *PGW*; Clary, *George Washington’s First War*, 125.

<sup>257</sup> GW to Carter Burwell, 20 April 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>258</sup> GW to John Robinson, 20 April 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>259</sup> John Adams to Charles Cushing, 19 October 1756, in Taylor, *Adams Papers*.

In Washington's case, it seems that his attachment to the noble patriotic commitment was all the more strengthened by attendant achievements of distinction that came along the way.<sup>260</sup>

Washington was gratified with the newly appointed commanders in 1755. General Braddock's complaisance was very pleasing to Washington who wished to reciprocate his condescending favors.<sup>261</sup> Likewise, Governor Shirley, in command of one of the two regiments to be raised in America, was an able soldier and politician "whose Character and appearance has perfectly charmd me," Washington wrote.<sup>262</sup> Although serving without rank and at his own expense, Washington did not doubt that he would enjoy his new military family, but confided to his older half brother Augustine that due to lack of opportunities (resulting from no command) he would not be able to spend the campaign "advantageously." In other words, military action was something Washington hungered for. After the Revolutionary War when revising his earlier correspondence, Washington crossed out this word and replaced it with "profitably," presumably to shift the attention of potential readers of his correspondence to pecuniary matters.<sup>263</sup>

Fortunately for Washington, he "was very particularly noticed by" Braddock who soon accepted the young Virginian as his extra aide-de-camp and offered him a commission of a brevet captaincy, the highest grade the general could then bestow on his own, as well as a small number of blank ensigncies to fill the vacancies in two Irish regiments.<sup>264</sup> Washington was content to serve on such terms since he was under no one's command but the general's and was privileged to distribute his orders to be obeyed by all. Taking advantage of favorable

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<sup>260</sup> Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 211; J. G. A. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 250, <http://han.nkp.cz/han/ebrary/site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/docDetail.action?docID=10035914>.

<sup>261</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 6 May 1755, GW to Mary Ball Washington, 6 May 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>262</sup> George II's non-secret Instructions to Edward Braddock, in Sargent, *Fort Du Quesne*, 394; GW to William Fairfax, 23 April 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>263</sup> GW to Augustine Washington, 14 May 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>264</sup> Zagari, "Life of General Washington", 14.

occasions seems to have been Washington's forte, for it was so this time also. "I have now a good opportunity," confided Washington to his younger brother Jack, "and shall not neglect it, of forming an acquaintance which may be serviceable hereafter, if I can find it worth while pushing my Fortune in the Military way."<sup>265</sup>

Cultivating appropriate client and patron ties may have increased the chances of one's advancement, but Washington almost missed one of his best career opportunities, if he hoped of becoming a professional soldier in the British army. In June of 1755, Washington suffered from such fevers and pains that he was unable to progress toward Fort Duquesne other way than by being drawn in a covered wagon. His illness prevented him from accompanying the general and was left behind with Colonel Dunbar's corps.<sup>266</sup> Washington was not yet fully recovered when he rejoined the general about a few kilometers short of Fort Duquesne on July 9, 1755, in anticipation of an imminent engagement.<sup>267</sup>

But it was a battle the British expected. While crossing the Monongahela River, the British thirteen hundred well-armed troops were ambushed by a combined French and Indian force of only three hundred (Washington's estimate).<sup>268</sup> Well-positioned and hidden behind trees, the enemy caught the British by surprise insomuch that the confused soldiers fell "into irretrievable disorder."<sup>269</sup> Seized with panic, the regularly commissioned soldiers "behaved with more cowardice than it is possible to conceive," recalled Washington. "They broke, and run as Sheep pursued by dogs; and it was impossible to rally them." On the other hand, the

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<sup>265</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 14 May 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>266</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 28 June – 2 July, 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>267</sup> Memorandum, 8-9 July 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>268</sup> Richard Walsh, ed., "Braddock on July 9, 1755," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 60, no. 4 (December 1965): 424, <http://mdhs.mdsa.net/>; GW to Mary Ball Washington, [18 July 1755], in *PGW*. For more precise numbers, see Pargellis, *Military Affairs*, 114, 125-27.

<sup>269</sup> Zagari, "Life of General Washington", 15.

officers and Virginia troops showed more bravery, but were almost all killed. Though the enemy's number was "trifling," the British were "scandalously beaten."<sup>270</sup>

Due to the commotion, the British casualties were caused mostly from their own fire. A majority of commanders were killed or wounded (none of Captain La Péronie's officers survived), and only about thirty souls remained from the three independent companies. All in all, almost nine hundred souls either died or were wounded in the British force in this ill-fated battle. Washington, too, was exposed to the heavy enemy fire and some even thought his wounds were fatal.<sup>271</sup> But miraculously enough, despite of the fact that four bullets pierced his clothes (one perforated his hat), one horse was shot and two wounded under him, Washington remained unscathed.<sup>272</sup>

Others were not so fortunate. Braddock received a fatal wound, of which he died four days later. Sir Peter Halket, second in command, perished early in the conflict. Lieutenant Colonels Burton and St. Clair suffered severe injuries, and Gage received a contusion. As the troops were confused about "who the surviving Senior officer was," Washington's momentous opportunity arrived. Being the only aide-de-camp left unhurt, Washington laid the general in a small covered wagon with his essential equipage and while under fire Washington brought him "in the best order he could" to a safer place on the other side of the river. By the general's command, Washington was then to return and deliver Braddock's orders to Lieutenant Colonel Gage.<sup>273</sup> Upon returning to the general, Washington was requested to advance speedily to Colonel Dunbar's second division over sixty kilometers away. Weariness from his recent illness and the anxieties of the day's massacre left

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 18; GW to Mary Ball Washington, [18 July 1755], GW to John Augustine Washington, 18 July 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>271</sup> Zagari, "*Life of General Washington*", 18; GW to Mary Ball Washington, [18 July 1755], GW to John Augustine Washington, 18 July 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>272</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 18 July 1755, in *PGW*; Zagari, "*Life of General Washington*", 16. One anonymous author wrote: "Washington . . . whose upper coat was intirely shot to tatters with musket bullets, and yet he not hurt." Walsh, "Braddock," 426.

<sup>273</sup> Zagari, "*Life of General Washington*", 16; Pargellis, *Military Affairs*, 120.

Washington scarcely able to accomplish the task. Nevertheless, Washington rode through the whole night, joining Dunbar's troops the following morning.<sup>274</sup>

Washington emerged from Braddock's massacre not only unscathed but also laden with wreathes of gallantry. One letter composed the following day stated, "Major Washington and Capt. Orme fought like heroes."<sup>275</sup> "Major Washington," wrote another author, "a gentleman much respected who went out a voluntier, and was appointed one of the General's Aid de Camps . . ."<sup>276</sup> One report related Washington's initiative in begging "the General, when he was first attacked, to let him draw off about 300 in each wing to scour the woods: but he refused it, and obstinately persisted in the form of a field-battle, his men standing shoulder to shoulder . . ."<sup>277</sup> Pennsylvania Gazette published an extract of a letter by Captain Robert Orme describing the battle with some particulars on Washington's conduct, "Mr. Washington . . . behaving the whole Time with the greatest Courage and Resolution."<sup>278</sup> About three months later, Washington was informed by his friend Christopher Gist, an experienced explorer who served as the general's guide in the engagement, "Yor Name is more talked off in Pensylvenia then any Other person of the Army."<sup>279</sup> John Bolling, a burgess and a militia colonel, wrote to his son in England, "Our brave Colo. Washington . . . came off with great applause."<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Zagari, "Life of General Washington", 18. GW's illness lingered on until at least July 18, see GW to Mary Ball Washington, [18 July 1755], in *PGW*.

<sup>275</sup> *Scots Magazine* 17 (Edinburgh), August 1755, 402, [http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_lwAAAAAYAAJ](http://books.google.com/books?id=_lwAAAAAYAAJ).

<sup>276</sup> "Potomack, Maryland, July 27, 1755," *Scots Magazine* 17 (Edinburgh), October 1755, 502, [http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_lwAAAAAYAAJ](http://books.google.com/books?id=_lwAAAAAYAAJ).

<sup>277</sup> "Boston in New England, Aug. 18," *Scots Magazine* 17 (Edinburgh), September 1755, 453, [http://books.google.com/books?id=\\_lwAAAAAYAAJ](http://books.google.com/books?id=_lwAAAAAYAAJ).

<sup>278</sup> Robert Orme to Horatio Sharpe, 18 July 1755, in Browne, *Horatio Sharpe*, 1:253; "Extract of a Letter from an Officer, Dated at Fort Cumberland, July 18, 1755," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 31, 1755, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com>.

<sup>279</sup> Christopher Gist to GW, 15 October 1755, in *PGW*; Sargent, *Fort Du Quesne*, 209.

<sup>280</sup> John Bolling to Robert Bolling, 13 August 1755, in John A. Schutz, "A Private Report of General Braddock's Defeat," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 79 (July 1955): 377, <http://dpubs.libraries.psu.edu/>; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:190.

Washington's rising acclaim induced a remark by Lord Halifax, president of the Board of Trade, who wrote, "I know nothing of Mr. Washington's character, but, that we have it under his own hand, that he loves the whistling of Bullets, and they say he behaved as bravely in Braddocks action, as if he really did."<sup>281</sup> Joseph Ball, who had dissuaded Washington's mother from allowing her son to pursue a career in the British navy, commended the hero of the Monongahela from London, "It is a Sensible Pleasure to me to hear that you have behaved yourself with such a Martial Spirit in all your Engagements with the French Nigh Ohio. Go on as you have begun; and God prosper you."<sup>282</sup>

Some even began to suspect the hand of Providence led Washington in the field. In his sermon before a company of independent volunteers raised from central Virginia, Samuel Davies, eminent Presbyterian minister in the American colonies and later president of the College of New Jersey, declared that he regarded the Franco-British conflict as "sacred Heaven-born Fire" to provide the colonists with an opportunity to assert their "Rights and Privileges." The preservation Washington life, his survival of perilous incidents unharmed, and serviceability in the cause of his country intrigued Davies insomuch that he conjectured that divine power must have hitherto attended the hero of Monongahela, "I may point out to the Public that heroic Youth Co. *Washington*, whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so signal a Manner, for some important Service to his Country."<sup>283</sup>

The year before Braddock's massacre, Washington cherished a desire for "oppertunity to testifie" to Dinwiddie and to "convince yr Honr, my Friends, and Country of my diligence,

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<sup>281</sup> Earl of Halifax to Sir Charles Hardy, 31 March 1756, "Intercepted Letters to the Duke de Mirepoix, 1756," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1896*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1897), 1:689, <http://www.archive.org/details/1896annualreport01ameruoft>.

<sup>282</sup> Joseph Ball to GW, 5 September 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>283</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:221; Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography*, 20 vols. (London: Humphrey Milford, [1935?]), s.v. "Davies, Samuel," 5:102-03, <http://www.archive.org/details/dictionaryofamer019311mbp>; Samuel Davies, *Religion and Patriotism the Constituents of a Good Soldier. A Sermon Preached to Captain Overton's Independant Company of Volunteers, Raised in Hanover County, Virginia, August 17, 1755* (Philadelphia; London: Reprinted for J. Buckland [etc.], 1756), 12, <http://www.archive.org/details/religionpatrioti00davi>.

and application to the Art Military.” Despite apprehensions that “a Head will soon arrive to whom all Honour and Glory must be given,” Washington was in both 1754 and 1755 expeditions in the forefront of the martial action.<sup>284</sup> In the first case, “a Head” did not arrive in time, and in the latter case, the general’s reputation was marred in consequence of his inadaptability to guerrilla warfare, which conduced to the heavy British losses (including his own life) in Braddock’s very first battle in the American colonies.<sup>285</sup>

Undaunted in the face of danger in order “to defend his Country’s Cause,” Washington began to be applauded for approaching that “Heroick Virtue” and “immortal honour” that was usually attributed to legendary patriots and other men of great merit.<sup>286</sup> No one truly knew what would be the outcome of these early battles between Britain and France in the upper Ohio Valley, whether a declaration of war or a peace treaty.<sup>287</sup> Braddock’s expedition won Washington further plaudits but it also hurt him financially, enfeebled him with more than a month-long illness, and left him with disturbing memories of the massacre.<sup>288</sup> If he still contemplated “pushing my Fortune in the Military way,” it would “never [be] upon the Terms I have done.”<sup>289</sup>

Washington’s decision to resign his colonial commission and serve as a volunteer (which meant that he served at his own expense) was not unique. Captain Robert McKenzie, who would later serve under Washington in the Virginia Regiment, similarly determined “to enter myself a Volontier in the Brittish Troops,” but his views were different from

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<sup>284</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>285</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to James Innes, 20 July [1755], in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:232; GW to William Fairfax, 7 June 1755, in *PGW*; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 90, <http://han.nkp.cz/han/ebrary/site.ebrary.com/lib/natl/docDetail.action?docID=10015501>.

<sup>286</sup> William Fairfax to GW, 26 July 1755, Warner Lewis to GW, [9 August 1755], in *PGW*.

<sup>287</sup> GW to William Fairfax, 7 June 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>288</sup> GW to Augustine Washington, 2 August 1755, in *PGW*; Zagari, “*Life of General Washington*”, 18. In his letter to Augustine, GW relates his “considerable expence in equipping and providing Necessarys . . . lost them all” in the 1754 expedition and “lost all my Horses and many other things” in the Braddock’s campaign. “I have been upon the loosing order ever since I enterd the Service.”

<sup>289</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 14 May 1755, GW to Augustine Washington, 2 August 1755, in *PGW*.

Washington's. By serving as a volunteer, McKenzie planned to achieve self-sufficiency with the monetary help of his friends and by returning to his previous "Profession" which he hoped would earn him more money than the scant wages of a colonial officer.<sup>290</sup> McKenzie later changed his mind and did not resign from the Virginia Regiment.<sup>291</sup> Similarly, French Mason, a relative of Washington's neighbor and friend George Mason, intended to serve as a volunteer in the army, but in consequence of his "small Fortune," he was dissuaded from such a course as economically unreasonable.<sup>292</sup> Whereas McKenzie's and Mason's reasons were strictly economic, Washington's motives for serving voluntarily seem to have had more to do with honor than anything else.

By August 1755, Washington's name was already being talked of in Williamsburg as a fitting nominee for the chief command of the newly organized Virginia forces. Members of the governor's council were unsure whether Washington would accept such a position since he had refused a command in the last expedition. Although the command was alluring enough among ambitious officers that "there is anor warm Sollicitation for it," Washington remained taciturn about his potential nomination.<sup>293</sup>

Washington learned from his friends that his chances of being nominated to the command seemed very high. Therefore, his friends were naturally eager to have him come to Williamsburg and speak his mind on the matter, but Washington stayed at home.<sup>294</sup> Significantly, such reclusiveness stands as stark contrast to his earlier proactive disposition. Prior to his earlier assignments and commissions, he had willingly traveled to the Virginia's capital to personally offer his services to prove his valiance and devotion to the country's

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<sup>290</sup> Return of the Virginia Regiment, 1 January 1757, Robert McKenzie to GW, 18 February 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>291</sup> Address from the Officers of the Virginia Regiment, 31 December 1758, Robert McKenzie to GW, 12 August 1760, Robert Stewart to GW, 6 April 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>292</sup> George Mason to GW, 6 May 1758, George Mason to GW, 16 May 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>293</sup> Philip Ludwell to GW, 8 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*; Charles Lewis to GW, [9 August 1755], Warner Lewis to GW, [9 August 1755], GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

cause. He had solicited support and favors from influential men by asking them to mention his name or to assure them of his patriotism.

I do not believe that Washington's sense of duty and laudable ambition of serving his country was on the wane, but rational considerations of the terms of service, ranking of regular and irregular officers, financial expense and salary, physical hardships and his health condition, probably concerned him more than ever before. Besides these unresolved concerns, there was another reason Washington was reluctant to travel to Williamsburg. To his kinsman, Washington wrote that his "weak and feeble condition" resulting from protracted fevers during the Braddock's campaign made his journey of 260 km to the colony's capital simply unreasonably arduous to undertake at this time.<sup>295</sup>

Washington confided to his mother that "if it is in my power to avoid going to the Ohio again, I shall." Some of his fears may have arisen from the fact that the previous two campaigns finished in British debacles and the realization "how little credit is given to a Commander" after such a defeat.<sup>296</sup> Given the likelihood of "vindictive Censures" in case of further defeats, Washington was apprehensive that by accepting the position he would jeopardize that which "constitutes the chief part of my happiness, i. e. the *esteem* and *notice* the Country has been pleas'd to honour me with."<sup>297</sup>

"Marks of Esteem," or "reverential regard," was traditionally expected to be shown to respected members of the society, including military officers.<sup>298</sup> Washington's military gallantry and his popularity among the notables of the Old Dominion to appoint him to the chief command of the colony's troops contributed to his honorableness and respectability

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<sup>295</sup> Warner Lewis to GW, 5 May 1758, GW to Warner Lewis, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>296</sup> GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 August 1755, GW to Warner Lewis, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>297</sup> GW to Warner Lewis, 14 August 1755, in *PGW* (my italics).

<sup>298</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 4 June 1754, in *PGW*; *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. "esteem."

among his associates. Washington's conspicuousness and prominence probably impacted the way he felt he ought to seek as well as preserve the honor already gained.

To one of his relatives Washington admitted to feel "unequal to the Task" because, in his view, the responsibilities of the command required one of "more experience" than he believed he had gained.<sup>299</sup> Rather than merely feigning modesty, Washington knew that his recent rapid ascent in the army made it only logical for him to be more cautious about losing his hard-won reputation.<sup>300</sup> The ideals of patriotic service and the honor involved in such a pursuit still inspired him, but he sensed (and rightly so) that it was time he was treated like a gentleman of his day—rather than "sollicit the Command," he preferred to have the office "press'd upon me by the genl voice of the Country."<sup>301</sup>

*"No Man ever Intended Better, nor Studied the Interest of His Country with More  
Affectionate Zeal than I Have Done"*

Washington was commissioned to the chief command of Virginia forces the way he had preferred, "by the genl voice of the Country."<sup>302</sup> He had proven his worthiness and merited the trust of members of the Assembly. "I . . . appoint You Colonel of the Virga Regimt & Commander in Chief of all the Forces now rais'd & to be rais'd for the Defence of this H: Majesty's Colony," wrote Dinwiddie to Washington scarcely a month after the Braddock's massacre in summer 1755. Washington was ordered to act both "defensively & Offensively" in repelling the French and Indian intruders from the British territory.<sup>303</sup> The Virginia Regiment was to be formed by raising sixteen companies and Washington's

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<sup>299</sup> GW to Charles Lewis, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*. Charles and Warner Lewis were brothers.

<sup>300</sup> Clary, *George Washington's First War*, 169.

<sup>301</sup> GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 August 1755, GW to Warner Lewis, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>302</sup> GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>303</sup> I. Commission, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

headquarters was to be situated at Winchester, the closest to the frontier of the three recruiting places. The governor reminded Washington to conform “to the Rules and Articles of War” and beseeched him to “inculcate Morality and Virtue among Your Men, to punish Drunkenness and Swearing.”<sup>304</sup>

Washington began to carry out his his new duty with great diligence and assiduity. His orders and letters to his officers are orderly and his arrangement of work appears highly methodical. Within a couple of months, he rode from one end of Virginia to another to check the progress of recruiting of men for the service, training and disciplining of soldiers, reinforcing forts, and issuing a number of other orders or giving instructions.<sup>305</sup>

It did not take long before issues concerning one’s rank resurged. The dispute arose in connection of who was to be in authority at Fort Cumberland on the Maryland side of the North Branch Potomac River.<sup>306</sup> Since Captain Dagworthy of Maryland claimed his superiority over the Virginia troops garrisoned at the fort based on his royal commission, the Virginia officers urged Washington to solicit General Shirley personally, the commander in chief in succession to General Braddock, for royal commissions to settle the contention. Washington’s diction was even more radical. “I have determined to resign a Commission,” Washington frankly admonished Dinwiddie, “rather than submit to the Command of a Person who I think has not such superlative Merit to balance the Inequality of Rank.”<sup>307</sup>

Dinwiddie consented to Washington’s going to Boston to petition Shirley for commissions, but was unsure whether the general possessed the authority to issue them in his

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<sup>304</sup> II. Instructions from Robert Dinwiddie, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*. For the immoderate use of liquor in the army, see Sargent, *Fort Du Quesne*, 297.

<sup>305</sup> GW’s General Instructions for Recruiting, [1-3 September 1755], GW’s Memorandum, [6 September 1755], GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 11 September 1755, GW’s Orders, 17 September 1755, GW to Peter Hog, 24 September 1755, GW’s Memorandum, [ca. 2 October 1755], GW’s Memoranda, 5 October 1755, GW’s Memorandum, [8 October 1755], GW’s Memorandum, [10 October 1755], in *PGW*.

<sup>306</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 14 January 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*; Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 22 January 1756, in *PGW*; Sir Thomas Robinson to William Shirley, 28 August 1755, in Charles Henry Lincoln, ed., *Correspondence of William Shirley, Governor of Massachusetts and Military Commander in America, 1731-1760*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 2:241-42, <http://www.archive.org/details/correspondencew04amergoog>.

own right. With a seasonable foresight, the governor of Virginia had already asked for “blank Commissions from Home,” and at this time was expecting a satisfactory reply. Regularly commissioned officers always took precedence when joined with the provincials, but this was not the case with Captain Dagworthy, explained Dinwiddie, because his royal commission was “cancell’d by his receiving a Sum of Money in lieu of half Pay.”<sup>308</sup>

The hitherto favorable consequences of Washington’s personal consultations with Dinwiddie may have been additional compelling reason that inspired the young Virginian hero to strike up a “personal acquaintance with General Shirley” as well in order to “add some weight to the strength of our Memorial.”<sup>309</sup> In consequence of either slow mail or a deliberate miscommunication, Washington was apparently not aware that Governor Sharpe had already delivered his instructions to Captain Dagworthy concerning the dispute prior to his departure to Boston.<sup>310</sup> But to Washington’s satisfaction, not long after his arrival to the capital of Massachusetts, Shirley followed Sharpe’s advise and ordered that in case the Virginia troops join with those of Captain Dagworthy’s at Fort Cumberland, “Colonel Washington should take the Command.”<sup>311</sup>

Upon learning that Sharpe, governor of Maryland, had been appointed by General Shirley to lead a new intercolonial expedition against Fort Duquesne, Washington tried to petition the general again for a royal commission, but this time through Sharpe.<sup>312</sup> When deferring the matter to Shirley, Sharpe expressed his inclination in granting Washington’s wishes, “As M<sup>r</sup> Washington is much esteemed in Virginia & really seems a Gent<sup>l</sup> of Merit I should be exceedingly glad to learn that your Excellency is not averse to favouring his

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<sup>308</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 22 January 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>309</sup> GW to Adam Stephen, 1 February 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>310</sup> William Shirley to Horatio Sharpe, 5 March 1756, in Browne, *Horatio Sharpe*, 1:347-48.

<sup>311</sup> Joseph Chew to GW, 4 March 1756, William Shirley to GW, 5 March 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>312</sup> William Shirley to Horatio Sharpe, 23 February 1756, in Lincoln, *William Shirley*, 2:396-99; Horatio Sharpe to William Shirley, 10 April 1756, in Browne, *Horatio Sharpe*, 1:389.

Application & Request,” despite of his recent discord with Washington over Captain Dagworthy’s right of command.<sup>313</sup>

Thus, during the first four months of 1756, Washington had two colonial governors (Robert Dinwiddie and Horatio Sharpe) soliciting British authorities for securing a king’s commission for him. A third governor and a general in one person, William Shirley, soon expressed his sentiments on the matter as well. Shirley, who must have been impressed by Washington on the occasion of their recent meeting in Boston, was in favor of securing a commission for the Virginian commander in chief, whom he intended to place as second in command to Sharpe. “I know no Provincial Officer upon this Continent,” wrote Shirley, “to whom I would so readily give it as to himself.”<sup>314</sup>

Whatever sanguine hopes Shirley’s endorsement of Washington may have aroused, they were at the same time quelled by the news that another general, Lord Loudoun, was soon expected to arrive in America and replace Shirley.<sup>315</sup> With the arrival of the Lord Loudoun, an official war was at last declared by the British king against France and all recommendations for command had to be bequeathed to the new general.<sup>316</sup> Whatever “personal acquaintance” Washington may have succeeded in cultivating with Shirley, he had to begin proving his worthiness anew with the general’s successor.<sup>317</sup>

Dinwiddie learned that His Majesty intended to send some blank commissions for the American soldiers and whetted Washington’s appetite by assuring him that he “doubt not You will be taken care of.”<sup>318</sup> But not leaving anything to chance, Washington determined to remind Dinwiddie that he would be pleased to have his credentials presented to the new

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<sup>313</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 14 January 1756, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 22 January 1756, in *PGW*; Horatio Sharpe to William Shirley, 10 April 1756, in Browne, *Horatio Sharpe*, 1:389; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 48.

<sup>314</sup> William Shirley to Horatio Sharpe, 16 May 1756, in Browne, *Horatio Sharpe*, 1:416.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> His Majesty’s Declaration of War Against the French King, 17 May 1756, in Lincoln, *William Shirley*, 2:450-53.

<sup>317</sup> GW to Adam Stephen, 1 February 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>318</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 23 April 1756, in *PGW*.

general. “You need not have wrote me to recommend You to the Earl of Loudon,” replied Dinwiddie, explaining that he was already planning to sent a detailed missive to his friend General James Abercromby, second in command, “as I know the Influence he has with [Loudoun].”<sup>319</sup>

Whether or not Washington’s reminder was helpful, Dinwiddie penned a hearty recommendation of the young Virginian colonel to Abercromby, pointing out his leading role in the Virginia forces since the beginning of the French and Indian War and Braddock’s condescension in promoting him as one of his aide-de-camps and possibly, had the general survived, to a regular army. “He is a person much beloved here,” continued Dinwiddie, “and has gone through many hardships in the Service, and I really think he has great Merit, and believe he can raise more Men here than any one present that I know. If his Lordship will be so kind as to promote him in the British Establishment I think he will answer my recommendation.”<sup>320</sup> Washington could have hardly wished for a more hearty testimonial.

Besides rank, there may have been an additional reason Washington craved a royal commission. Apart from being privileged to receive a commission signed by the king, royally commissioned officers had greater financial benefits than the colonial officers. Whereas a colonial soldier’s length of service was often cut short by disbandment with no financial arrangement “for a broken Leg, or a shortned Arm,” a young soldier on the British Establishment “may venture to dip his Estate a little on the Road to preferment, where he is sure, if he behaves well, that a Commission is some Sort of a provision for Life.”<sup>321</sup> After retirement, a royally commissioned officer usually continued to receive half pay for life.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 27 May 1756, in *PGW*. GW’s second letter to Dinwiddie of May 23 was not found, but Dinwiddie confirmed receiving and replied to both of them on May 27.

<sup>320</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to James Abercromby, 28 May 1756, in R. A. Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751-1758, Now First Printed from the Manuscript in the Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, 2 vols. (Richmond, VA: Virginia Historical Society, 1884), 2:425, <http://www.archive.org/details/officialrecordso02virg>.

<sup>321</sup> George Mason to GW, 16 May 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>322</sup> Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 45.

However, Washington was certainly not the only one asking for a recommendation to be sent to the new general. Robert Stewart, captain of the Regiment's light cavalry, also entreated Dinwiddie to be recommended to His Lordship. Another reason Dinwiddie chose not to write directly to Loudoun but to Abercromby was that he expected the general would be "troubled with *many* solicitations."<sup>323</sup>

One of those was initiated by John Bradstreet, Shirley's adjutant-general, who was especially adroit in inviting his friends not to hesitate to present his name in order to secure a due command under the new commander. Hence, Loudoun, even prior to his departure from Britain, was "not unacquainted with your name and your activity."<sup>324</sup>

William Henry Fairfax (Billy), son of Colonel William Fairfax, desired to serve as a regular officer under Loudoun as well. Having joined a regiment encamped at Albany as a volunteer, Billy soon found out that there were one hundred other volunteers following the regiment and hoping for a commission, "many of them very well recommended either by Service or Interest." Seeing that there was just a slim chance of success by waiting, he embraced the first opportunity of purchasing a commission, occasioned by a vacancy in another regiment, which Loudoun "very willingly consented" for a "200£ Sterling wch is the settled Price [for ensigncy] here, & 100£ more for a Lieutenancy, unless by a private Bargain."<sup>325</sup>

Likewise, Robert Stewart, who had recently obtained a lieutenancy in the Royal American corps, was still dissatisfied with his rank and sought a higher regular commission in that regiment through purchase, but admitted that the price was unaffordable for him without

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid. (my italics); Pargellis, *Military Affairs*, 88; GW to Robert Stewart, 11 August 1758, in PGW; Robert Dinwiddie to James Abercromby, 28 May 1756, Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 2:425.

<sup>324</sup> William G. Godfrey, *Pursuit of Profit and Preferment in Colonial North America: John Bradstreet's Quest* (Waterloo, ON, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 8, 87, <http://books.google.com/books?id=SEmo-gwbLwMC>.

<sup>325</sup> William Henry Fairfax to GW, 9 December 1757, in PGW.

the pecuniary “assistance from my Friends.”<sup>326</sup> William Peachey, who was recently reduced from his captaincy in the Virginia Regiment, also wished to purchase a royal commission, but realized that he could not “advance much for a Commission as I have Children to provide for.” So Peachey contemplated procuring recommendatory letters “from the leading Men of this Colony” and presenting them to Lord Loudon, in hopes by obtaining it by merit.<sup>327</sup>

As far as Washington’s case is concerned, since it is not clear what particular rank in the royal commission he desired, it is difficult to determine how much such a purchase would cost him. By all accounts, however, Washington’s correspondence does not indicate that he ever seriously intended to enter the British Establishment by the means of money. On the other hand, there are numerous instances testifying that he hoped to obtain the commission by merit.<sup>328</sup> It may be assumed that meriting such a commission appeared to Washington more honorable and just than by obtaining it through purchase.

Meanwhile, Washington patiently continued to fulfill his duties at various military posts in Virginia. During the first few months of 1756, Washington sent several dismal reports of the late situation of the British subjects, particularly of those residing near Winchester on the Virginia borderland.<sup>329</sup> He informed Dinwiddie, that there were insufficient number of soldiers recruited, and those recruited were often poorly trained, that ammunition and provisions were inadequate, citizens were constantly threatened and harassed by the

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<sup>326</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 16 January 1759, in *PGW*.

<sup>327</sup> William Peachey to GW, 14 November 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>328</sup> Arvel B. Erickson, “Abolition of Purchase in the British Army,” *Military Affairs* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1959): 66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1985503>; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 160n3. The exact prices for royal commissions in the British army were not stable in the 18th century, but the prices set by Gen. Jeffery Amherst in 1759 for troops in North America were fixed in the following manner: an ensigncy (second lieutenancy) cost £200, a first lieutenancy £300, and a captaincy could be purchased for £1200 sterling. Based on the progression of prices according to rank, a majority would cost about £2,000.

<sup>329</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 13 January 1756, 7 April 1756, 16 April 1756, 18 April 1756, 22 April 1756, GW to John Robinson, 7 April 1756, 16 April 1756, in *PGW*.

French or Indians, inciting a considerable number of families to move out of the area “and in a short time will leave this County as desolate as Hampshire, where scarce a family lives!”<sup>330</sup>

The Virginia frontier was becoming a scene of “cruelties and Barbarities, as are shocking to human nature,” lamented Washington.<sup>331</sup> He deeply sympathized with his fellow citizens and was furthermore distressed by not being able to relieve them of their present suffering. Resorting to a pathetic language seldom appearing in his correspondence, Washington exclaimed, “I would be a willing offering to Savage Fury: and die by inches, to save a people!”<sup>332</sup>

Despite his willingness to lay down his own life for the protection of his fellow citizens, Washington faced charges that raised questions of morality and good conduct of his officers in the Regiment. Washington could not determine which particular officers may have been at fault, but he vindicated himself by stating that his orders “witness how much I have, both by Threats and persuasive means, endeavoured to discountenance Gaming, drinking, swearing, and irregularities of every other kind.”<sup>333</sup>

Washington was a tough serviceman, but thin-skinned to criticism. Though having already been dissuaded from resignation, he began to cast doubts on his continuation in service again, mostly due to criticism.<sup>334</sup> “If I continue in the Service,” wrote Washington to Dinwiddie in spring 1756, he pledged take a more rigorous approach to enforcing the military rules among his officers to avoid being blamed for their lack of discipline.<sup>335</sup> He was disaffected for doing his best “while the murder of poor innocent Babes, and helpless families, may be laid to my account here!” The commander of Virginia became so desperate that he began “to lament the hour that gave me a Commission” and would gladly “resign

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<sup>330</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 24 April 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 22 April 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>333</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 18 April 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>334</sup> GW to Robert Hunter Morris, [9 April 1756], in *PGW*.

<sup>335</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 18 April 1756, in *PGW*.

without one hesitating moment, a command, which I never expect to reap either Honor or Benefit from."<sup>336</sup>

Washington had already demonstrated he was capable of relinquishing his office if its continuation would bring him dishonor. It appears that criticism was especially disagreeable to him because of his conviction that he was serving from laudable motives. His thoughts of resignation apparently subsided this time again, but his patience was tried anew about half a year later when the Virginia Gazette published a highly censorious article disparaging the Virginian officers. The anonymous author wrote, "Men are advanced according to Seniority, the Interests and influence of Friends, &c. and not according to Merit." The commanding officers were charged with cowardly inactivity "when nothing brave is so much as *attempted* . . . and suffer their Country to be ravaged in their Neighbourhood." Calling the officers "dastardly Debauchees," the scurrilous scribe could have hardly expressed anything more injurious to Washington than to claim that "men of Virtue and true Courage can have no Heart to enlist, and mingle in such a Crowd."<sup>337</sup>

However, Washington was not the only one to consider resignation that year. The officers of the Virginia Regiment, dejected by "so groundless and barb'rous Aspersion, we are one and all (at this Garrison) fully determin'd to present our Commissions to the Governor." While applying for redress, the soldiery expressed their unswerving high esteem for both Colonel Washington and Lieutenant Colonel Stephen.<sup>338</sup>

William Ramsay, a long-time friend, assured Washington "that ev'ry Gentn in an exalted Station raises envy."<sup>339</sup> Washington was informed by his older half brother Augustine that it is a general opinion of his supporters to give no heed to "that unlucky 10th Centinel."

<sup>336</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 22 April 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>337</sup> "Centinel X," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), September 3, 1756, quoted in Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 43; "The Virginia Centinel, No. X," in Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Washington and 'Centinel X'*, reprinted from *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (January 1899), 4-5, <http://www.archive.org/details/washingtoncentin00ford>.

<sup>338</sup> Officers of the Virginia Regiment to Adam Stephen, 6 October 1756, in Ford, *'Centinel X'*, 8.

<sup>339</sup> William Ramsay to GW, 22 September 1756, in *PGW*.

Washington's resignation was all the more cautioned against since it could induce many other officers (and probably those not deserving the blame) to follow his example. Despite the uproar that the charges printed in the newspapers provoked, it did not tarnish Washington's good reputation among the leading Virginians.<sup>340</sup> He was known for his bravery and "your dissinterestedness, your unwearied Application & Zeal for your Countrys good."<sup>341</sup>

Washington listened to the reassuring words of his friends, weighed the options carefully, and decided to stay in the service.

Contrary to his inclinations, Washington's work during his chief command of the Virginia forces was largely defensive. Due to insufficient forces, Washington was necessitated to relinquish any schemes of a major action against the enemy and focus primarily on protecting the Virginia backcountry, which largely consisted of erecting and garrisoning forts along the province's frontier.<sup>342</sup>

While on his way along the frontier posts, Washington encountered another life-threatening situation. Washington and a few others were cantering in a forest near Fort Vause, unaware that a party of Indians waylaid there. The peculiarity of the situation was that the enemy party did not lie in wait for Washington or his men, but for another group of men whose passing through the same area was expected at about the same time. Unaware, Washington passed through and "escaped almost certain destruction for the weather was raining and the few Carbines unfit for use if we had escaped the first fire."<sup>343</sup>

Only later did Washington learn from some of the British prisoners of this incident as well as the fortunate fact that the Indians were ordered by their captain (who had actually

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<sup>340</sup> Augustine Washington to GW, 16 October 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>341</sup> William Ramsay to GW, 22 September 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>342</sup> Zagari, "*Life of George Washington*", 20; GW to John Robinson, 24 April 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 3 May 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 23 May 1756, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 12 June 1756, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 1 July 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 4 August 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 23 September 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 10 October 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 9 November 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>343</sup> Zagari, "*Life of George Washington*", 20.

temporarily left them to verify the numbers of the approaching enemy) not to take heed of travelers passing from the opposite direction than the anticipated party. This and other narrow escapes led Washington to suppose that he was sometimes spared from an enemy fire only “by the protection of Providence” and may have contributed to his impression that his life may have been preserved for some higher purpose or further patriotic service in the future.<sup>344</sup>

Washington “made it a principle of duty to promote the interest and Service of my Country by every endeavour,” no matter what calumny may defame his name.<sup>345</sup> But besides the aspersions cast on the Virginia officers by “that unlucky 10th Centinel” and the precarious situation on the frontier, Washington was additionally perturbed by increasingly strained relationship with Dinwiddie in the latter half of 1756.<sup>346</sup> The governor sent Washington regular instructions and promoted the interests of the colony as much as he could, but the young commander of Virginia repined about “ambiguous and uncertain” directions and disagreed with a number of issues concerning the management of the army.<sup>347</sup> Furthermore, Washington disclosed his feelings of resentment over Dinwiddie’s orders in a letter to John Robinson, a fact that apparently did not escape the governor’s attention either.<sup>348</sup>

The governor could hardly have been contented when Washington kept sending melancholy reports to the governor and the speaker, complaining about the inadequate laws regulating the militia, the brevity of their service, the unmethodical use of provisions and ammunition, the defenseless state of the forts, the “indolence and irregularity” of the garrisons, the feeble protection they afford to the backcountry settlers who are “so affected

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> GW to John Robinson, 9 November 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>346</sup> Augustine Washington to GW, 16 October 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>347</sup> GW to John Robinson, 5 August 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 165n21.

with approaching ruin” that they are fleeing to the Southern colonies.<sup>349</sup> Washington’s list of issues seemed endless and perusing its contents would vex almost any reader.

Dinwiddie could have turned brash but he seems to have kept his temper under control in his rebuke. “I agree the Militia Law is very deficient, & I hope the next Assembly will make proper Amendments,” began Dinwiddie diplomatically with a point with which he concurred. He then returned the young man’s charge of ambiguity by pointing out that his report was vague and the two individuals proposed by Washington for an office did not mention any “Name for my Approbation.” The governor then proved that he was not to blame for there being no “offensive war,” because he repeatedly beseeched Loudoun for an intercolonial expedition to the Ohio, but with no answer. “You seem <to At>tribute Neglect in me,” Dinwiddie continued and warned Washington that “<T>he Charge is unmannerly, as I did what I thot proper.”<sup>350</sup> The governor in his letter enclosed the council’s decision on not only maintaining but reinforcing Fort Cumberland—a fort, which Washington had previously indicated, was situated in a remote region and provided feeble protection to the province, especially since the colony’s plans were void of any offensive measures.<sup>351</sup>

Being on unfriendly terms with the governor was neither honorable nor prudent for Washington, especially since it was, in large measure, Dinwiddie’s trust and patronage that initiated the young man’s precocious rise in the military line. “I am very sorry any expression in my letter should be deemed unmannerly,” apologized Washington, but he seems to have believed the contents of his letters were sincere and frank. His vindication began by stating that he “endeavoured to demean myself in that proper respect due to Superiors.” In answer to the reprimand of providing a vague report, the commander of Virginia wrote, “I was rather

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<sup>349</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 9 November 1756, GW to John Robinson, 9 November 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>350</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 16 November 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 9 November 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>351</sup> GW to John Robinson, 5 August 1756, Enclosure: Proposal for Frontier Forts, [ca. 9 November 1756], Enclosure: Minutes of the Council, 15 November 1756, in *PGW*.

fearful of blame for prolixity & impertinence.” The following statement succinctly reveals Washington’s sentiments on his diction, “If my *open & disinterested* way of writing and speaking, has the air of pertness & freedom; I shall redress my error by acting reservedly.”<sup>352</sup> It was evident that Washington wished to remain on good terms with the governor, but at the same time, he was determined to stick to his growing convictions that his demeanor was honorable and merited approbation.

What added to Washington’s discomfiture was Dinwiddie’s note informing him that Lord Loudoun disagreed with his suggestions on further military operations in the Virginia backcountry. In reaction to Washington’s suggestion to evacuate Fort Cumberland, His Lordship opined, “I cannot agree with Co. Washington . . . by retiring the advanced Posts near Winchester . . . This Proceeding, I am affraid will have a bad Effect as to the Dominion: & will not have a good Appearance at Home.”<sup>353</sup> If Washington hoped to make a good impression on Loudoun with his proposals, this was not a particularly encouraging reply.

If Washington’s relationship with Dinwiddie was somewhat distant and reserved in late 1756, Loudoun’s perception of Washington, the commander of Virginia may have feared, was not particularly favorable either. The anticipated arrival of Loudoun (newly appointed governor general of Virginia) in Virginia was delayed by attending to business in the Northern states, but when Washington learned of his coming to the Old Dominion, Washington promptly asked Dinwiddie (who remained a lieutenant governor) for a leave of absence in order to meet with His Lordship in person.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 24 November 1756, in *PGW* (my italics).

<sup>353</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 10 December 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>354</sup> Charles M. Andrews, ed., “List of Commissions and Instructions to Governors and Lieutenant Governors of American and West Indian Colonies, 1609-1784,” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1911*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O., 1913), 1:401, 522, <http://www.archive.org/details/1911annualreport01ameruoft>; Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 15 December 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 19 December 1756, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 27 December 1756, GW to To James Cuninghame, 28 January 1757, in *PGW*.

Washington almost always believed his deeds were proper and honorable—an attitude that actually followed his traditional family coat of arms, *Exitus acta probat*, which translates as “At the end of life my deeds will be approved.”<sup>355</sup> Washington estimated that Loudoun’s unfavorable judgment of his proceedings was occasioned by nothing else than his ignorance of “what were the springs and motives that have actuated my conduct.” Furthermore, Washington was so convinced of the propriety of his service that he professed to Dinwiddie, “no man ever intended better, nor studied the Interest of his Country with more affectionate zeal than I have done.”<sup>356</sup>

For these reasons, Loudoun’s admonition that Washington’s proceedings may “have a bad Effect as to the Dominion: & will not have a good Appearance at Home” was obviously particularly injurious to the young commander.<sup>357</sup> The prejudices against his character, induced by false representations of facts, compelled Washington to confess to Robinson, that he was again thinking of resignation and “determined to bear up under all these embarrassments some time longer.”<sup>358</sup>

Prior to his planned personal meeting with Loudoun, Washington attempted to set the record straight for his Lordship by penning a lengthy account (about 4,500 words) of his proceedings in defending the interests of the colony. Washington mentioned a number of issues, which he hoped to resolve by an “Amendment” of the military law. More importantly, he talked about the motives for his service. Washington admitted to have apprehended a “loss of Honour” and an exposure of his “Character to Publick Censure” by accepting the chief command. “But the *Sollicitations of the Country* overcame my objections,” he proudly declared. In fact, the very reason of his sending such a prolix letter allegedly was the

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<sup>355</sup> Alden, *George Washington*, 81; Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 12. The motto is sometimes erroneously translated as “The end justifies the means.”

<sup>356</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 19 December 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*; Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 10 December 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>358</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 19 December 1756, GW to John Robinson, 19 December 1756, in *PGW*.

“Affectionate Zeal to Serve my Country, Steady Attachment to Her Interest, The Honour of Her Arms, and crying Grievances which She is labourg under.”<sup>359</sup>

By complimenting his Lordship and deferring to him as “our Patron,” Washington rightly acknowledged his clientage status in this relationship and demonstrated his respect for rank and benevolence of his superior. Washington did not intend to merely flatter or fawn, “my nature is honest, and Free from Guile,” he professed.<sup>360</sup>

But Washington was also preparing the ground for obtaining a regular commission. Half a year had passed since Dinwiddie’s recommendation of Washington to Abercromby for a royal commission and no reply, it seems, had yet arrived.<sup>361</sup> Had General Braddock survived the ill-fated Battle of Monongahela in 1755, Washington claimed, “I should have met with preferment equal to my Wishes.”<sup>362</sup>

In this regard, Washington felt a glimmer of hope as James Cuninghame, Loudoun’s aide-de-camp, said in reply to his prolix letter, “His Lordship seems very much pleased with the Accounts you have given him” and the “good Charecter given of you by the Gentlemen” Cuninghame had the privilege of meeting, made him wish “to have that Honor” of being personally introduced to the commander of Virginia in the ensuing the year.<sup>363</sup>

At last, Loudoun and Washington met in Philadelphia on March 20, 1757, at the occasion of a conference with the southern governors. With the view of no imminent offensive measures, Washington could not hope for further evidences of his valor and worthiness any time soon. Nevertheless, the Virginian colonel was undoubtedly already ripe for being promoted to the British Establishment. The moment of truth seems to have arrived. Lord Loudoun’s diary entry of that day reads, “Called in Col. Washington and made a new

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<sup>359</sup> GW to John Campbell, Earl of Loudoun, 10 January 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.* (my italics); Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 105.

<sup>361</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to James Abercromby, 28 May 1756, in Brock *Robert Dinwiddie*, 2:425; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 49.

<sup>362</sup> GW to To John Campbell, Earl of Loudoun, 10 January 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>363</sup> James Cuninghame to GW, 27 February 1757, in *PGW*; Robert Dinwiddie to John Campbell, Earl of Loudoun, 1 July 1756, in Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 2:457.

disposition of Va troops.”<sup>364</sup> No more details have been preserved. Whether or not Loudoun gave his word for securing the royal commission for Washington at this time is unknown. Empty-handed, Washington then returned to his routine service on the frontier and one can only speculate what consequences Loudoun’s gratification of Washington’s ambition for a royal commission may have occasioned with respect to the “future” War of Independence in the American colonies.<sup>365</sup>

*“Distinguished in Some Measure from the Common Run”*

In spring 1757, when recapitulating the previous two years to his London trader, Washington wrote of his having stayed on “our cold and Barren” backcountry to attempt to protect the British subjects along a 560-km-long frontier against the incursions of the crafty enemy. “I am become in a manner an exile,” Washington added somberly.<sup>366</sup>

Washington’s mood was not a bit alleviated when Dinwiddie notified him that for the sake of saving some expenses, the Assembly determined to reorganize the Virginia Regiment into ten companies of one hundred men each.<sup>367</sup> Besides the reorganization, the chief commander of Virginia heard from the Burgess speaker that Dinwiddie contemplated reducing his pay also. Washington pleaded with the governor to “not differ in opinion from the whole country” (an obvious hyperbole) and to retain “the only perquisite I have” in prosecuting his numerous duties on the frontier.<sup>368</sup>

Although Washington’s pay was not decreased, the issues of financing the Virginia troops continued to trouble him for most of that year. Indians were threatening to forsake the

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<sup>364</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 2 February 1757, in *PGW*; Loudoun’s memorandum books, 23 July 1757, Huntington Manuscript 1717, vol. 3, Henry E. Huntington Library, quoted in Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 50, 163n35.

<sup>365</sup> Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 50.

<sup>366</sup> GW to Richard Washington, 15 April 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>367</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 16 May 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>368</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 29 April 1757, in *PGW*.

British if not “properly rewarded,” and many Virginian soldiers were agitated by being long in salary arrears. Washington viewed himself quite fortunate to have kept “the Soldiers from mutiny and desertion” in consequence of their dissatisfaction with the financial circumstances.<sup>369</sup> The condition of the soldiery grew so penurious that the commander of Virginia considered it beyond his power to move the troops “till the money arrives.”<sup>370</sup>

In 1757, the combined forces Washington had under his command varied in number, depending on the circumstances, but they barely exceeded one thousand.<sup>371</sup> The possibility of receiving reinforcements from the Creek and Chickasaw Indians gave Washington a spark of hope that marching against the Fort Duquesne would be feasible. In fact, such a scheme seemed to Washington nothing but a “glorious undertaking.”<sup>372</sup> But no attack on the French fort was undertaken that year as the British numbers in the Virginia backcountry were insufficient and an exorbitant amount of time was spent in merely gathering intelligence about the movement and plans of the French forces on the Ohio. Washington’s men were once alarmed by what seemed an imminent attack by the French, but it turned out that the enemy forces were heading toward Pennsylvania rather than the Old Dominion.<sup>373</sup>

Throughout 1757, the relationship between Washington and Dinwiddie had its vicissitudes but continued to be generally reserved. In June, Washington confided to Speaker Robinson, “I am convinced it wou’d give pleasure to the Governor to hear that I was involved in trouble: however undeservedly, such are his dispositions toward me.”<sup>374</sup> Besides such straightforward, if not unmannerly, charge, the letters Washington and Dinwiddie exchanged

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<sup>369</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 16 May 1757, George Mercer to GW, 26 April 1757, GW to John Stanwix, 28 May 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>370</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 30 May 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>371</sup> Richard Bland to GW, 7 June 1757, GW to John Stanwix, 15 June 1757, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 17 September 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>372</sup> GW to John Robinson, 30 May 1757, GW to John Stanwix, 28 May 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>373</sup> Memorandum, 16 June 1757, Council of War, 16 June 1757, GW to William Fairfax, 25 June 1757, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 27 June 1757, GW to Henry Lee and Culpeper County Lieutenant, 25 June 1757, GW to Orange County Lieutenant, Henry Fitzhugh, and John Spotswood, 25 June 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>374</sup> GW to John Robinson, 10 June 1757, in *PGW*.

at this time remained reasonably polite and only on occasion was it seasoned with a gripe of one kind or another.<sup>375</sup>

Washington's agitation intensified upon learning that an alleged calumny defamed his character and reputation—hardly a bearable concern for someone longing for “Honour and Glory.”<sup>376</sup> Interestingly enough, he may never have learned about it if it had not been for Captain William Peachy who related to him in summer of 1757 that the slander, which allegedly consisted of an intentional false alarm by Washington the previous year, had been circulating among the gentlemen in Williamsburg. Peachy said he learned of this slander from Charles Carter of Shirley who claimed to have heard it from Colonel Richard Corbin, a member of the governor's council. Consequently, the deceitful report had allegedly “lessen'd the Governour's & some of the leading Men's Esteem for you,” explained Peachy.<sup>377</sup>

Disquieted by the slander, Washington began to investigate the matter. In consequence of the Dinwiddie's “change in your Honors conduct towards me,” Washington suspected the governor had heard of the slander. If Washington was guilty of any charge, he said he wished to have a fair chance of defending his character, rather “than to stigmatize me behind my back.” Moreover, Washington repeated his conviction of the propriety of his service, “no man that ever was employed in a public capacity has endeavoured to discharge the trust reposed in him with greater honesty, and mor zeal for the country's interest, than I have done.”<sup>378</sup>

Whether or not it was true, Washington's conviction of his diligence and sense of patriotism was real and extraordinary.

Dinwiddie professed not to have heard of it nor “any Alarms witht proper Foundation” that had been imputed to Washington. Nevertheless, he vowed to inquire of Colonel Corbin

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<sup>375</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 1 June 1757, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 13 August 1757, in *PGW*. Due to his vexations with Dinwiddie, GW intended to correspond more closely with John Stanwix, his superior, see GW to John Stanwix, 15 June 1757.

<sup>376</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>377</sup> William Peachey to GW, 22 August 1757, Return of the Virginia Regiment, 1 January 1757, List of Officers in the Virginia Regiment, 26 May 1757, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:158, 204.

<sup>378</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 17 September 1757, in *PGW*.

about it when he arrives in the capital. Do not “give Credit to ev’ry idle Story Yo. hear,” advised Dinwiddie. “My Conduct to Yo. from the Begining was always Friendly,” the governor continued, “but Yo. know I had gt Reason to suspect Yo. of Ingratitude, which I’m convinc’d your own Conscience & reflection must allow I had Reason to be angry.”<sup>379</sup>

Not surprisingly, Washington could not recall giving a cause for being suspected for showing ingratitude to his patron. “If an open, disinterested behaviour, carries offence, I may have offended,” wrote Washington. But without having his alleged misbehavior more particularized, the Virginian commander could not even “have answered to them.” Washington then informed the governor that he suspected that his actions and motives had long been “maliciously aggravated.”<sup>380</sup>

In the fall of 1757, Dinwiddie’s gubernatorial service in Virginia was drawing to a close and his farewell with Washington did not seem a particularly warm one.<sup>381</sup> After months of quibbling about what one or the other had done amiss, Dinwiddie was not favorably disposed toward Washington’s proposal to take a leave of absence to settle some accounts with him before his expected departure for Britain, “I think you are in the wrong to ask it,” he replied sternly.<sup>382</sup>

Although Washington did not disclose it in his correspondence, he was suffering from a severe form of dysentery more or less throughout the whole fall season.<sup>383</sup> His health complications rendered him incapable of performing further duties (even of writing letters) and his doctor advised him to return home speedily to recuperate. On November 13, 1757,

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<sup>379</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 24 September 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>380</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 5 October 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>381</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 24 September 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>382</sup> Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 19 October 1757, in *PGW*; Note, for example, Dinwiddie’s subtle accusation in “You shou’d have . . .” and GW’s use of the phrase “I am quite at a loss how to act, as you did not inform me upon what terms . . .,” see Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 2 September 1757, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 5 October 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>383</sup> Robert Stewart to Robert Dinwiddie, 9 November 1757, Enclosure III: Robert Stewart to John Stanwix, 24 November 1757, in *PGW*.

Washington finally arrived at Mount Vernon, fatigued by his long illness and mentally exhausting service on the province's frontier.<sup>384</sup>

Since his appointment to be the commander in chief of the Virginia forces, the first public office he claimed he wished to have avoided, Washington experienced more anxieties than had opportunities to display his heroic valor in battle.<sup>385</sup> "Honor suggested a public drama in which men played roles for which they were praised or blamed."<sup>386</sup> With that premise in mind, the Virginian colonel may have thought that his honor had suffered in consequence of newspaper aspersions, rumors of a slander, prolonged discord with the governor, and most of all, in the absence of a battle.

It is to be remembered that personal honor was consistently safeguarded by eighteenth-century gentlemen. An affront to one's reputation was sometimes taken so seriously that it resulted in a challenge to a fatal duel.<sup>387</sup> For instance, John Baylis serving under Washington in the Virginia Regiment was challenged to such a duel at the close of 1757 by Alexander Woodrow, another soldier serving in the Virginia backcountry who was said to have behaved with "much modesty and gentility"—traits of one who was likely to prize his personal reputation.<sup>388</sup> Baylis awaited his opponent the following morning "with my sword & Pistol's in order to give or take satisfaction conformable to the Punctilio's of Honour." But in consequence of Woodrow's repudiation of having extended the challenge and his reluctance to engage in the duel, Baylis had a right to bid his opponent "to Retrieve his Honour."<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> GW to Sarah Cary Fairfax, 15 November 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>385</sup> I. Commission, Robert Dinwiddie to GW, 14 August 1755, GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>386</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 39.

<sup>387</sup> Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xvi.

<sup>388</sup> Council of War, 10 July 1756, Enclosure: John Baylis's Advertisement, 28 January 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>389</sup> Enclosure: John Baylis's Advertisement, 28 January 1758, in *PGW*.

A man's honor was contingent on "the respect that he received in public" and by turning a deaf ear to an offense, "a gentleman did so at his own peril, for . . . ignoring an insult could have serious consequences."<sup>390</sup> Despite the fact that personal honor formed the *raison d'être* of Washington's public service and to criticism he was particularly thin-skinned, the Virginian colonel apparently never fully accorded with this procedure of settling such affronts to one's character since he scrupulously avoided duels throughout his life. "It is with pleasure I receive reproof, when reproof is due," admitted Washington in 1757.<sup>391</sup> But "sporting with my character," he wrote, was something Washington could barely stand and at times considered it "little less than a comic-entertainment."<sup>392</sup>

When Washington gave vent to his exasperation over deserters and insubordinate garrisons in the fall of 1757 by admitting that "they tire my patience, & almost weary me to death," little could he anticipate what his own words portended.<sup>393</sup> Indeed, within two months, Washington again contracted a severe form of dysentery, including a relapse in January, which made him suffer from the illness for a span of at least seven months.<sup>394</sup> The length and severity of the illness made some even surmise that the Virginian colonel had succumbed and "was dead!"<sup>395</sup>

Like his physical health, Washington's spirit was at a low ebb in the first few months of 1758, particularly upon hearing of others' being promoted to the British regular forces. Thomas Gage, for example, who had served with Washington in the Battle of Monongahela,

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<sup>390</sup> Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>391</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 27 August 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>392</sup> GW to William Peachey, 18 September 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>393</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 17 September 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>394</sup> Robert Stewart to Robert Dinwiddie, 9 November 1757, Enclosure III: Robert Stewart to John Stanwix, 24 November 1757, Robert Carter Nicholas to GW, 5 January 1758, GW to John Blair, 30 January 1758, GW to John Blair, 20 February 1758, GW to John Stanwix, 4 March 1758, GW to Richard Washington, 18 March 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>395</sup> Robert Carter Nicholas to GW, 6 February 1758, in *PGW*.

was appointed a lieutenant by Lord Loudoun to command a regiment of light infantry.<sup>396</sup> But for Washington, the dream of a royal commission was slowly vanishing. “I now see no prospect of preferment in a Military Life,” he wrote to his superior Colonel John Stanwix.<sup>397</sup> In consequence of his weakened condition and with the view of the unavoidable hardships of a military life in the ensuing campaign, Washington, once again, considered his resignation, “I have some thoughts of quitting my Command & retiring from all Publick Business.”<sup>398</sup>

However, Washington soon learned that Loudoun was being recalled from America and a new general would replace him with “many other Alterations” in the army. Washington may have then decided to reconsider his intention to resign. The prospects of some offensive measures in the upcoming season were boosted by uniting with several hundred Indian allies at Fort Loudoun and the anticipation of further British reinforcements, namely “a very large Fleet . . . & seven Thousand men.”<sup>399</sup>

The newly appointed commander in chief was James Abercromby, Lord Loudoun’s second in command, but the officer entrusted with the campaign against Fort Duquesne—which more immediately concerned Washington—was John Forbes.<sup>400</sup> Again, Washington considered it wise to introduce himself to his new commander. Hoping Colonel Stanwix would mention his name in “favorable terms” to the General Forbes, Washington did so not with a view of “military preferment,” for he had already “conquered all such expectancies,” but to “be distinguished in some measure from the *common run* of provincial Officers; as I

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<sup>396</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 28 June – 2 July 1755, GW to Robert Orme, 28 July 1755, John Hall to GW, 4 February 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>397</sup> GW to John Stanwix, 4 March 1758, in *PGW*; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 203.

<sup>398</sup> GW to John Stanwix, 4 March 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>399</sup> John Stanwix to GW, 10 March 1758, GW to John Blair, 9 April 1758, GW to John Stanwix, 10 April 1758, GW to William Henry Fairfax, 23 April 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>400</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 141, 225-26; Extract from the Instructions to Major-General Abercrombie, 30 December 1757, in Francis Thackeray, *A History of the Right Honorable William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for C. and J. Rivington, 1827), 1:322, <http://archive.org/details/historyofrightho1thac>; Irene Stewart, ed., *Letters of General John Forbes: Relating to the Expedition Against Fort Duquesne in 1758* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 5, [http://books.google.com/books?id=KK\\_c9IwCZPgC](http://books.google.com/books?id=KK_c9IwCZPgC).

understand there will be a motley herd of us.”<sup>401</sup> To Thomas Gage, Abercromby’s second in command, Washington sent virtually the same plea, though his “modesty will scarcely permit me to ask it.” The Virginian colonel, who was now proud to have served in the army longer “than any provincial officer in America,” re-emphasized that he was inspired by motives that were “purely laudable.”<sup>402</sup>

Washington did not seem to cultivate vanity in his efforts to obtain a royal commission in the British army. He seems to have been an aspiring soldier in his early years indeed, yet his principles were no doubt based on a sound moral foundation that revered matters of a divine nature. Although the specifics of his religious convictions may be uneasy to decipher, he was a believer. Besides his Anglican faith (state church of the colony), he had been initiated to the Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1752.<sup>403</sup> His hitherto survival in the heat of battles and in perilous situations on the Virginia frontier contributed to his forming a belief that a saving Providential power had a hand in the preservation of his life.<sup>404</sup> Moreover, during the French and Indian War, Washington continuously asked the governor’s council to commission a chaplain for his Regiment. “Common decency, Sir, in a camp calls for the services of a Divine; and which ought not to be dispensed with, altho’ the world should be so uncharitable as to think us void of Religion, & incapable of good Instructions,” Washington wrote the president of the governor’s council in 1758.<sup>405</sup>

Washington knew very well that a lack of modesty was incompatible with either conventional ethics or punctilios of genteel conduct. Therefore, writing to General John Forbes, Washington defined the limits of his aspirations, “to merit a continuance of the good opinion you seem to entertain of me, shall be one of my Principal Studies; for I have now no

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<sup>401</sup> GW to John Stanwix, 10 April 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>402</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 243; GW to Thomas Gage, 12 April 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>403</sup> DSF 1:267, 47; Thompson, “*In the Hands of a Good Providence*”, 16.

<sup>404</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 18 July 1755, William Fairfax to GW, 26 July, 1755, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 9 November 1756, GW to Francis Fauquier, 28 September 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>405</sup> GW to John Robinson, 9 November 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 9 November 1756, GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 12 June 1757, GW to John Blair, 17 April 1758, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:66-67.

ambition that is higher.”<sup>406</sup> Similarly, when communicating with John St. Clair, deputy quartermaster general, Washington said he was pleased that “the General, Sir John, and Major Halkett” trusted him enough to include his company in the ensuing campaign and hoped “to stand well in your good Opinions.” Washington then elaborated on the moral imperatives of his service by adding that he expected no other reward but a satisfaction arising “from a Consciousness of doing my duty” and earning a deserved acknowledgment of his friends.<sup>407</sup>

Undoubtedly, the moral foundation upon which Washington based his public service increased his credibility in rendering his duties disinterestedly. By calling attention to his willingness to serve his country rather than to promote his own interests, he was also gaining trust that he would not misuse the power that would be vested in him. Respecting his newly acquired right to issuing orders to the Virginia militia in spring of 1758, Washington promised to President Blair that “I shall make a prudent use of the Power you have been pleased to give me.”<sup>408</sup> Earning a public trust in not misusing the power of his office would prove increasingly important in Washington’s later career.

Washington’s conviction that he was not given a sufficient notice by his superiors of his gallantry made him more susceptible when such notices were given to other officers, especially when undeservedly. Lieutenant James Baker’s promotion in May 1758 is one such instance. Baker, who had participated in a daring excursion to Fort Duquesne, was thought by his friends worthy of promotion. They solicited William Nelson, a member of the council, to intercede with Blair on Baker’s behalf and advance him to fill up the vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Captain Joshua Lewis. They justified their recommendation, which ran contrary to the rule of seniority, this way: “when a junior Officer had signalized himself by

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<sup>406</sup> GW to John Forbes, 23 April 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>407</sup> GW to John St. Clair, 27 April 1758, in *PGW*; Pargellis, *Military Affairs*, 34, 45; Godfrey, *Pursuit of Profit and Preferment*, 118.

<sup>408</sup> GW to John Blair, 4-10 May 1758, in *PGW*.

his remarkable good behaviour on any particular Occasion, as Mr Baker had, it was not unjust nor unusual to promote such a one, as it would inspire others to emulation.”<sup>409</sup>

Washington adhered to the rule of seniority and refused to advance Baker “over the heads of older officers.” Washington acknowledged him as a “very *deserving* officer; but there are others equally deserving—and have adventured equally to seek *Glory*, and to *merit* applause!” The commander of Virginia understood well that promoting younger officers solely by merit would cause disaffection in the Regiment, especially among the more senior officers.<sup>410</sup>

In reaction to this preferment, Washington may have reflected on his prominent role in the French and Indian War since its very beginning, including his heroic role at the ill-fated Battle of Monongahela, and his hitherto vain expectation of a royal commission despite his greatest exertions. Admittedly, his credentials would have probably accorded him the regular commission by virtue of either merit or seniority, but to Washington’s dismay, that bounty was still not forthcoming. Baker’s promotion may have made him somewhat disgruntled over his own futile efforts to deserve a royal recognition himself, which he believed was due him.

The prospects of a promising campaign prompted some of Washington’s friends to wish him success. “You have my Earnest Prayers, that you may make a Glorious & successfull Campain,” wrote him Joseph Chew of Connecticut, a long-time friend of the Washingtons. “After which,” Chew continued, “I hope you will meet with that Reward and notice from your king & Country you have so Long merrited; and so greatly deserved.”<sup>411</sup> “Notice from your king,” in the military sense, meant a royal commission. Robert Rutherford, captain of rangers, chose a more poetic language in his letter to the commander of Virginia. “Injoy the inexpressible Sattisfaction of Compleat Victory,” wrote Rutherford, “and return

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<sup>409</sup> John Blair to GW, 11 May 1758, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:70.

<sup>410</sup> GW to John Blair, 28 May 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>411</sup> Joseph Chew to GW, 10 May 1758, in *PGW*; DSF 2:163.

with wreaths of Laurel Elate with Youth and Success to your friends and fortune . . .”<sup>412</sup> As sincere as these accolades may have been, they probably reminded Washington what may have been realized had the royal favor actually smiled on him.

In the first half of 1758, preparations for the expedition against Fort Duquesne were fully under way. Besides the militia, the Virginian colony voted 2,000 men for the campaign to be under General Forbes’ command. The British also welcomed the partisan force of over 700 Indians who joined the cause on the colony’s frontiers.<sup>413</sup> The timing for an attack seemed propitious since, according to some accounts, the garrison at Fort Duquesne was invitingly feeble at that moment.<sup>414</sup>

In May 1758, when Francis Fauquier, Dinwiddie’s successor, was expected to arrive in Williamsburg, Washington was sent to the Virginia’s capital to give a full account on current military matters.<sup>415</sup> But besides providing the report, Washington probably looked forward to introducing himself in person to the new governor in hopes of making a good first impression. Unfortunately, the governor was delayed and urgent military duties precluded Washington from waiting longer than a week or two.<sup>416</sup> Back at Fort Loudoun, Washington at least penned his welcome letter to Governor Fauquier offering “your Honr my congratulations on your appointment.”<sup>417</sup>

Any procrastination of the anticipated offensive against Fort Duquesne made Washington anxious. Although complimenting General Forbes as “an Officer of your universal good Character, and consummate Prudence to Command in this Expedition,” Washington felt an urge to advise him on a number of points the expedition may benefit from. In sum, Washington warned the general of further delays as the Indian allies grew

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<sup>412</sup> GW to Robert Rutherford, 24 June 1758, Robert Rutherford to GW, 2 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>413</sup> GW to William Henry Fairfax, 23 April 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>414</sup> GW to John St. Clair, 4 May 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>415</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:66-67. Since the departure of Dinwiddie in January 1758, the colony of Virginia was led by John Blair, president of the council.

<sup>416</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 17 June 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*

increasingly restless. The precariousness of traversing the wilderness, Washington further cautioned, necessitated the assistance of Indian warriors, and proposed that a British agent be sent to the Cherokee nation immediately to settle any disagreements that might disrupt the anticipated joint offensive.

Washington was so anxious for the successful accomplishment of the attack that he apologized for taking the liberty in submitting his “Ideas” on the campaign to General Forbes. But it was “a liberty, that nothing but the most disinterested regard for the safety and welfare of these Colonies could cause me to take,” he added.<sup>418</sup> Francis Halkett, Forbes’s secretary, believed Washington was justified in submitting his advice to the general on the grounds of “the great application you have given, with the opportunities, and experience you have had.” He also mentioned that the general placed “confidence” in Washington’s opinions, “which your merit deserves.”<sup>419</sup>

In order to achieve more practicality and perhaps look more presentable (if not “regular”), Washington on his own initiative ordered a new design of uniforms for his soldiers. Colonel Henry Bouquet, an important commander under Forbes, was “mightily pleased” with them and even suggested that they “should be our pattern in this expedition.” Forbes also expressed his approval of them.<sup>420</sup>

Meanwhile, the British suffered a humiliating defeat at Fort Carillon (later renamed to Fort Ticonderoga) in upstate New York, losing about a thousand men, including Lord Howe, second in command to James Abercromby, the commander in chief.<sup>421</sup> With the news of this

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<sup>418</sup> GW to John Forbes, 23 April 1758, GW to John Forbes, 19 June 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>419</sup> Francis Halkett to GW, 25 June 1758, in *PGW*; Alfred Procter James, comp. et ed., *Writings of General John Forbes: Relating to His Service in North America* (Menasha, WI: Collegiate Press, 1938), 21n43, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015027041345>.

<sup>420</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, 13 July 1758, Abraham Bosomworth to GW, 11 July 1758, Henry Bouquet to GW, 11 July 1758, Henry Bouquet to GW, 14 July 1758, in *PGW*; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 268; James, *Writings of General John Forbes*, 19n40.

<sup>421</sup> Abraham Bosomworth to GW, 24 July 1758, in *PGW*; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 240-41.

major defeat of the British forces and the prolonged indisposition of General Forbes, the prospects of an imminent British attack on Fort Duquesne were suddenly dimming.<sup>422</sup>

Washington was directed to march the whole Regiment under his command to Winchester and later to supervise building a new 60-km-long wagon road from Fort Cumberland north to Raystown (today's Bedford, Pennsylvania) as well as a 70-km-long wagon road east to Fort Frederick.<sup>423</sup> Opening up new roads was part of Forbes's plan to provide a more convenient route to Fort Duquesne than the Braddock's Road.<sup>424</sup> Washington was willing "most cheerfully proceed to Work on any Road; pursue any Rout" his superior commander deemed appropriate, but his views on the subject were radically different from the general's.<sup>425</sup>

Washington feared that opening up a new road would delay the progress of the troops so much that they would likely miss the opportunity for an attack during that year's campaign season.<sup>426</sup> Moreover, Washington reasoned that the rugged terrain of the Alleghany Mountains would not produce a sufficiently flat route, in fact, any "Road comparable to General Braddocks (or indeed fit for any Service at all, even for Carrying Horses) cannot be made."<sup>427</sup>

Notwithstanding Washington's argumentation, the general's order for opening up a new road to the enemy's fort had to be followed.<sup>428</sup> Washington's dispiritedness was

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<sup>422</sup> Henry Bouquet to GW, 27 July 1758, GW to Francis Fauquier, 5 August 1758, Abraham Bosomworth to GW, 23 August 1758, John Forbes to GW, 16 September 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>423</sup> John St. Clair to GW, 24 May 1758, John St. Clair to GW, 13 June 1758, Henry Bouquet to GW, 13 June 1758, Henry Bouquet to GW, 27 June 1758, Henry Bouquet to GW, 1 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>424</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 5 August 1758, in *PGW*; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 29-30, "Map 2: New France and the British Mainland Colonies in the Seven Years' War, 1754-63".

<sup>425</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, 25 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>426</sup> GW to Francis Halkett, 2 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>427</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, 2 August 1758, GW to Henry Bouquet, 25 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>428</sup> Henry Bouquet to GW, [3 August 1758], in *PGW*.

somewhat lifted on receiving some intelligence as to its convenience, but on his later personal examination he called Forbes's road "undescribably bad."<sup>429</sup>

Since Governor Sharpe of Maryland, who held the rank of a lieutenant colonel, was expected to arrive at Fort Cumberland in late August, Washington hoped to preclude any strife over the sensitive subject of rank and superiority. He wondered whether Sharpe had a right of command over the fort since it was situated in his home province. Washington was "unwilling either to dispute the point wrongfully, or to give up the Command to him if it is my Right."<sup>430</sup> Much to Washington's relief, Colonel Bouquet assured him that the colonial governors do not possess authority over the troops even in their own province, unless specifically commissioned by the commander in chief. Sharpe's rank did not amount to sufficient authority for commanding the fort, anyway, "Therefore you are very Right in Keeping it," concluded Bouquet.<sup>431</sup>

For the British, the military affairs in the Northern colonies remained somber until the successful siege of Louisbourg (Nova Scotia) in July 1758.<sup>432</sup> The taking of Louisbourg, nicknamed "the Dunkirk of America" and "the Gibraltar of the North" for its formidable setting in the New World, revived the British inasmuch that Colonel Bouquet ordered a *feu de joie* at Fort Cumberland also.<sup>433</sup>

But as far as Washington's men on the Virginia frontier were concerned, they were "most heartily tired, & Sick of Inactivity."<sup>434</sup> Washington's tie of friendship with John Robinson, the Burgess speaker, earned a frank and straightforward correspondence between the two gentlemen, affording a valuable insight into their sentiments for the historian. In his September letter to Robinson, Washington frankly disclosed his resentment about the

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<sup>429</sup> Henry Bouquet to GW, 21 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>430</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, 21 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>431</sup> Henry Bouquet to GW, 23 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>432</sup> Henry Bouquet to GW, 21 August 1758, in *PGW*; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 250-56.

<sup>433</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 250; George William Fairfax to GW, 1 September 1758, Henry Bouquet to GW, 30 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>434</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, 28 August 1758, in *PGW*.

management of expedition against Fort Duquesne. “The conduct of our Leaders (if not actuated by superior Orders) is temperd with something—I dont care to give a name to—in<deed> I will go further, and say they are d— —s, or something worse to P—s—v—n Artifice,” Washington repined.<sup>435</sup> The blunt candor of Washington’s views sent to Robinson helps us better understand his aspirations. “That appearance of Glory once in view—that hope—that *laudable Ambition* of Serving Our Country, and meriting its applause, is now no more,” he further lamented.<sup>436</sup>

As already explained, the seemingly oxymoronic “laudable ambition” was not coined by Washington neither was it an unusual phrase in the eighteenth century. By the use of this phrase, the commander of Virginia emphasized that his motives were disinterested when he expressed his longing for a military action. Similarly, Arthur Lee, son of former Virginia’s governor, appealed to “laudable ambition” as well when he later wished to justify his solicitation for Washington’s recommendatory letter in order to increase his chances of obtaining the office of an Agent while practicing law in London, claiming his “entire devotion to” the country’s “interests.”<sup>437</sup>

However, with no military engagement in sight, Washington’s dream of achieving fame and meriting another round of country’s applause seemed suspended into the indefinite future. “Tis dwindled into ease—Sloth—and fatal inactivity—and in a Word, All is lost,” he candidly disclosed to Robinson.<sup>438</sup> The pathos of Washington’s regret over missing the prime opportunity for an attack against Fort Duquesne is discernible in his letter to Governor Fauquier, “What a Golden oppy have we lost! but this is past—irrecoverably gone.”<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, in *PGW*. For examples of GW’s hitherto frank communication with Robinson, see GW to John Robinson, 5 August 1756, GW to John Robinson, 10 June 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>436</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, in *PGW* (my italics).

<sup>437</sup> Arthur Lee to GW, 10 July 1771, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 2:18.

<sup>438</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>439</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 2 September 1758, in *PGW*.

Nevertheless, it was important for Washington “to stand well” also in the governor’s opinion even should the campaign fall through.<sup>440</sup> He enclosed copies of his numerous letters to Bouquet and sent them to Fauquier to prove that his eagerness to bring the campaign to a successful end was genuine and that the governor could be ascertained “that nothing in my power has been wanting.”<sup>441</sup>

Like with Dinwiddie, it was a matter of no small importance to Washington to establish cordial ties with Governor Fauquier. Aware of the trust reposed in him, the commander of Virginia took pains not to transgress the bounds of his office. “Be assured,” wrote he to the governor, “the confidence which you have reposed in me, shall never be wilfully abused.”<sup>442</sup> This assurance included not only misusing his authority but paying his respects to his superiors also. Washington’s deference to his superiors was conscientious. In anticipation of meeting with Fauquier in December 1758, Washington’s deference is readily recognizable when he expressed that he hoped “for the honor of kissing your hand . . . and shall think myself *honored* with your Esteem.”<sup>443</sup> Patronage of influential gentlemen was still valued by Washington as a precious political capital, which he vowed to never misuse.<sup>444</sup> This also had much to do with the propriety of one’s conduct, which was highly important to Washington, be it in the civil or military realm.

The military scenes Washington was placed in on the Virginia frontier were radically different from the conventional European way of waging a war. The American backcountry, inhabited by Indian tribes, was undoubtedly less suitable for open battlefield tactics with linear formations than for an asymmetric warfare. The French and Indian War waged mostly on the densely forested American frontier required officers to be not only knowledgeable

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<sup>440</sup> GW to John St. Clair, 27 April 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>441</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, GW to Francis Fauquier, 2 September 1758, in *PGW*. GW sent ten letters to Bouquet between August 2 and September 2, 1758.

<sup>442</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 30 October 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>443</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 9 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>444</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 30 October 1758, in *PGW*.

about military theories, but also be possessed of “robustness to bear fatigue, & resolution to execute with celerity” commands from one’s commanders. Unfortunately, in the eyes of some Americans, including Washington, the British officers lacked in these crucial aspects.<sup>445</sup>

On the other hand, the precarious wilderness setting perhaps offered more opportunities for military heroism, which in turn could bring sought-after applause and honor to brave men. After the War of Independence, Washington recalled once incident that occurred in November 1758 that put him “in as much jeopardy as it had ever been before or since” but evidenced his valor. Having received intelligence of an enemy’s reconnoitering of their camp at Loyal Hannon (today’s Ligonier, Pennsylvania), the British immediately dispatched a party under Colonel Mercer to dislodge them. But when it appeared that the fire was still approaching the camp, Washington implored the general for permission to rally a group of volunteers and assist his comrade in arms. At this time, Washington may have been prompted by the urgency of the situation and the need for aiding his fellow Virginian, but perhaps also by his desire for action, in which he could again prove his worthiness of further honor by heroic valor.<sup>446</sup>

Advancing toward Mercer’s troops, Washington dispatched scouts to inform them that he was backing them up. But it being near twilight and the intelligence inadequately disseminated, Mercer’s soldiers mistook Washington’s corps for the enemy, and a heavy fire between them ensued. Despite the exertion of the officers to hold fire, several of their men fell dead and many were wounded. With his characteristic bravura in the heat of battle, Washington found himself “between two fires, knocking up with his sword the presented pieces.”<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> William Ramsay to GW, 31 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>446</sup> Zagari, “*Life of George Washington*”, 21-22.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*

The account, as it stands, supports one historian's claim that Washington during the French and Indian War exemplified "the soldier's knack of fatalism that permitted him to ignore the bullets."<sup>448</sup> Admittedly, Washington's conduct was heroic enough to merit due recognition, but for some reasons the commander of Virginia chose to remain silent about this incident, mentioning it only after the Revolutionary War in his remarks to Humphreys's biography.<sup>449</sup> Presumably, it was because of the miscommunication and the resulting bedlam between the two Virginia corps that Washington preferred to keep silent about it. This life-threatening incident furnishes considerable evidence that Washington's military interests were closely tied with the interests of his colony and that he would not welcome credit for something that would denigrate the province's army (under his command).

By late fall of 1758, the burgesses in Williamsburg began to doubt that a scheme for an attack against Fort Duquesne would be concerted prior the troops' retreating to winter quarters.<sup>450</sup> Washington may have had doubts also, but he did not relinquish his efforts to recommend various tactics and move ahead as swiftly as possible.<sup>451</sup> One day, after apparently being interrupted in his face-to-face conversation with Bouquet on the next possible steps, Washington cared about finishing his point to such an extent that later that evening he quickly scratched a letter to the colonel with additional questions, though Washington had an access to his tent pitched in the same camp.<sup>452</sup>

It was not until November 1758 that the British advanced to a close proximity to Fort Duquesne.<sup>453</sup> The army was divided into three brigades, Washington's unit being the leading one.<sup>454</sup> But having arrived within a day's march from the fort, Washington's men learned a

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<sup>448</sup> Lewis, *For King and Country*, 183.

<sup>449</sup> Zagari, "*Life of George Washington*", 105n51; DSF 2:357-58.

<sup>450</sup> John Robinson to GW, 13 [November] 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>451</sup> GW to John Forbes, [8 October 1758], in *PGW*.

<sup>452</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, [6 November 1758], in *PGW*.

<sup>453</sup> GW to John Forbes, 16 November 1758, Henry Bouquet to GW, 16 November 1758, GW to John Forbes, 18 November 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>454</sup> Orderly Book, 14 November 1758, in *PGW*; Zagari, "*Life of George Washington*", 21.

surprising fact. The enemy “burned the fort, and ran away (by the light of it) at night, going down the Ohio by water, to the number of about 5,00 men, from our best information,” Washington recorded.<sup>455</sup>

It was an unexpected way of concluding the expedition. Anyhow, that year’s campaign was over also.<sup>456</sup> Contrary to Washington’s hopeful expectations, no battle in which he could prove his gallantry occurred. Moreover, his Virginia Regiment was in a “very *distressed condition*” by the year’s end.<sup>457</sup> The soldiers lacked sufficient supplies of provisions and adequate clothing to withstand the inclement weather, “having hardly rags to cover their nakedness.”<sup>458</sup> The army had already confronted “almost insuperable Difficulties of Recruiting” new soldiers, and the enlisted men began to murmur and desert in substantial numbers.<sup>459</sup> And unless appropriate measures were taken outright, Washington cautioned, “they must inevitably perish!”<sup>460</sup>

With the troops retired to winter quarters, Washington sought a relief himself. Like the previous winter, he was fatigued and indisposed due to recurrent dysentery. Not surprisingly, his thoughts turned to resignation again.<sup>461</sup> The commander of Virginia, it seems, no longer entertained any hopes of obtaining a royal commission and being placed on the British Establishment. His reluctance to continue in the service was all the more increased by an “animating prospect of possessing Mrs Custis” and leading a domestic life at his recently remodeled estate at Mount Vernon.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 28 November 1758, in *PGW*; Zagari, “*Life of George Washington*”, 22.

<sup>456</sup> Zagari, “*Life of George Washington*”, 22.

<sup>457</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 9 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>458</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, [6 November 1758], GW to Francis Fauquier, 30 October 1758, GW to Francis Fauquier, 2 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>459</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 31 December 1758, Robert Stewart to GW, 20 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>460</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 2 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>461</sup> Zagari, “*Life of George Washington*”, 106n59-60; James Craik to GW, 20 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>462</sup> GW to Sarah Cary Fairfax, 12 September 1758, Humphrey Knight to GW, 13 July 1758, George William Fairfax to GW, 25 July 1758, 5 August 1758, John Patterson to GW, 13 August 1758, in *PGW*.

Having considered his circumstances fully, Washington at length intended to materialize his thoughts of resignation. “The fear of losing you has struck a general Grief,” wrote Captain Stewart.<sup>463</sup> His comrades in arms were saddened to see their commander retire “and dread the consequences of your resigning.”<sup>464</sup> Washington must have had quite a following in the army, for once his resignation was ascertained, some of the officers and soldiers were grieved and dejected, some deserted.<sup>465</sup>

The soldiers’ regard and affection for their leader induced them to compose a letter which can be termed as their valedictory or farewell address. In it, the officers wrote of “the <happine>ss we have enjoy’d and the Honor we have acquir’d” while serving under Washington’s command. The commander of Virginia was commended for an “invarable Regard to Merit” and for inculcating sentiments “of true Honor and Passion for Glory.” The officers wondered where they would find a replacement for “one so renown’d for Patriotism, Courage and Conduct?” “Your approv’d Love to your King and Country, and your uncommon Perseverance in promoting the Honor and true Interest of the Service,” convinced them that only the most cogent reasons could prevail upon their commander to retire.<sup>466</sup>

Although deferential sentiments toward a chief commander accorded with accepted conventions, Washington was evidently impressed and honored by such an address. He was particularly fond of their expression of “approbation of my conduct,” which he said would “constitute the greatest happiness of my life, and afford in my latest hours the most pleasing reflections.”<sup>467</sup> The assurance of the propriety of his conduct mattered greatly to him throughout his entire military service. It may be remembered that four and a half years earlier, shortly after his first encounter with the enemy, Washington acknowledged Dinwiddie’s

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<sup>463</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 29 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>464</sup> James Craik to GW, 20 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>465</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 29 December 1758, 31 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>466</sup> Address from the Officers of the Virginia Regiment, 31 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>467</sup> To the Officers of the Virginia Regiment, 10 January 1759, in *PGW*.

approbation of his conduct and informed him that it “has given me more pleasure than any thing” since the beginning of his service.<sup>468</sup>

Writing in almost poetic diction, Colonel Stewart bade Washington adieu by extolling his “very genteel manner in which those fresh marks of your disinterested Friendship are therein given at once Demonstrate your refin’d Sentiments of that Celestial virtue so rarely found genuine in this world.”<sup>469</sup> Disinterestedness in the sense of selflessness and virtue were indeed some of the admirable traits of an esteemed gentleman.<sup>470</sup>

In sum, the last year and a half of Washington’s service in the military was perhaps the most exhausting, mentally and perhaps physically also. Fatigued by severe cases of dysentery two winters in a row, Washington was additionally wearied by the general disaffection, numerous desertions, and the inertia of the troops, making him exclaim indignantly, “they tire my patience, & almost weary me to death!”<sup>471</sup> In need of further instructions, Washington was often at a loss to know how to act. Dinwiddie tried to comply with Washington’s requests, but their relationship stagnated until the governor’s departure for Britain. Though his aspiration after a regular commission abated, Washington still wished to receive some kind of recognition from General Forbes. Writing to Colonel Stanwix, his superior, Washington asked him to mention his name in “favorable terms” to the new general in order to “be distinguished in some measure from the *common run* of provincial Officers.”<sup>472</sup> His “*laudable Ambition of Serving Our Country*,” however, seems to have remained as his invariable objective.<sup>473</sup> Once more, his health began to deteriorate by the end of 1758, and in view of his forthcoming nuptials, Washington’s recurrent thoughts of resignation were materialized and with the

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<sup>468</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>469</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 29 December 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>470</sup> Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 1, 41, 176.

<sup>471</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 17 September 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>472</sup> GW to John Stanwix, 10 April 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>473</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, in *PGW*.

arrival of the new year, the retired commander of Virginia began to enjoy a domestic life at Mount Vernon.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE GENTLEMAN OF MOUNT VERNON

*Washington's Stately Residence*

Inheritance came to young Washington's hands primarily through premature deaths of his family relatives. When his father Augustine died in 1743, the eleven-year old George was deeded the 112 hectares and "Moiety of my Land lying on Deep Run and Ten Negro Slaves." Mount Vernon plantation and iron works, the most valuable portion of the inheritance, were bequeathed to Lawrence, his oldest living son. But since the will included a proviso that if Lawrence died without issue, the property "shall go & remain to my son George" upon reaching adulthood, should Augustine, George's older half brother, not desire the property himself. Since Lawrence had a lawful issue at the time of his death (though three out of his four children had already passed away), George could not inherit Mount Vernon on the basis of his father's will.<sup>474</sup>

Lawrence bequeathed to George "all my lands in Fairfax county" and equal share of lands given to three younger brothers. Mount Vernon, however, passed on to his wife Ann and in case of her death to their daughter Sarah. But if Sarah died without children of her own, the property would be transferred to George. And this is the scenario that actually occurred. But things were a little more complicated still. If George also had no issue, then the property would go to Lawrence's brother Augustine.<sup>475</sup> Shortly after Lawrence's death, Anne remarried and allowed George to occupy Mount Vernon under a lease. When George outlived both Sarah (who died in 1754) and Ann (who died in 1761), he was entitled to the property of

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<sup>474</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Wills of George Washington and His Immediate Ancestors* (New York: Historical Printing Club, 1891), 42, 41, 45, 44, 47, <http://www.archive.org/details/willsofgeorgewas00ford>; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 26.

<sup>475</sup> Ford, *Wills*, 75, 73, 78, 74, 75-76.

Mount Vernon, but without lawful heirs of his own, the estate would have to go back to Augustine and his descendants after George's death.<sup>476</sup>

After Sarah's death, George Washington was allowed by Ann to occupy Mount Vernon on lease, and after Ann's death, he was entitled to the estate, but could not sell or will the property, as was verified by his lawyer Edmund Pendleton, without begetting lawful heirs. Interestingly enough, perhaps unaware of the details of Lawrence's will and the temporal entitlement to Mount Vernon property, Washington willed the estate in 1799 to his wife Martha. William Augustine Washington, Augustine's son and therefore rightful heir according to Lawrence's will, is said to have recognized the wrong, but "he would not oppose the will."<sup>477</sup>

In 1757, Washington began to renovate and remodel Mount Vernon into a more stately residence, one that would more closely reflect a home of a prosperous gentleman of his day. From London, he ordered "a Marble Chimney piece," 250 window panes, wallpaper "of a very good kind and colour," "a Set of best painted Ornaments for a Ceiling," two "neat" mahogany tables and a dozen mahogany "best gothick Chairs, wt. Pincushion Seats, stuff in the best manner & coverd with horse hair," a dozen "fashionable" door locks, eleven "fine" china dishes, six dozen "finest white Stone plates," two dozen "fine wine glasses Ingravd," "a fine Mahagony Tea Table," two sets of "best" London silverware, among others.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 26-27; quoted in DSF 2:2-3; Edmund Jennings Lee, ed., *Lee of Virginia, 1642-1892: Biographical and Genealogical Sketches of the Descendants of Colonel Richard Lee* (Philadelphia: [Franklin], 1895), 140, <http://www.archive.org/details/leeofvirginia16400inlee>.

<sup>477</sup> Lease of Mount Vernon, 17 December 1754, in *PGW*; Ford, *Wills*, 83; Moncure Daniel Conway, *George Washington and Mount Vernon* (New York: Long Island Historical Society, 1878), xcii, quoted in Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 27-28, see also 152n6. The lease of Mount Vernon, which included the services of eighteen slaves, exacted from GW an annual payment of 6,810 kg of tobacco, or, at George's option, its cash equivalent.

<sup>478</sup> Enclosure: Invoice to Richard Washington, 15 April 1757, Invoice from Richard Washington, 20 August 1757, Invoice from Richard Washington, 10 November 1757, Invoice from Thomas Knox, 28 September 1757, in *PGW*.

The following year, Washington continued with his remodeling plans by instructing his servants and friends to rebuild and enlarge his house.<sup>479</sup> Accordingly, the roof was taken off and another floor was added.<sup>480</sup> Before long, additional outbuildings were built in front of the mansion house as well.<sup>481</sup> Washington furnished his Mount Vernon “in a style befitting a Virginia planter” and he intentionally selected items that “referenced the established Chesapeake Bay gentry preference for” aesthetic simplicity and elegance. Additionally, Washington typically requested that the ordered items be branded with his family “crest or coat of arms, as he well understood that all one’s appurtenances be appropriate to one’s social station.”<sup>482</sup>

In accordance with the artistic taste of a distinguished soldier, Washington also wished to grace the interiors of his home with busts of rulers of singular military skills, namely Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, Duke of Marlborough, Prince Eugene, and King of Prussia. To Washington’s dissatisfaction, the company in London he made his orders to did not have any of these requested busts and could only offer busts of well-known figures of the arts, such as Homer, Virgil, Plato, Chaucer, Addison, and Locke.<sup>483</sup> Consequently, the order was put off and ultimately no busts were sent from overseas.<sup>484</sup> Nevertheless, the men whose busts Washington planned to order were all accomplished military commanders. This indicates that Washington had a high regard of these military leaders and very likely looked to them as worthy of imitation.

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<sup>479</sup> GW to Thomas Knox, January 1758, Invoice from Thomas Knox, 18 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>480</sup> John Patterson to GW, 17 June 1758, Humphrey Knight to GW, 13 July 1758, George William Fairfax to GW, 5 August 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>481</sup> *DGW* 1:258.

<sup>482</sup> Cadou, *George Washington Collection*, 29.

<sup>483</sup> Enclosure: Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, 20 September 1759, Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, 15 March 1760, in *PGW*.

<sup>484</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 10 August 1760, GW to Robert Cary & Company, 28 September 1760, in *PGW*.

*“I Am Now I Beleive Fixd at This Seat with an Agreeable Consort for Life”*

Washington’s ascent to the upper crusts of the Virginia gentry was catalyzed by his marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis, one of the wealthiest widows in the province. Martha had a highly respectable gentry heritage, mainly by virtue of her late husband Daniel Parke Custis. Born on June 2, 1731, Martha was raised in a lower gentry family, but with prominent social ties; her uncle was a captain in the British navy and member of the governor’s council.<sup>485</sup>

Her late husband’s grandfather-in-law was Daniel Parke, a legendary Virginian who had served as an aide-de-camp to the duke of Marlborough and carried the dispatch of the great English victory at Blenheim to Queen Ann. When offered a financial reward by the queen, Daniel Parke declined and preferred a miniature of the monarch, a deed revered even by the enemies. John Custis, Martha’s father-in-law, was a distinguished planter with broad fields and hundreds of slaves, a third-generation member of the governor’s council, and a brother-in-law to the celebrated William Byrd II of Westover.<sup>486</sup>

The estate that Daniel Parke Custis, Martha’s late husband, left behind was appraised at £23,632 in Virginia currency. Therefore, after Washington’s marriage, his wealth increased considerably by being entitled to “one-third of the Custis fortune and guardianship of the remaining two-thirds that” were vested in Martha’s two children.<sup>487</sup> By finding a wealthier

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<sup>485</sup> Wright, *Washington*, 41; Helen Bryan, *Martha Washington: First Lady of Liberty* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), 15, 21, 38, [http://books.google.com/books?id=x-Jfr\\_nJ65UC](http://books.google.com/books?id=x-Jfr_nJ65UC).

<sup>486</sup> John Custis, *The letterbook of John Custis IV of Williamsburg, 1717-1742*, ed. Josephine Little Zuppan (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 1, ix, 15, <http://books.google.com/books?id=EkKUjMmxVS0C>; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 318-20; DSF 2:299; Kaminski, *Founders on the Founders*, 521. Martha was first married in 1749, and widowed in 1757.

<sup>487</sup> Schedule B: General Account of the Estate, [c. October 1759], in PGW; Cadou, *George Washington Collection*, 31.

spouse than himself, Washington extended the male tradition in his family line of “marrying up.”<sup>488</sup>

It is worth emphasizing that Washington began to refine his home at Mount Vernon about a year before he began courting Martha, which suggests that he had high tastes for beautification. Washington was twenty-five, was gaining a reputation as an audacious officer, had his first (though unsuccessful) try at burgess elections, and though hitherto unsuccessful in his pursuits of courtship, he was usually prone to thinking well ahead. In this regard, Joseph J. Ellis argues that Washington’s renovations of Mount Vernon in 1757 may have been a sign of his confidence that “an appropriate consort would turn up soon.”<sup>489</sup>

Before George wedded Martha, he admired Sarah (known as Sally) Cary, coincidentally another very well-off lady who married George William Fairfax in 1748. Being neighbors and related by Lawrence’s marriage, George could conveniently spend considerable time in her company either at Belvoir or Mount Vernon. Their relationship has been much romanticized by historians, but the fact remains that Sally did not reciprocate Washington’s wish for a regular correspondence, probably due to an asymmetrical sentiments of friendship and her discretion in favor of fully honoring her marital vows.

The timing of the letters also needs to be considered. The dates of the letters George sent her show that nine out of ten of them (all that have been preserved) were composed prior to his own nuptials.<sup>490</sup> Additionally, judging from the cordial, but healthy associations the young Washington couple enjoyed with the Fairfaxes in later years, whatever feelings of

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<sup>488</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 35; Quitt, “Cleric and the Adventurer,” 169-70, 180; Charles Arthur Hoppin and Edward Lee McClain, *The Washington Ancestry, and Records of the McClain, Johnson, and Forty Other Colonial American Families*, 3 vols. (Greenfield, OH: Priv. print., 1932) 1:229, quoted in DSF 1:30, see also pp. 33, 44-45.

<sup>489</sup> Enclosure: Invoice to Richard Washington, 15 April 1757, in *PGW*; Cadou, *George Washington Collection*, 29; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 35.

<sup>490</sup> DSF 1:230; Wright, *Washington*, 42; GW to Sarah Cary Fairfax, 30 April 1755, 14 May 1755, 7 June 1755, 23 September 1756, 15 November 1757, 13 February 1758, 4 March 1758, 12 September 1758, 25 September 1758, 16 May 1798, in *PGW*.

affection, which may have abided in Washington's heart, never crossed the proper bounds of his or Sally's conjugal fidelity.<sup>491</sup>

Since the society of the planter class of Virginia was rather small with intimate ties, Washington had likely known the Custises for some time, just as they were probably familiar with his name in connection with his military expeditions to the upper Ohio Valley. Yet, whether George had been personally introduced to Martha prior to the passing of her first husband in 1757, the records are silent. During his visit to Williamsburg the following year, he had the privilege of meeting with Martha, whose estate stood in New Kent County, not far from the capital, presumably to offer his condolences and possibly to see if a closer friendship could be struck up. Given her social prominence, other bachelors probably came to share their sympathies.<sup>492</sup>

The preserved records do not uncover any evidence of the exact date of Martha's engagement to George. The timing of the beginning of their courtship is based on the following circumstantial evidence. One of the hints is Washington's ledger entries, which identify dates Washington met with Miss Custis (March 16 and March 25, 1758).<sup>493</sup> Another hint is Washington's letter of April 5, 1758 (eleven days after his second visit to the Custis home) to Richard Washington, his London merchant, canceling his previous order and requesting "as much of the best superfine Blue Cotton Velvet as will make a Coat Waistcoat & Breeches for a Tall Man with a fine Silk button to suit it & all other necessary Trimmings & Linings together with Garters for the Breeches" and "six pr of the very neatest Shoes." Interestingly enough, Washington's previous order was sent out from Williamsburg just

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<sup>491</sup> George William Fairfax to GW, 15 April 1761, 30 October 1761, GW to George William Fairfax, 17 July 1763, 29 September 1763, in *PGW*.

<sup>492</sup> DSF 2:278, insert between 285-86; George Washington Parke Custis and Mary Randolph Custis Lee, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, ed. Benson John Lossing (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1861), 499-501, <http://books.google.com/books?id=t0cFAAAAYAAJ>. G.W. Parke Custis recalls that GW met Martha upon accepting an offer of Mr. Chamberlayne, a respectable gentleman and Martha's neighbor, to dine at his home. Writing from memory many years after either GW or Martha could have shared the details, Parke Custis's account is therefore likely to contain some inaccuracies.

<sup>493</sup> Series 5, Financial Papers, Ledger Book 1, in *GWPLC*, folio 38, image 116.

eighteen days earlier, and one may wonder what caused the sudden change of his requests, in Washington's words, "almost in a breath."<sup>494</sup> Besides, about the same time, the young widow of New Kent was composing a similar letter to a London firm ordering "one Genteel suite of Cloths for myself to be grave but *not* Extravagent and nor to be mornning."<sup>495</sup>

Washington's credentials as well as steps taken in the upcoming months were pointing out to a promising future. As colonel under General Braddock, he had served in the expedition against the French to the upper Ohio and had earned an appreciation and bounty of £50 from the House of Burgesses.<sup>496</sup> Several months after his auspicious calls to Miss Custis in the spring of 1758, Washington succeeded in the burgess elections for a seat in the Frederick County.<sup>497</sup> By the end of the year, he resigned his military commission, perhaps in hopes of spending more time at home with his wife to be.<sup>498</sup> She must have been impressed by this gallant chief officer, whose audacious spirit was spoken of in various parts of the colony. In short, Washington was handsome, athletic, and "affable," as his fellow soldiers described him.<sup>499</sup>

If Washington was typically the tallest man in the room, Martha ranked among the shortest ones, for she was only 152 cm tall.<sup>500</sup> She received a fairly good education in her times, though primarily of a practical domestic character, which was typical for girls in the

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<sup>494</sup> GW to Richard Washington, 18 March 1758, 5 April 1758, in *PGW*; DSF 3:46-47.

<sup>495</sup> [Martha Dandridge Custis's] Invoice to Robert Cary and Company, 1758, n.d., MSS1C9698a219, in *Custis Papers*, Virginia Historical Society; DSF 2:301-02.

<sup>496</sup> McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 8:182, 198, 217.

<sup>497</sup> Lucille Griffith, *The Virginia House of Burgesses, 1750-1774* (University of Alabama Press, 1970), 94-96; Enclosure V: Frederick County Poll Sheet, 1758, 24 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>498</sup> James Craik to GW, 20 December 1758, Address from the Officers of the Virginia Regiment, 31 December, 1758, in *PGW*. GW's frail health may have been additional factor in considering his resignation.

<sup>499</sup> Address from the Officers of the Virginia Regiment, 31 December, 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>500</sup> Kaminski, *Founders on the Founders*, 521; For Martha's portrait, see DSF 2:insert between pp. 285-86. Although not a portrait of the best quality, it is a Martha's likeness when she was about twenty-six (before her first husband died).

early days of colonial settlements. She learned to “sew, cook . . . read, write, dance, welcome company, help with the younger children, and memorize her catechism.”<sup>501</sup>

Their marriage was solemnized on January 6, 1759.<sup>502</sup> Washington not only espoused an attractive and affluent wife, but through marriage he also fathered two of Martha’s young children by her late husband (her first two children had died in infancy), a four-year old John Parke, called “Jacky,” and a two-year old Martha Parke, called “Patsy.”<sup>503</sup> Besides her large dower and two children, Martha brought other social advantages needed by a prosperous estate owner. For instance, shouldering divers domestic responsibilities was one of them, for “a wife in colonial Virginia had an important role as her husband’s active partner.” There were probably very few, if any, other ladies that Washington could espouse that would have accelerated his social rise so much so that the two would immediately become one of “the power couple[s] of” the province.<sup>504</sup>

Primarily for these pragmatic reasons, Samuel Eliot Morison maintains that in George and Martha’s case, “it was a *mariage de convenance* that developed into a marriage of affection.”<sup>505</sup> Likewise, Robert F. Jones avers that their union began “with a high regard for one another that matured into a quiet and deep love.”<sup>506</sup> Marriages of convenience were common during the “golden age” (from late seventeenth until mid-eighteenth century) of Chesapeake Bay plantation society. The then highly patriarchal society with an emphasis on order and authority, in large measure, restrained the autonomy of their marriageable sons and

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<sup>501</sup> Bryan, *Martha Washington*, 28, 37.

<sup>502</sup> Presumably a deliberately selected date in connection with the Twelfth Night, a Christian feast day.

<sup>503</sup> Bryan, *Martha Washington*, 117; DSF 3:2.

<sup>504</sup> Bryan, *Martha Washington*, 2.

<sup>505</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, “The Young Man Washington,” (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932); quoted in H. J. Duteil, *The Great American Parade* (Kessinger Publishing, 2005), 137, <http://books.google.com/books?id=S2ku4oO48x8C>.

<sup>506</sup> Robert Francis Jones, *George Washington: Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Leader* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 23, <http://books.google.com/books?id=LY8JTi-lmg8C>.

daughters to choose a spouse of their own. Social status, rather than mutual affection, seems to have been one of the key traditional determinants of marriage choices.<sup>507</sup>

However, the latter half of the eighteenth century was marked by significant familial changes in the Chesapeake Bay society. Mutual affection and romantic love were increasingly becoming the key factors in selecting a spouse. Considering this historical context, George and Martha's marriage occurred "at a time when the gentry increasingly married for love."<sup>508</sup> The mere date of their marriage, of course, cannot determine the main incentives behind it. Equally cautious ought we to be in regarding any aspects of convenience of their marriage to imply that practical considerations were the main reasons of their union.

Unfortunately, a thorough evaluation of their relationship is difficult since only a few of many personal letters exchanged between Martha and Washington have been preserved.<sup>509</sup> Martha intentionally burned all of their correspondence after Washington's death for the sake of confidentiality and to avoid, as her grandson G. W. Parke Custis put it, "desecrating their chaste loves," because "perhaps, some word or expression might be interpreted to his disadvantage."<sup>510</sup>

Washington's connubial contentment, however, is evident from his letter written about eight months after the nuptials, "I am now I beleive fixd at this Seat with an agreeable Consort for Life and hope to find more happiness in retirement than I ever experiencd amidst a wide and bustling World."<sup>511</sup> Shortly after he was appointed the general of the Continental Army,

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<sup>507</sup> Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 21-22, <http://books.google.com/books?id=cobhC8uzacoC>.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*; Sayen, "'A Compleat Gentleman,'" 143.

<sup>509</sup> I concur with Freeman that GW's alleged letter, dated 20 July 1758, to Martha is spurious, see DSF 2:405-06; Martha Washington to GW, 30 March 1767, GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, 23 June 1775, in *PGW*; Elizabeth Willing Powel to GW, 11[-13] March 1797, in *PGW*. Mrs. Powel informed GW that she had found "a large Bundle of Letters" from Mrs. Washington addressed to GW in a writing desk she had just bought from him.

<sup>510</sup> John Benson Lossing, *Mary and Martha: The Mother and the Wife of George Washington* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), 278n, <http://www.archive.org/details/marymarthamother01loss>.

<sup>511</sup> GW to Richard Washington, 20 September 1759, in *PGW*.

Washington sent a brief but decidedly tender message to Martha, “My dearest . . . I retain an unalterable affection for you, which neither time or distance can change.”<sup>512</sup>

A few years ago, a fourth letter exchanged between Martha and her husband known to exist was successfully identified. Written on the back side of her son’s letter to the general, dated September 11, 1777, Martha’s note comprised only a few seemingly trifling words about the weight of a newly purchased piece of china, but the fact that she addressed her husband even in such a casual note by the felicitous salutation of “My love” in an age when it was not rare that spouses communicated with each other in a rather formal way, proves their close attachment.<sup>513</sup>

In his recent lecture, Edward G. Lengel shared doubts that one of the primary reasons for Washington’s proposal to Martha was her large dowry. Throughout their lives, Lengel said, they learned “to depend on each other.”<sup>514</sup> It is also known that at Washington’s urging, Martha willingly traveled to join her husband in camp every winter during the eight years of the Revolutionary War despite her “dislike of distant travel, unfamiliar places, and warlike activity.”<sup>515</sup> Notwithstanding the scarcity of preserved correspondence between the Washington couple, their words that can be evaluated with respect to their marital felicity as well as some circumstantial evidence point to the argument that marriage de convenance was not likely their case.

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<sup>512</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 23 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>513</sup> Edward Lengel, “Inventing George Washington: America’s Founder in Myth and Memory” (lecture, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA, February 24, 2011), 56:52 min. (29-30th min.), [http://www.vahistorical.org/news/lectures\\_lengel\\_washington.htm](http://www.vahistorical.org/news/lectures_lengel_washington.htm); Higginbotham, “George Washington and Revolutionary Asceticism,” 236.

<sup>514</sup> Lengel, “Inventing George Washington,” (28th min.).

<sup>515</sup> Higginbotham, “George Washington and Revolutionary Asceticism,” 236.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“IT SURELY IS THE DUTY OF EVERY MAN WHO HAS ABILITIES TO SERVE HIS  
COUNTRY”

*The Burgess Election of 1755*

The colonial society of Virginia was distinctively hierarchical and patriarchal, where a man's status largely determined his social obligations. The extant principles of *noblesse oblige* laid a majority of civil responsibilities upon a relatively small number of Virginia patrician families. By his marrying up and assuming increasingly more public responsibilities, Washington continued a rapid ascent among the leading gentry of the colony.

In this respect, Washington kept his family line occupying the same public offices, because Augustine, George's father, was appointed to offices that were typically held by men of gentle status. Besides being justice of the peace, he also worked as an executor of estates, churchwarden, and sheriff. Lawrence, George's grandfather, also served as sheriff and justice of the peace. John, George's great-grandfather, “sought and gained in succession an ascending order of profitable offices and court appointments,” namely, coroner, trustee of estates, guardian of children, vestryman, justice of the county court.<sup>516</sup>

Washington made his first attempt at entering the world of politics as early as May 1755, while yet serving under General Braddock. But Washington was loath to enter that world blindly. Learning that his home county (Fairfax) was to be divided and that the incumbent was no longer running for another term, Washington was willing to stand a poll “if I thought my chance tolerably good.” He wrote to his younger brother John Augustine (Jack) to query discreetly several influential neighbors without disclosing his intentions. His further instructions to his younger brother included soliciting their support if in favor of promoting

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<sup>516</sup> DSF 1:41, 34, 30, 17.

his interest, or letting “the Affair entirely subside . . . with an air of Indifference & unconcern” in case of their favoring someone else. Circumspectly, Washington designed to “sound their Pulse” rather than run headlong and risk a political defeat.<sup>517</sup>

Unfortunately, John Augustine’s response has not been preserved and we can only conjecture its contents. Nevertheless, the historical accounts demonstrate that Washington did not stand a poll in Fairfax, but in the frontier county of Frederick, where he was also legally permitted to run thanks to his owning a land there.<sup>518</sup>

Elections to the House of Burgesses, the lower chamber of the General Assembly of Virginia, typically occurred with the arrival of the new governor or, at the governor’s discretion, whenever in need to replace the sitting members.<sup>519</sup> Given its great political significance, membership in the Assembly carried very high social prestige. Only two representatives were elected to represent their county in the House.<sup>520</sup> Like other colonies, the political scene of Virginia was dominated by well-off planters, members of the gentry class, who were elected to offices by a broad-based electorate.<sup>521</sup>

“Elections represented one of several important social ‘occasions’ that reinforced the deferential relationships between upper and lower strata.” The length of the campaigning season varied, from about a month to a year, and the candidates usually campaigned by providing free food and entertainment to the electorate.<sup>522</sup>

The peculiarity of the Frederick election was that Washington probably did not know he was a candidate there. By all accounts, his name was submitted by his friends on the

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<sup>517</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 28 May 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>518</sup> Land Grant, from Thomas, Lord Fairfax, 20 October 1750, in *PGW*; Charles S. Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making: Political Practices in Washington’s Virginia* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 39-40.

<sup>519</sup> John Gilman Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders: Electoral Politics in Colonial Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 59, 64-65.

<sup>520</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 24.

<sup>521</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 3-4.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 64, 28-29.

election day.<sup>523</sup> This is supported by the fact that Adam Stephen, his fellow officer who could be most serviceable in such a campaign in Frederick because his “acquaintance there is very general,” was not notified of Washington’s candidacy there either.<sup>524</sup> Due to his relatively young age, his first attempt at the burgess elections, and especially the short notice the voters had of his candidacy, Washington gained only a slender number of votes in contrast to Hugh West and Captain Thomas Swearingen, his two opponents, who won this election by a landslide.<sup>525</sup> Although he had recently moved in Mount Vernon (under a lease) and had been appointed the commander of Virginia several months prior to the election, Washington could not receive many votes without acquainting the electorate with his purposes in advance.<sup>526</sup>

Obviously, Washington did not campaign for himself in the Fairfax County in 1755, but significantly enough, he participated ardently in the election to promote the interests of his friend and neighbor George William Fairfax. In a sense, this marked the beginning of Washington’s political career.<sup>527</sup> While supporting the cause of his patron, Washington clashed with William Payne, a supporter of another contestant for the burgess seat.<sup>528</sup>

Presumably, the row was caused by the closeness of the election and by Washington’s casting of one vote instead of the usual two. Refusing to cast more than one vote at a burgess election at once (and Washington was not the only one to do so that day) usually reflected voting tactics that several years later began to be penalized by a colonial law by not being “allowed to vote for another” at a later time during the election.<sup>529</sup> Some biting remarks

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<sup>523</sup> Griffith, *Virginia House of Burgesses*, 93-94.

<sup>524</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 48-49; Adam Stephen to GW, 23 December 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>525</sup> Griffith, *Virginia House of Burgesses*, 159-60.

<sup>526</sup> John Gilman Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders: Electoral Politics in Colonial Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 151.

<sup>527</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 75.

<sup>528</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 152; DSF 2:146.

<sup>529</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: Franklin Press – Market Bridge, 1820), 7:521, <http://www.archive.org/details/statutesatlargeb07virg>; Election Poll (List of Voters), 11 December 1755, Series 4, General Correspondence, Fairfax County, Virginia, in *GWPLC*, images 499-504.

between Washington and Payne were exchanged and the quarrel intensified insomuch that the latter, though smaller in stature, knocked his disputant to the ground with his cane.<sup>530</sup>

When Washington got back on his feet, he was escorted home by a group of irate and excited friends.<sup>531</sup> A good number of soldiers of the Virginia Regiment stood behind Washington and felt indignant on learning of their leader having been “insulted at the Fairfax Election.”<sup>532</sup> As explained earlier, a man’s honor was derived from “the respect that he received in public” and ignoring an offense, especially in presence of others, “could have serious consequences” for any gentleman. Washington, then the most distinguished Virginian officer, probably felt justified in challenging his rival to a duel in order to keep his honor.<sup>533</sup>

At a time when affronted gentlemen of like standing could have resorted to an *affaire d’honneur*, Washington penned a note to Payne, asking him to meet him the following day. Payne came and a number of excited townsmen did as well, all in anticipation of what would follow. Filled with humility, Washington frankly apologized and acknowledged to have been in the wrong. In his biography of Washington, Freeman states that Payne must have been “as much impressed by this display of character as he was surprised to avoid a duel.”<sup>534</sup>

Although Washington may have been a man of passions, this incident demonstrates that he was also able to master his temper, acknowledge his mistake, and publicly apologize. In light of this, Washington’s vindication to Dinwiddie written less than two years later adds a sense of authenticity, “it is with pleasure I receive reproof, when reproof is due; because no person can be readier to accuse me, than I am to acknowledge an error, when I am guilty of one.”<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 152; DSF 2:146.

<sup>531</sup> DSF 2:146.

<sup>532</sup> Adam Stephen to GW, 23 December 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>533</sup> DSF 2:146; Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>534</sup> DSF 2:146.

<sup>535</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 27 August 1757, in *PGW*.

It is quite peculiar that Washington promoted George William Fairfax's cause so ardently that he became involved in a brawl. Washington may have felt obliged to stand behind the Fairfaxes, his patron family, because "If a young man wished to rise in politics, society, or wealth, it was well for him to vote for those who had the power to aid him in winning his goal." Whether Washington was calculating his future political ascent at this instance, it is hard to judge. While it is true that the Fairfaxes ranked among the most influential families in the colony (it will be remembered that George William's father, Colonel Fairfax, served in the powerful governor's council), Washington probably supported his neighbor for reasons of being beholden to the Fairfaxes besides his own potential future interest.<sup>536</sup>

With regard to membership in the House of Burgesses, Washington would not have been the first member of his family to occupy this political office. Augustine, Washington's older half brother, was elected to the House of Burgess the previous year (when about thirty-five years old) after the decease of one of the incumbents from his county.<sup>537</sup> Augustine must have been a burgess held in esteem, for he was privileged to sit on the important standing Committee of Propositions and Grievances in that House.<sup>538</sup> Lawrence, Washington's eldest half brother, was elected a burgess at age twenty-five or twenty-six, serving for about five years until the decline of his health. Lawrence, too, was honored to sit on the same Committee.<sup>539</sup> Lawrence, Washington's grandfather, was elected a burgess when about twenty-five years old and served on the standing Committee of Public Claims.<sup>540</sup> John,

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<sup>536</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 67; DSF 2:266.

<sup>537</sup> DSF 1:41n145; Griffith, *Virginia House of Burgesses*, 166; McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 8:viii, x, 194.

<sup>538</sup> McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 8:234, 418.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:vii, ix, 387, 78, 157, 258; DSF 1:41n145, 229.

<sup>540</sup> DSF 1:30; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1659/60-1693*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1914), 2:xi, xiv, 227, 337, 384, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouse02virg>.

Washington's great-grandfather, was appointed a burgess at about thirty-five and was also honored to sit on the Committee of Propositions and Grievances.<sup>541</sup>

### *The Burgess Election of 1758*

After the burgess elections of 1755, Washington's responsibilities continued primarily in the realm of the military. But it did not take long before Washington made his second attempt to obtain a burgess seat. By February 1758, shortly after Governor Dinwiddie's departure, Washington wondered whether it would hurt his "Interest as a Candidate" in the county of Frederick again.<sup>542</sup> Washington could have contemplated standing a poll months in advance, as the Assembly was traditionally dissolved with the arrival of the new colonial governor. Francis Fauquier did not arrive until June of that year, causing the campaign to be particularly long. Partly in consequence of this, the Frederick County's 1758 election "was the most publicized in colonial Virginia."<sup>543</sup>

The election day was set for July 24 of that year, complying with a legal stipulation of a minimum of twenty-day advance notice for setting the time of a burgess election once the writs for election were delivered to the sheriff.<sup>544</sup> Three years earlier, there was hardly any electioneering on Washington's behalf since almost no one knew of his candidacy until the day of the election. Now in 1758, Washington's candidacy was also uncommon because he was actually absent from the Frederick County during the whole of the election, attending to his military duties. Judging from the context of the ongoing prospects of an offensive in the

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<sup>541</sup> DSF 1:15; McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia*, 2:viii11, ix, 36, 48. Freeman claims that Lawrence Washington's grandfather served on the committee on Propositions and Grievances, but provides no reference. If Freeman meant his paternal grandfather (Lawrence Washington, GW's grandfather as well), then I have found no evidence to corroborate his assertion. See DSF 1:229n40.

<sup>542</sup> Nathaniel Thompson to GW, 20 February 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>543</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:67; Griffith, *Virginia House of Burgesses*, 94.

<sup>544</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 7:520. Interestingly enough, the stipulation of a minimum of a twenty-day waiting period is not found in earlier statutes.

army, I believe his preference to stay in the field suggests that military honor was more appealing to him than political affairs.

Before long, however, the commander of Virginia learned that his chances of success were decreasing since some of his erstwhile supporters were allegedly changing their minds in favor of someone else or were unsure about whom to vote for. Charles Smith, Washington's fellow officer at Fort Loudoun, wrote that many "pretended Friends" that were expected to vote in Washington's favor, were now reluctant to promise their loyalty.<sup>545</sup> Colonel James Wood, the founder and leading citizen of Winchester and one of the principal supporters of Washington, was also probing into the electorate's preferences and his report was not so dismal, though allegedly some tried to persuade him to the contrary.<sup>546</sup> In any case, Washington was fortunate that his associates were committed to "dowing all that Lyes in thare power" to help him succeed.<sup>547</sup>

In Frederick, a number of citizens called attention to the inconvenience of electing their colony's chief commander to the Assembly in over three-hundred-kilometer-distant Williamsburg. Ironically, little did they probably know that Washington already contemplated resigning from the army at the end of that year's campaign anyway because of his marriage prospects with Miss Custis. It was an outlook Washington seems to have kept to himself but it is a plausible one based on historical evidence discussed in chapter three.<sup>548</sup>

While Washington was away, his competitors were actively electioneering in the county. Hugh West, one of the incumbents, "has been two days wth them, & intends to be very busy till the time comes." West, however, had been publicly accused by Colonel Thomas Bryan Martin, another candidate, of being involved in a dubious mercantile bargain, which

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<sup>545</sup> Charles Smith to GW, 20 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>546</sup> James Wood to GW, 7 July 1758, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:362. James Wood's son and namesake later became governor of Virginia.

<sup>547</sup> Edward Snickers to GW, 19 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>548</sup> John Kirkpatrick to GW, 6 July 1758, in *PGW*.

discredited his trustworthiness and caused disaffection among his best friends.<sup>549</sup> Martin, whose station was elevated by his close family relationship with the powerful Fairfaxes, had already served as a burgess in another county.<sup>550</sup> Thomas Swearingen, Washington's third competitor, was the other incumbent.

A candidate's physical presence among the electorate was highly advantageous with respect to gaining support from the local citizens, especially on the day of the election. To achieve this end, Washington was advised, "your being elected absolutely depends on your presence that day. this is the Opinion of every thinking friend, & therefore must in the most pressing manner desire it."<sup>551</sup>

The politically savvy friends of Washington invited him to "shew your Face" because it was not prudent to rely on the casual word "of the common Herd."<sup>552</sup> Accordingly, Washington, who at that time was stationed at Fort Cumberland, asked Colonel Bouquet, his superior commander, for a leave of absence to attend the scheduled election. Interestingly enough, Washington asked for the leave not because he fully intended to attend the election but rather to keep this option open in case he would decide so.<sup>553</sup>

In this case, Washington's rationale was based on a closer attachment to his current military obligations than to potential political prospects. "Tho. my being there on that occasion woud, at any other time, be very agreable to me," Washington said and then disclosed the reasons for his forbearance in attending the burgess election to Bouquet, "yet, at this juncture, I can hardly perswade myself to think of being absent from my more immediate Duty, even for a few days." By "this juncture" Washington referred to a possibility of an

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<sup>549</sup> Gabriel Jones to GW, 6 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>550</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:285. Martin was a nephew of Lord Fairfax.

<sup>551</sup> Gabriel Jones to GW, 6 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>552</sup> James Wood to GW, 7 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>553</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, 19 July 1758, in *PGW*.

imminent attack on Fort Duquesne in the summer of 1758, something he had pushed for during the military campaign relentlessly.<sup>554</sup>

Having been impatiently waiting for an opportunity for an offensive, he did not dare to risk being absent from his “Regiment when there is a probability of its being calld upon.”<sup>555</sup> Arguably, Washington welcomed the prospects of political recognition that would be associated with his becoming a burgess, but that still could not compete with the kind of reputation that resulted from a distinguished military service, let alone military gallantry. The commander of Virginia stayed at his military post.

As far as the prestigious burgess election was concerned, Washington eventually “abandond all thoughts of attending Personally at the Election in Winchester,” delegating the responsibility of electioneering to his friends who, after all, were said to be “dowing all that Lyes in thare power” to have him succeed.<sup>556</sup> In colonial times, when a particular candidate was absent at the election, it was common that a substitute stood in his place that day.<sup>557</sup> In Washington’s case, a proxy of good standing was imperative if he hoped to receive a sufficient amount of votes. Of those that were under consideration, Colonel James Wood was selected as a fit individual for this representation.<sup>558</sup>

In colonial times, Virginia burgess elections were held at only one place in the county—at the courthouse. Typically, the sheriff and several ranking justices sat behind a long table in the courtroom. The candidates (or their representatives) were seated at the extreme ends of the table and their clerks, or “writers,” were close at hand. The sheriff was the only one authorized by law to open the polls, which he usually did in mid-morning, when

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> GW to Henry Bouquet, 21 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., Edward Snickers to GW, 19 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>557</sup> Charles Smith to GW, 20 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:362.

most voters had assembled, by reading the writ for the elections.<sup>559</sup> Each voter was asked to step up to the sheriff, take an oath, testifying to be a freeholder of the county, and openly state his choices *viva voce*.<sup>560</sup> The appropriate clerk recorded the freeholder's name "and often the candidate for whom he had voted arose, bowed, and publicly thanked him." After a vote was stated, it was not unusual to hear huzzahs "and shouts of approval from one side answered by" boos and retorts from another.<sup>561</sup>

The key to one's success at the polls was gaining the support of the local gentry. The gentlemen, who usually let their preferences known, had such an influence with the freeholders that the elections were sometimes more or less decided even before they were held.<sup>562</sup> On the day of the elections, the leading men of the county always voted first, which usually set the stage for the voting behavior of the "common herd."<sup>563</sup>

The poll sheet for the burgess election at the Frederick County in 1758 arguably exemplifies this pattern.<sup>564</sup> The first man to vote in this election was Lord Fairfax. His precedence among the voters was rightly deserved, for he was proprietor of extensive landholdings in the region, county lieutenant of Frederick, ranking magistrate of the county court, and vested with special authority "to act as a Justice of the Peace in all the Counties in the Northern Neck."<sup>565</sup> Fairfax's votes in the election were in favor of Martin and Washington. At Fairfax's heels was William Meldrum, a prominent Episcopal clergyman, who followed suit. Washington was fortunate to have James Wood as his representative, because he came third and, naturally, voted for Washington. But his second vote favored

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<sup>559</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 26-28.

<sup>560</sup> Griffith, *Virginia House of Burgesses*, 51. Freeholders were adult white males meeting property requirements to vote.

<sup>561</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 29, 31.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>563</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 146; James Wood to GW, 7 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>564</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 66-67.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*; DSF 1:329-30; Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:301.

West, not Martin. The fourth gentleman to vote was Colonel John Carlyle who supported Martin and Washington.<sup>566</sup>

“These first four votes, given by leaders of the landed gentry and of political, military and ecclesiastical institutions, set the pattern for the rest of the election.” All men designated as “gentleman,” as well as Doctor James Craik, and three ministers of different faiths, voted for Washington and Martin. Eight men bearing any kind of military rank voted likewise. Washington received seven, Martin six, and West only three votes. No person of distinction from these professions supported Swearingen.<sup>567</sup>

Inevitably, Washington and Martin were advantaged through this early lead in the polls. Before halfway through the election, Swearingen was trailing so significantly that it seemed pointless to waste a vote on him, so West began to catch up to the two front runners. Nevertheless, the two candidates supported by Lord Fairfax, the first voter, never lost the momentum, and ultimately won the election. To be mindful of those who supported him, Washington carefully transcribed one of the poll sheets into his own list arranged in alphabetical order. The totals given in his copy are as follows: Washington 309, Martin 239, West 199, and Swearingen 45.<sup>568</sup>

The support of Lord Fairfax and other patricians, including those bearing a military rank, seems to have swayed the rest of the voters. As in his earlier endeavors, Washington was now again assisted by the Fairfaxes, his neighbors and powerful patrons. Moreover, the election was held during a war in a county deeply concerned about the protection of its boundary, thus supporting men acquainted with the current military situation sounded

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<sup>566</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 66.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>568</sup> Election Poll (List of Voters), 24 July 1758, Series 4, General Correspondence, Frederick County, Virginia, in *GWPLC*, images 756-67. The totals for each candidate sent by Lieutenant Smith and Joseph Carroll, the clerk, slightly differ from GW's copy, see Charles Smith to GW, 24 July 1758, 26 July 1758, Enclosure V: Frederick County Poll Sheet, 24 July 1758, in *PGW*.

reasonable. After all, Washington and Martin, the two candidates who held a military rank, were elected as opposed to West and Swearingen, who held none.

Like other candidates, Washington and his friends spent a substantial amount of money on treating the electorate. Treating with food and drink was a prevalent practice in eighteenth-century Virginia, and it was one of the means by which a candidate could prove his open-handedness and generosity befitting a prosperous gentleman.<sup>569</sup> After the election, Washington was sent receipts that indicate a rather bountiful treating: 189 liters of rum punch, 174 liters of beer, 132 liters of wine, 106 liters of rum, and a dinner for friends.<sup>570</sup>

Although widely accepted in Virginia, treating could have been practiced on both sides of the law. A 1705 act regulating the burgess elections prohibited “after the test, or issuing out or ordering of the writ or writs of election . . . give, present, or allow to any person or persons having voice or vote in such election, any money, meat, drink, entertainment, or provision . . . in order to be elected.”<sup>571</sup>

Thus, once the writs for election were issued, treating voters was illegal until after the polls closed. However, offering food and drink was within the limits of the law, as long as it was done without solicitation for votes or regard for voter’s preferences. Not surprisingly, occasional complaints were filed against some candidates at various Virginia elections for inappropriate treating “Freeholders, to engage them to vote.”<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 28-29; Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 70.

<sup>570</sup> Enclosure I: Account with Henry Brinker, 24[-25] July 1758, Enclosure II: Account with John Funk, 24[-26] July 1758, Enclosure III: Account with Henry Heth, 24[-26] July 1758, Enclosure IV: Account with Alexander Wodrow, 24 July 1758, Enclosure: Account with John Hite, 24 July 1758, in *PGW*; DSF 2:320. Small quantities of brandy and cider are omitted here.

<sup>571</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, 13 vols. (Philadelphia: Thomas Desilver, 1823), 3:243, <http://vagenweb.org/hening>.

<sup>572</sup> McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 8:456-57. For additional examples, see *Ibid.*, 8:49-50, 360; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1727-1734, 1736-1740*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1910), 6:209, 258, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouseo06virg>.

On behalf of Washington, the provided entertainment seems to have been impartial, or at least, it was intended so. In thanking Wood for his great support at the election, Washington hoped “no exception were taken to any that voted against me but that all were alike treated and all had enough.” He only feared “that you spent with too sparing a hand.”<sup>573</sup> Such disinterestedness was required of a gentleman who wished to seek support for any public office in an honorable way.

Washington’s triumph in the burgess election induced a number of accolades and congratulatory messages in his honor. Wood, who “Sat on the Bench” in proxy for Washington during the polls, “was Carried round the Town with a General applause, Huzawing Colo. Washington.”<sup>574</sup> Robert Stewart, captain of the Regiment’s light cavalry, felicitated Washington “from the bottom of a heart that overflows with Joy,” despite of the fact that he had commanded the province’s army “in the worst of times” and had been absent during the election.<sup>575</sup> Likewise, Robert Rutherford, captain of rangers, believed that Washington’s success was owing to his “humane and Equitable treatment” of others as well as “Ardent Zeal for the Common Cause” in whatever capacity he had served.<sup>576</sup>

After his 1758 successful election, George Washington became the fifth “Washington” to be elected to the House of Burgesses. He was elected when twenty-six years old, which was not a younger age than that of two of his predecessors in the family. Washington, too, was soon honored to sit on the important Committee of Propositions and Grievances.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> GW to James Wood, [ca. 28 July 1758], in *PGW*.

<sup>574</sup> Charles Smith to GW, 24 July 1758, in *PGW*. Such jubilation of a political victory does not seem to be uncommon in pre-Revolutionary Virginia, see “The Candidates; or, the Humours of a Virginia Election. A Comedy in Three Acts,” in Robert Munford, *A Collection of Plays and Poems, by the Late Col. Robert Munford, of Mecklenburg County, in the State of Virginia* (Petersburg, [VA]: William Prentis, 1798), 42, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/munford/munford.html>.

<sup>575</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 25 July 1758, GW to Robert Stewart, 11 August 1758, in *PGW*; Pargellis, *Military Affairs*, 88.

<sup>576</sup> Robert Rutherford to GW, 26 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>577</sup> McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 9:57, 223.

Washington's reputation was on the rise. Although denied a royal commission, he had served as the commander in chief of Virginia forces, married one of the wealthiest widows in the province, succeeded in the burgess election, and established cordial ties with many respectable gentry families. I believe it is safe to state that by 1758, Washington surpassed any other preceding member of his family in reputation.

### *The Burgess Election of 1761*

Following his resignation from the army, Washington was honored with a resolution by the House of Burgesses, of which body he was now a new member, that commended his conduct and military achievements. In the February session of 1759, it was "Resolved, *Nemine contradicente*, That the Thanks of this House be given to George Washington, Esq . . . for his faithful Services to his Majesty, and this Colony, and for his brave and steady Behaviour" since the beginning of the hostilities until his resignation.<sup>578</sup>

During his tenure as a burgess, Washington's contribution to the decision-making of the lower house of the Assembly was especially weighty in matters of the military. His experiences in commanding the Virginia Regiment provided him with a profundity of the military operations on the frontier most of his colleagues lacked. Logically, among the items Washington was assigned to address were petitions concerning the compensation of officers for their personal expenses and privations during the French and Indian War.<sup>579</sup> Robert Stewart, a fellow officer and supporter of Washington, recognized the "salutary Advice" the retired commander of Virginia was capable of giving to the Assembly.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 9:66-67.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 141-43, 147, 150, 188; Robert Stewart to GW, 12 March 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>580</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 3 June 1760, in *PGW*.

The passing of King George II in 1760 occasioned new general elections of the burgesses in Virginia during the following year. “I deal little in politics,” Washington claimed shortly after he had stood as a candidate in the burgess election for the Frederick County.<sup>581</sup> Evidently, the world of politics was not as enticing as the military field to Washington, but membership in the House of Burgesses carried prestige and respectability Washington was definitely honored with.

By February 1761, the year of general burgess elections in the colony, “the Flame of Burgessing” began to kindle almost “every Breast” in Winchester, the county seat of Frederick, which county Washington represented in the House since the previous election three years earlier. By all accounts, Colonel Adam Stephen, Washington’s former second-in-command and now a passionate candidate, can be imputed for much of the fray.<sup>582</sup> During his campaign, Stephen was “incessantly employd in traversing” the county, earnestly soliciting votes from freeholders. “His claims to disinterestedness, Public Spirit and genuine Patriotism are Trumpeted in the most turgid manner,” Stewart informed Washington. Furthermore, Stephen resorted to demagoguery by pledging to initiate business projects that would eradicate poverty and bring wealth to the county.<sup>583</sup>

Judging by the mid-eighteenth century standards, Stephen’s electioneering methods, which consisted of exploiting “every method to arrive at his point de vue” obviously “violated the gentry code of election etiquette.” Contrary to modern political customs, gentlemen at that time were expected to refrain from basing their campaigns on specific issues or pledging selected expedient measures. Instead of referring to a political platform, they were expected to

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<sup>581</sup> GW to Andrew Burnaby, 27 July 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>582</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 15 February 1761, in *PGW*; Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 230.

<sup>583</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 15 February 1761, in *PGW*.

disinterestedly present their impartial and mature judgment and unblemished character to the voters.<sup>584</sup>

Since the electoral etiquette prescribed rather indirect methods of winning one's favor, house-to-house canvassing was generally frowned upon. Many an experienced gentleman mastered the seeking of political "support with such delicacy of phrase as to avoid the appearance of doing so."<sup>585</sup> In fact, the would-be statesman was obliged by the contemporary courtesy books to stifle his ambition or to "cloak aspiration in modesty."<sup>586</sup>

It is to be remembered, however, that "the pursuit of happiness" for most colonial British Americans, as Jack P. Greene aptly put it, "did not involve the pursuit of public office or even the *active* occupation of a public space." Usually, it was more a social obligation than something inherently desired by them, for agrarian responsibilities occupied a substantial amount of their concerns, thus stimulus for having a public career was rather scarce. "Their primary allegiances were to themselves and their families rather than to the larger social and political entities to which they belonged."<sup>587</sup> One visiting French aristocrat observed that Americans in late 18th century were still "too much engaged in their respective occupations for the enticements of" more social ones.<sup>588</sup> An industrious husbandman, content under his own vine and fig tree, was still the most popular cultural image invoked by many American freeholders.<sup>589</sup>

While the aspiring patrician men were expected to imbibe the principles of disinterestedness and assume an air of indifference about one's social climb, the common folk

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<sup>584</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 12 March 1761, in *PGW*; Longmore, *Invention*, 64.

<sup>585</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 70.

<sup>586</sup> Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 41.

<sup>587</sup> Jack P. Greene, "The Concept of Virtue in Late Colonial British America," in *Virtue, Corruption, and Self-Interest: Political Values in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Richard K. Matthews (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994), 47.

<sup>588</sup> Duke de la Rochefoucault Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797; With an Authentic Account of Lower Canada*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for R. Phillips, 1799), 2:679, [http://www.archive.org/details/cihm\\_36209](http://www.archive.org/details/cihm_36209).

<sup>589</sup> Greene, "Concept of Virtue," 47.

knew that they were the most fitting candidates to occupy the seats of the colony's government. The term disinterestedness was not understood as being uninterested in civil and political affairs but rather "that one's virtue and independence were such that one could rise above narrow self-interest and act out of a sense of the public good."<sup>590</sup>

It was advocated that history had in numerous instances attested that "if weak or ignorant men are entrusted with power," there will be a "universal confusion." Such an unmerited elevation of nescients "will rather make them giddy and vain, and deprive them of the little understanding they had before."<sup>591</sup> Indeed, the degree of one's cultivation of mind (understanding) or ignorance played a key role in identifying the fit candidates for leadership. The grounds for the colonial gentry's presumption of their prominence over the commoners, wrote Robert E. Shalhope, were their refined "character, education, rational minds."<sup>592</sup>

While Washington lacked erudition in any given field of science, he welcomed others' acknowledgments of his respectability in consequence of his honorable character and sagacity. In fact, these two attributes appear to have been among the most important components of his political creditability since the 1760s.

Following the British model, the American gentry "anticipated being called to govern at all levels of colonial society."<sup>593</sup> Since seats in the General Assembly were practically solely occupied by members of the gentry in mid-eighteenth century, the Virginia gentlemen found themselves as if on a "permanent list of nominees for political office."<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> Glenn A. Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 207.

<sup>591</sup> Andrew Eliot, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency Francis Bernard, Esq: Governor, the Honorable His Majesty's [sic] Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England, May 29th, 1765* (Boston: Green and Russel, 1765; repr., London: J. Meres, 1765), 7, <http://books.google.com/books?id=SexbAAAAQAAJ>.

<sup>592</sup> Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism, Liberalism, and Democracy: Political Culture in the Early Republic," in *The Republican Synthesis Revisited: Essays in Honor of George Athan Baillias*, eds. Milton M. Klein, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), 42.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>594</sup> Eliot, *Sermon*, 70, 73.

Therefore, in the Frederick County election of 1761, Colonel Thomas Bryan Martin, as an incumbent, was very likely to be reelected had he wished prolong his tenure, but he decided to retire. Likewise, Washington's great advantage lay in his current incumbency in that county and in the fact that "Leaders and all the Patrician Families" were unswerving in their determination to cast a vote for him at the upcoming election, thus boding similar voting preferences of yeomen who were "often quasi-feudal retainers of the great planters."

Although Stewart was confident Washington would poll even better than at the last election, he admonished the retired commander of Virginia to come and make his presence known to the citizens of Frederick.<sup>595</sup>

Since Washington's "Interest's being immutably Establish'd," at least a portion of his campaign activities seems to have focused on "joining of interests" with George Mercer, a fellow officer and now a candidate from Frederick County, to help him succeed.<sup>596</sup> The political alliance with Mercer was additionally reasonable with respect to their partnership in obtaining land in the upper Ohio Valley. After all, in his letter to Washington the previous year, Mercer labeled Stephen one of the "mighty Schemers" who wished to snatch the best lands for themselves.<sup>597</sup>

Although Stephen's "indefatigable" canvassing aimed at counteracting Mercer's rather than Washington's popularity, Washington went on a campaign "tour" during which he attended a cockfight, a wedding, and a special meeting.<sup>598</sup> Such appearances at public events, if the candidate comported himself with dignity, were in keeping with the electoral etiquette.<sup>599</sup> Besides, Washington deemed it prudent to pen a letter to Van Swearingen, the

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<sup>595</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 15 February 1761, GW to Andrew Burnaby, 27 July 1761, in *PGW*; Longmore, *Invention*, 65.

<sup>596</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 12 March 1761, GW to Van Swearingen, 15 May 1761, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:289; Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:114n86.

<sup>597</sup> George Mercer to GW, 17 February 1760, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:245.

<sup>598</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 12 March 1761, GW to Van Swearingen, 15 May 1761, in *PGW*; Longmore, *Invention*, 64.

<sup>599</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 70.

sheriff who was in charge of managing the polls, three days before the election. Of course, the sheriff as such was obliged to remain impartial toward any candidate and for this reason was prohibited by law from voting unless in case of a tie. Yet, he was authorized to set the date of the election and to open and close the polls at his discretion. His respectability was such that “if the sheriff was known to favor one candidate over another, some voters may well have been swayed by this knowledge.”<sup>600</sup>

Aware of the sheriff’s authority, Washington shrewdly enclosed in his letter some of Stephen’s propaganda he had come across and presented them as evidence of his impugnable electioneering methods. Washington “made a just and proper use of” the *corpora delicti* and pragmatically advised the sheriff to “communicate the contents to your Neighbours and Friends,” if he deemed it expedient.<sup>601</sup>

Washington further expressed his expectation that the sheriff would not condone Stephen’s unconventional proceedings and that he would contribute his “aid towards shutting him out of the Public trust he was seeking.” To take advantage of the initial momentum at the polls like three years earlier, Washington cherished hope that his and Mercer’s supporters would be “hurried in at the first of the Poll . . . but as Sheriff I know you cannot appear in this, nor would I by any mean have you do any thing that can give so designing a Man as Colo. Stevens the least trouble.”<sup>602</sup>

The manner in which he attempted to draw advantages from Stephen’s obviously controversial campaign demonstrates the pragmatic nature of Washington’s political deliberations. Whereas coaxing the sheriff into supporting any one’s candidacy at the polls would have been improper and illegal, Washington seems to have deliberately used the

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid., 68-69, GW to Van Swearingen, 15 May 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>601</sup> GW to Van Swearingen, 15 May 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

subtlety of language to merely refer to the advantage of his and Mercer's friends polling first but acknowledged the overruling necessity of the sheriff's remaining impartial.

On May 18, 1761, when the sheriff opened the polls, the first to cast his votes was John (Augustine) Washington, a younger brother of the incumbent candidate who, naturally, voted for his brother and for Mercer. The second freeholder to step forward was Samuel Washington, another younger brother of the candidate, who, as expected, followed suit. By the time three dozen freeholders had voted, Stephen was trailing well behind Washington and Mercer. Their early lead decreased during the elections, but when the polls closed, the order of candidates remained the same: Washington 505, Mercer 400, Stephen 294, Rutherford 1, Hite 1, and Brinker 1.<sup>603</sup>

Neither John Augustine nor Samuel Washington could qualify as leading gentry or men of prominence. The fact that they succeeded in voting first is another indication of Washington's careful political strategy at the 1761 election. Since the concurrent quest for the best lands of the upper Ohio had a significant impact on the campaign proceedings, Washington went to great lengths to achieve his and Mercer's victory and thus preclude Stephen from obtaining a seat at the Assembly—a membership which gave one considerable power in public affairs, including the allotment and settlement of the colony's frontier.

Washington's exertion during the campaign may have been a factor in his contracting another prolonged and serious illness, for his health began to decline at about the time of the election and lasted for four months. Despite his traveling to the mountains in hopes of fresh air and clean water, the seriousness of the malady was such that he thought he was “very near

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<sup>603</sup> Election Poll (List of Voters), 18 May 1761, Series 4, General Correspondence, 1697-1799, Frederick County, Virginia, in *GWPLC*, images 169-78. Thomas Wood, one of the poll takers, attributed only 399 votes to Mercer in another count, see *ibid.*, image 178.

my last gasp . . . thought the grim King would certainly master my utmost efforts and that I must sink in spite of a noble struggle.”<sup>604</sup>

“*It Surely Is the Duty of Every Man Who Has Abilities to Serve His Country*”

One of the most illuminating works with respect to political practices in colonial Virginia is Robert Munford’s *The Candidates*.<sup>605</sup> Besides his military service during the French and Indian War, Munford became acquainted with colonial politics through his five-year long tenure of a Mecklenburg County’s burgess office before he composed the play presumably late in 1770.<sup>606</sup> *The Candidates* was actually never enacted on stage during the author’s lifetime, but this “rich and evocative” source has merited a substantial attention by scholars writing on the political ethos of the pre-Revolutionary Virginia.<sup>607</sup>

Rather than a faithful depiction, the comedy professes to satirize a somewhat idealistic House of Burgesses election in an unspecified Virginia county after the death (October 15, 1770) of Lord Botetourt, governor of Virginia.<sup>608</sup> However, Richard Beeman believes that the satirized burgess election of *The Candidates* was probably inspired by much earlier election, namely Lunenburg County’s 1758 polls, yet, the characters and electioneering methods mentioned in the play are illustrative of the general spirit of politicking in colonial Virginia.<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> GW to Andrew Burnaby, 27 July 1761, GW to Charles Green, 26[-30] August 1761, GW to Robert Cary & Company, 23 September 1761, GW to Richard Washington, 20 October 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>605</sup> “Candidates,” in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*.

<sup>606</sup> Richard R. Beeman, “Robert Munford and the Political Culture of Frontier Virginia,” *Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 2 (1978): 173-75; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:296. Tyler erroneously claims Brunswick as the county Munford represented in the House of Burgesses.

<sup>607</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, “A World Turned ‘Topsy Turvy’: Robert Munford, The Patriots, and the Crisis of the Revolution in Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2004): 3rd par., <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/61.2/mcdonnell.html>; Beeman, “Robert Munford,” 169.

<sup>608</sup> Beeman, “Varieties of Deference,” 319; Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 13; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:69.

<sup>609</sup> Beeman, “Robert Munford,” 176-77; Griffith, *Virginia House of Burgesses*, 52-53.

In the play, Worthy's decision to retire from the Virginia Assembly occasions a surge of candidates to vie for that respectable post. Worthy represents the epitome of gentility whose modesty and refined manners eclipse the several new contenders. His respectability is approximated only by Wou'dbe who succeeds in garnering public trust from many freeholders by his alike genteel manners and high social status. Three more men declare their willingness to stand a poll in the upcoming election. Smallhopes represents a gentleman abstemious in drink but bullying in temperament when it comes to disagreements. Strutabout, whose name is indicative of his parvenu status, decreases his chances of being elected by infracting the genteel customs by his indiscreetness and promising the fulfillment of demands put forth by even the most nescient of constituents. Sir John Toddy is a figure whose creditability is weakened by his addiction to spirits and by feigning genuine concern for potential voters. The play concludes by Worthy's changing his mind (at Wou'dbe's exhortation) shortly before the planned polls, and inevitably, Worthy and Wou'dbe win the election.<sup>610</sup>

*The Candidates* derides some of the plebeian electioneering manners that are contrasted with the respected genteel conventions, as was still the habitude in Washington's Virginia. The following lines of the play outline the proper method of seeking the favors of electors:

The prudent candidate who hopes to rise,  
 Ne'er deigns to hide it, in a mean disguise.  
 Will, to his place, with moderation slide,  
 And win his way, or not resist the tide.  
 The fool, aspiring to bright honour's post,

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<sup>610</sup> Beeman, "Robert Munford," 175; *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. "to strut" is defined as "to walk with affected dignity; to swell with stateliness"; "Candidates," in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, passim.

In noise, in shouts, and tumults oft, is lost.<sup>611</sup>

The key word that distinguishes the prudent and the foolish seems to be “moderation.” Moderate manners was certainly something that was missing in Sir John Toddy’s canvassing when, after his declaring his intention to run for a burgess, he suddenly took a great interest in the welfare of his county neighbors with whom he was actually barely acquainted. Attending a horse race (also part of Washington’s campaign in 1769), he begins to query the gathered freeholders on how their families are doing. Subsequently, he meets with the attendee’s puzzlement, “how the devil come he to know me so well, and never spoke to me before in his life?” When Sir John greets another freeholder and inquires about how it fares with his wife and children, the freeholder’s plain reply, “there’s my wife. I have no children, at your service,” carries comic overtones.<sup>612</sup> Here, Munford demonstrates his despite of those who suddenly put on an air of affected concern for the welfare of the public to merely solicit more votes.

Equally despicable was the practice of circulating rumors and allegations of joined interests with another candidate that could serve to the disadvantage of a third candidate. In the play, Smallhopes intended to “to prejudice [Wou’dbe’s] interest by scattering a few stories among the people, to [his] disadvantage.”<sup>613</sup> Wou’dbe also felt obliged to rebut allegations of his endorsement of another candidate, “You may put what construction you please upon my behaviour, gentlemen; but I assure you, it never was my intention to join with Sir John, or any one else.”<sup>614</sup>

Despite its idealistic tinge, some elements of Munford’s *The Candidates* are recognizable in the burgess elections Washington personally participated in. For instance, Washington found himself in a similarly heated milieu when he confronted controversial

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<sup>611</sup> “Candidates,” in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 41.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 27; *DGW* 2:154.

<sup>613</sup> “Candidates,” in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 20-21.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

electioneering by Adam Stephen during the Frederick County's 1761 election. The electoral campaign was additionally spirited by a thirst for political control over attractive frontier land allotment, which constituted a major incentive for Stephen to resort to open canvassing and soliciting votes for himself; something which was still looked on askance with respect to the established electoral etiquette.<sup>615</sup> Whether Stephen circulated rumors directed against Washington is not known, but his deportment was apparently disgraceful enough to induce Washington to submit his opponent's propagandistic tracts to the sheriff with a view of "shutting him out of the Public trust."<sup>616</sup>

The joining of interests, as mentioned in *The Candidates*, was not an uncommon practice, and the term typically implied "speak[ing] a good word" in favor of a selected running mate. Whereas rumors of joined interests with a disreputable candidate could severely harm one's chances of success, joining interests with an incumbent running for reelection was usually a determinative factor in the poll's outcome.<sup>617</sup> The latter alternative was also the case during Frederick County's 1761 election, in which Washington took advantage of his earned military acclaim and burgess incumbency to endorse Mercer, to the disadvantage of Stephen who subsequently lost the election.<sup>618</sup>

In contrast to Stephen's forward electioneering, Wou'dbe sets the standard for a proper gentleman, "I am determined never to ask a vote for myself, or receive one that is unduly obtained."<sup>619</sup> Indeed, it was an ideal becoming a member of the landed gentry, yet an objective that Washington undoubtedly aspired to. In 1758, Washington received the most votes despite the fact that he refrained from personal campaigning altogether (mostly thanks to his influential friends). In 1761, when his "Interest's being immutably Establish'd" and was

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<sup>615</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 71.

<sup>616</sup> GW to Van Swearingen, 15 May 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>617</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 45, 52.

<sup>618</sup> GW to Van Swearingen, 15 May 1761, in *PGW*.

<sup>619</sup> "Candidates," in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 21.

already familiar with the “the punctilios” of proper behavior, Washington still appeared at several public events. However, it is apparent that rather than apprehending meager support for himself, Washington used his influence there in favor of his running mate.<sup>620</sup>

The lines that perhaps most aptly illustrate a gentleman’s befitting reserve (something Washington eventually mastered) with regard to the colonial electoral etiquette include a conversation between the two honorable characters. Shortly before the scheduled election, the incumbent Worthy again expresses his personal disinclination to public service and even reminds Wou’dbe that he had been elected not as a result of his personal ambition but rather in consequence of his obedience to the voice of the people, “you know . . . how little I have ever courted the people for the troublesome office they have hitherto *imposed* upon me.”<sup>621</sup>

Similarly, dignified and reserved rhetoric was employed by Washington at the time of his appointment to the office of commander in chief. The similarity of his words to that of Worthy’s is remarkable, “far from seeking this appointment I have used every endeavour in my power to avoid it,” but “it has been a kind of destiny that has *thrown* me upon this Service,” wrote the newly appointed general to his wife.<sup>622</sup> Worthy’s willingness to retire from his office can be equally compared to Washington’s readiness, in numerous instances, to resign his military or political powers.

In the play, the conversation continues with Wou’dbe’s commendation of the venerable gentleman’s fondness for domestic or agrarian pursuits, “I believe you enjoy as much domestic happiness as any person, and that your aversion to a public life proceeds from the pleasure you find at home.” Wou’dbe then extends the following straightforward

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<sup>620</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 12 March 1761, in *PGW*; “Candidates,” in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 25.

<sup>621</sup> “Candidates,” in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 42.

<sup>622</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW* (my italics).

challenge: “But, sir, it surely is the *duty* of every man who has abilities to serve his country, to take up the burden, and bear it with patience.”<sup>623</sup>

Wou’dbe’s encouragement of Worthy to continue his membership in the House of Burgesses results in the incumbent’s assent, the joining of interests with Wou’dbe, and both of them winning the election, thus precluding the “less honorable” candidates (Smallhopes, Strutabout, and John Toddy) from entering the government traditionally reserved only for “virtuous and enlightened citizens.”<sup>624</sup>

In this dialogue, Wou’dbe referred to a social obligation associated with *noblesse oblige*, a responsibility of members of the high society (especially when entitled to peerage) to conduct themselves accordingly.<sup>625</sup> The expected obligation of the gentry to assume offices of responsibility was also an inextricable part of the political ethos of pre-Revolutionary Virginia. One anonymous author (likely John Randolph) designated “the ignorant Vulgar” as “unfit to judge” and “unable to manage the Reins, of Government.”<sup>626</sup> On the other hand, those of “High Birth and Fortune” were privileged to have “the solid and splendid Advantages of Education and Accomplishments, extensive Influence, and Incitement to Glory.”<sup>627</sup>

The colonial paradigm that distinguished between the “virtuous and enlightened citizens” and “the ignorant Vulgar” was long reinforced within appointive as well as elective posts.<sup>628</sup> Naturally only those of gentry birth traditionally occupied virtually all appointive

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<sup>623</sup> “Candidates,” in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 42 (my italics).

<sup>624</sup> Quoted in Jack P. Greene, Richard L. Bushman, and Michael Kammen, *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The Coming of the Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York*, ed. Richard M. Jellison (New York: Norton, 1976), 24.

<sup>625</sup> *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1835), s.v. “noblesse oblige” is here defined as “quiconque prétend être noble, doit se conduire noblement.”

<sup>626</sup> Earl Gregg Swem, ed., *Considerations on the Present State of Virginia; Attributed to John Randolph, Attorney General; and Considerations on the Present State of Virginia; Examined by Robert Carter Nicholas* ([Williamsburg, VA: Purdie and Dixon, 1774], repr., New York: Charles F. Heartman, 1919), 15, <http://www.archive.org/details/considerationso00rando>.

<sup>627</sup> [Jonathan Boucher], *A Letter from a Virginian, to the Members of the Congress to Be Held at Philadelphia, on the First of September, 1774* ([Philadelphia: H. Miller,] 1774), 5, <http://www.archive.org/details/letterfromvirgin00john>.

<sup>628</sup> Quoted in Greene, Bushman, and Kammen, *Society, Freedom, and Conscience*, Jellison, 24; Swem, *Considerations on the Present State of Virginia*, 15.

posts (vestries, justices, sheriffs, militia officers, and other county offices) in the Old Dominion prior to 1776 since the appointments rested on the discretion of the colonial governor, who himself was commissioned by the crown. But freeholders voting for candidates for the House of Burgesses, the only elective body in colonial Virginia, followed more or less the same pattern.<sup>629</sup> The time-honored sociopolitical climate kept both the well-bred and the commoners habituated to countenance the “reciprocal Duties” between the rulers and the ruled.<sup>630</sup> While the former were to accept leadership and pledge benevolence to his inferiors, the latter were obliged to support and pay obeisance to his superiors.

Like Worthy, who reevaluated his continuation in the Assembly in terms of his social obligation, Washington too eventually regarded his patriotic service as a duty, a noun that occurs almost three thousand times in the preserved portion of his lifetime correspondence.<sup>631</sup> The aspiring Adams, too, believed that the victorious general was guided by “duty, not interest nor glory . . . from the beginning.”<sup>632</sup> One year before assuming the presidency, Washington clearly formulated his stance on patriotic duty, “the consciousness of having discharged that duty which we owe to our Country, is superior to all other considerations.”<sup>633</sup> Washington’s disinclination to relinquish his gratifying retirement at his Mount Vernon in 1789 has been perhaps most aptly set forth by David Humphries, one of his former aides, “influenced by principles of duty, his private inclination was overcome by a sense of public obligation,” a choice of words undoubtedly sanctioned by the general himself.<sup>634</sup>

In sum, it is evident that neither could have Munford been inspired by Washington’s diffidence in 1776 nor is it likely that Washington read and paraphrased Munford’s

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<sup>629</sup> Greene, Bushman, and Kammen, *Society, Freedom, and Conscience*, Jellison, 22-25.

<sup>630</sup> [Boucher], *Letter from a Virginian*, 8.

<sup>631</sup> A full text search of “duty” in *GW* yielded 2,880 results.

<sup>632</sup> John Adams to Robert Livingston, 16 June 1783, in Kaminski, *Founders on the Founders*, 485.

<sup>633</sup> GW to James Madison, 2 March 1788, in *PGW*.

<sup>634</sup> Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army during the War of the Revolution April, 1775, to December, 1783* (Washington, DC: Rare Book Shop, 1914), 308, <http://www.archive.org/details/franheitmanreg00bernrich>; Zagari, “*Life of General Washington*”, 56. Humphries’s biography of GW was the only one written under the General’s supervision (*ibid.*, xviii-xxii)

manuscript of the play before the Revolutionary War.<sup>635</sup> If *The Candidates*, despite its romanticized coloring, delineates Worthy's reserve to enter or continue to lead a public life as that of an ideal member of the landed gentry, then it serves as another indication that Washington succeeded, in a remarkable degree, in imitating a character of such a gentleman in his later public service.<sup>636</sup>

### *The Vestry*

The gentry in colonial Virginia often occupied more than one county office. Therefore, it was not rare that a gentleman held an ecclesiastical, a military, and a civil function concurrently.<sup>637</sup> Moreover, if one already served in the House of Burgesses, the membership itself in that body carried enough prestige that it was not difficult for the incumbent to be elected to other offices reserved for the gentry. Although Washington "did not shine as a Burgess . . . his character and his military reputation gave him influence."<sup>638</sup> In an almost expected way, because of this "influence," Washington was elected a vestryman in the Truro parish of his home county four years after his first successful burgess election in 1758.<sup>639</sup>

It is worthy to note that like his membership in the Assembly, Washington's service in the vestry was not unprecedented in his family either—his father Augustine had actually

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<sup>635</sup> "Candidates," in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, ii; Jay B. Hubbell and Douglass Adair, eds., "Robert Munford's *The Candidates*," *William and Mary Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1948): 219-20, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1917457>. While Munford composed the play as early as 1770, it was not published until 1798.

<sup>636</sup> GW's embodiment of Worthy's attributes is also discussed in Beeman, "Varieties of Deference in Eighteenth-Century America," 319-21. GW's perception of duty evidently extended a bit further than merely to *noblesse oblige* responsibilities that resulted from his upward social mobility. There was a transcendent aspect to his perception of duty that spanned from the present moment to future generations. For example, GW considered an active participation of his younger brother in the Revolutionary cause "a duty we owe our Country—a Claim posterity has on us." However, this aspect becomes more noticeable only after the onset of the Revolutionary War. GW to John Augustine Washington, 31 March 1776, in *PGW*, see also Adair, "Fame and the Founding Fathers," 8.

<sup>637</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 84-85.

<sup>638</sup> DSF 3:88.

<sup>639</sup> Philip Slaughter, *The History of Truro Parish in Virginia* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1908), 34, <http://www.archive.org/details/historyoftruropa00slau>.

served in the same capacity in the same parish.<sup>640</sup> Membership in the Anglican parishes in the American colonies generally granted the vestrymen more ecclesiastical as well as civil prerogatives than was the case of “their counterparts in England.”<sup>641</sup> With its granted autonomous powers, the vestry acted as a self-perpetuating body throughout the eighteenth century, the vestrymen themselves electing new members when there was a need to fill a vacancy. Therefore, it is not surprising that many held on to this post for years, if not decades.<sup>642</sup> In contrast to the ministers, the vestrymen received no salary for their work, but the amount of money they controlled sometimes surpassed the budget of a county court.<sup>643</sup>

Throughout eighteenth-century Virginia, establishment of parish boundaries usually even preceded the territorialization of counties. The vestrymen were thus “prominently known to the electors” whenever a new county was created. Employed in local ecclesiastical government, the vestrymen were “leading figures” whose “performances were known, their reputations established.”<sup>644</sup> Besides the county court, membership in the vestry offered significant opportunities for public service and constituted “the best step toward eventual election to the House of Burgesses.”<sup>645</sup> Washington climbed this social ladder of rising colonial gentleman with a slightly different successive order of rungs, for his membership in the Assembly antedated his appointment to county and parish offices.<sup>646</sup>

Washington’s regular attendance at church meetings, “reverential” demeanor, as well as his respectability were most likely a factor in his appointment yet to more ecclesiastical

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<sup>640</sup> Slaughter, *History of Truro Parish*, 9-11.

<sup>641</sup> David Hein, Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *The Episcopalians* (New York: Church Publishing, 2005), 19, <http://books.google.com/books?id=Dtr2TzTuzssC>.

<sup>642</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 83-84; William H. Seiler, “The Anglican Parish Vestry in Colonial Virginia,” *Journal of Southern History* 22, no. 3 (August 1956): 315-16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2954548>.

<sup>643</sup> Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 133; C. G. Chamberlayne, ed., *The Vestry Book of Blissland (Blissland) Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, Virginia, 1721-1786* (Richmond, VA: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1935), 155, <http://www.archive.org/details/vestrybookofblis00cham>; Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 83. Prior to the Revolutionary War, the Truro and Fairfax parishes operated with a larger budget than the court of Fairfax County itself.

<sup>644</sup> Seiler, “Anglican Parish Vestry in Colonial Virginia,” 315.

<sup>645</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 86.

<sup>646</sup> DSF 3:88.

responsibilities in the parish.<sup>647</sup> That occurred in 1763 when Washington and his prominent neighbor George William Fairfax, with whom he had served in the same vestry, were appointed churchwardens.<sup>648</sup> In Washington's day, a churchwarden's duties may have consisted of overseeing the parish readers and sextons, social welfare support, reporting wrongdoers to the county court, furnishing of the sacramental bread and wine, raising of levies, payment of salaries, and construction and maintenance of church buildings.<sup>649</sup> Washington's responsibility of superintending the construction of chapels, for instance, came in early 1764 when he and Fairfax authored a public notice, by which they sought volunteers for construction of a brick church within the boundaries of the parish.<sup>650</sup>

Having merged with a part of the neighboring parish, the precinct of the Truro eventually became populous enough that it was expedient to split it into two parishes.<sup>651</sup> With the division came new vestry elections in which Washington again stood as a candidate. But Washington competed in the vestry election in the new Fairfax parish rather than Truro since the Fairfax's parochial boundaries included his estate, though only barely.<sup>652</sup>

By law, the vestry was to be limited to twelve men only that were to be chosen "of the most able and discreet persons."<sup>653</sup> Out of thirty-three contestants for the Fairfax vestry, only four received more votes than Washington. His election was somewhat expected for two

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<sup>647</sup> Bishop Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1861), 2:247, <http://www.archive.org/details/oldchurchesmini02mead>; Thompson, "In the Hands of a Good Providence", 52-56.

<sup>648</sup> Slaughter, *History of Truro Parish*, 33, 35; Notice of Truro Parish Vestry Meeting, 20 March 1764, in *PGW*. GW's appointment as churchwarden occurred two years earlier than Freeman claims in DSF 3:178.

<sup>649</sup> John Kendall Nelson, *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690-1776* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 41, <http://books.google.com/books?id=I2o5W3whNacC>.

<sup>650</sup> Notice of Truro Parish Vestry Meeting, 20 March 1764, in *PGW*.

<sup>651</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 7:612-13; John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1761-1765*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1907), 10:273, 308, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouseo10virg>.

<sup>652</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: J. and G. Cochran, 1821), 8:43, <http://www.archive.org/details/statutesatlargeb08virg>.

<sup>653</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 8:43.

reasons: he was the incumbent and he could boast the military rank of colonel. In both Fairfax and Truro vestry elections, all candidates with a military rank were elected to the vestry.<sup>654</sup>

Due to complaints about the great inequality of tithables within the precincts of the two parishes, a vestry election with newly set boundaries was ordered anew before long.<sup>655</sup> After adjusting the boundaries, Washington's residence was found within the Truro parish and that is where he stood for the same function once again. Like at the previous election, several hundred freeholders from the Fairfax County gathered at the polls and cast their votes in favor of their preferred candidates. Of the nineteen candidates for the Truro vestry, Washington finished third, though his number of votes tied with the fourth candidate. It is worth noting that of the twenty-four newly elected vestrymen of the two parishes, besides two that declined standing as candidates again, only three incumbents were not reelected.<sup>656</sup> Therefore, with regard to these factors, Washington's success at the reelection came as no surprise.

#### *The Burgess Election of 1765*

Washington's influence in the House of Burgesses was not dominating. Although he was a member of three standing committees during the interwar period, he was never appointed a chairman in any of them.<sup>657</sup> On the Committee for Religion, Washington dealt primarily with the organization of the parishes and considering "all Matters and Things relating to Religion and Morality." On the Committee of Privileges and Elections, he was

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<sup>654</sup> Vestry Elections in Truro and Fairfax Parishes, 25 and 28 March 1765, in *PGW*. Captain Darrell was the only exception, perhaps because he did not participate in the election, for he did not receive a single vote.

<sup>655</sup> Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 10:363; Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 8:157.

<sup>656</sup> Vestry Elections in Truro and Fairfax Parishes, 22 and 25 July 1765, in *PGW*.

<sup>657</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 90.

principally responsible for examining “returns of Writs for electing Burgesses” and on the Committee of Propositions and Grievances, complaints of diverse needs were addressed.<sup>658</sup>

Membership in a standing committee ensured one a more conspicuous role in the House of Burgesses, but by no means was it an elite circle. The size of the committees kept changing, but during the November 1769 session, for instance, Washington served with forty other burgesses on the Committee for Religion, comprising almost one third of the total House membership. Twenty-three men sat on the Committee of Privileges and Elections, and fifty-six, almost half of the body, sat on the Committee of Propositions and Grievances. It was not uncommon for gentlemen, like Washington, to serve on multiple committees concurrently. In the November 1769 session, everyone that served on the Committee of Privileges and Elections also sat on the Committee of Proposition and Grievances, and all but five also sat on the Committee for Religion.<sup>659</sup>

During the pre-Revolutionary period, Washington was gaining expertise in handling diverse administrative, legal, religious, and political issues in the province’s governing body that would soon stand in the forefront of American resistance to British imperial policies. In the House of Burgesses, Washington cooperated and learned from many notable figures such as Edmund Pendleton, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and Richard Henry Lee. All four of these men sat on identical burgess committees as Washington and all later served as the colony’s delegates to the first Continental Congress.<sup>660</sup>

For the first seven years of Washington’s political career, he was a burgess for a different county than his own. In 1765, Washington, for the first time, decided to stand as a candidate in his home county of Fairfax. Washington believed his chances at the Fairfax burgess election were increased once he learned that George Johnston, a prominent lawyer

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<sup>658</sup> Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 11:228-29; *DGW* 2:151n.

<sup>659</sup> Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 11:221-22, 228-29.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:221-22, 228-29; *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, DC, 1904-37), 1:23, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html/>.

and the county's burgess for the previous seven years, decided to retire.<sup>661</sup> Washington's expenses for the election canvass were meager in contrast to his earlier elections. His financial accounts record only a little over £7 for refreshments, which were provided, Freeman believes, only after all the votes had been counted.<sup>662</sup> Washington may have reasoned that his propinquity to the electorate of the Fairfax County would garner sufficient support at the polls and that bounteous treating would be supererogatory. Moreover, Washington may have been more cautious about conforming to a recently enacted colonial law (1762) that further proscribed giving "money, drink, meat, entertainment . . . in order to be elected," updating a similar stipulation of an earlier date.<sup>663</sup>

The other candidates, besides Washington, for the county's two burgess seats were Colonel John West and Captain John Posey, the former being the incumbent.<sup>664</sup> On the day of the election, Lord Fairfax, being the most respected gentleman at the polls, was privileged to be the first to state his preferences. He supported Washington and West. At his heels was George William Fairfax, son of Colonel Fairfax who was the peer's cousin. He followed suit. The electoral poll sheet suggests that presumably at Washington's instigation, his friends attempted to take advantage of the initial momentum to secure an early lead, for the first fifteen freeholders, without exception, cast one of their two votes in his favor.<sup>665</sup>

To Washington, the freeholders' political preferences mattered. In order to "be a Competent Judge of [his] Friends," Washington painstakingly copied the complete electoral

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<sup>661</sup> Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:266; McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 9:vii; Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 10:4; Election Polls (Three Lists of Voters), Fairfax County, Virginia, July 16, 1765, Series 4, General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 278-82.

<sup>662</sup> DSF 3:142.

<sup>663</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 7:526.

<sup>664</sup> McIlwaine, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 8:vii; Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 10:3.

<sup>665</sup> Election Polls (Three Lists of Voters), Fairfax County, Virginia, 16 July 1765, Series 4, General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 278-82.

poll sheet into an alphabetically organized list in his own hand.<sup>666</sup> Indeed, Washington may not have been overly conspicuous in the House of Burgesses, but he was highly methodical in whatever endeavor he was engaged in, be it in the military, farming, or politics. As Longmore reminds us, Washington wished to master the Whiggish air of aloofness and a spirit of disinterestedness that prevailed among the eighteenth-century noblemen.<sup>667</sup> Unfortunately, much of Washington's views of the 1765 election have been preserved, but when writing to a family relative the following month, he mentioned his successful candidacy in a somewhat laconic fashion, "I changed the Scene from Frederick to this County, & had an easy and creditable Poll," as befitting a repeatedly reelected gentleman.<sup>668</sup>

### *The Justiceship of the Peace*

In harmony with conventional patterns of the day, Washington was honored with more responsibilities commensurate with his standing in the county. The passing of George Johnston in 1766 created a vacancy among the trustees of Alexandria, a town only several kilometers north of Mount Vernon.<sup>669</sup> Towns that were governed by a set of trustees were fairly customary in the mid-eighteenth century Virginia.<sup>670</sup> Johnston had been serving in this capacity since 1752 in the room of late Lawrence Washington, Washington's eldest half brother. The town of Alexandria record of December 16, 1766, states "'Present Geo. William Fairfax, Esq. The Trustees proceeded to appoint a Trustee . . . and have unanimously chosen

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<sup>666</sup> Charles Smith to GW, 26 July 1758, in *PGW*; Election Polls (Three Lists of Voters), Fairfax County, Virginia, 16 July 1765, Series 4, General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 283-87.

<sup>667</sup> Longmore, *Invention*, 67.

<sup>668</sup> GW to Burwell Bassett, 2 August 1765, in *PGW*; DSF 3:82n84.

<sup>669</sup>"Williamsburg, September 19," *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), September 19, 1766, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:266;

<sup>670</sup> Julian A. C. Chandler, *The History of Suffrage in Virginia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1901), 15, <http://www.archive.org/details/historyofsuffrag00chanrich>.

George Washington, Esq. as Trustee for the Town aforesaid.’ He declined serving.’<sup>671</sup> It is not known why the office of a trustee of Alexandria was not sought by Washington and its acceptance did not seem alluring. Nevertheless, after some persuasion, he changed his mind and accepted the trust “and in that manner strengthened associations” of his youth when he surveyed the town’s lots.<sup>672</sup>

During the 1760s, Washington was appointed into another public office unwittingly and merely on the basis of his respectability (the lower house of the Virginia General Assembly was still the only body to which candidates were elected by the populace; all other political offices were filled by appointment).<sup>673</sup> In 1762, Washington was commissioned by the governor’s council a justice of the peace for King George County by virtue of his ownership of Ferry Farm and other property there. However, he and two other gentlemen declined this appointment, probably from the inconveniency that would have arisen from frequent travel to participate in court meetings.<sup>674</sup> Four years later, he (along with two others) turned down the appointment to the justiceship of that county again.<sup>675</sup>

Finally, in late 1767 as well as mid-1768, Washington was commissioned and accepted the justiceship for his home county of Fairfax. Washington thus began to serve with

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<sup>671</sup> *The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America*, 23 vols. (New York: Charles B. Richardson, 1863), 8:213-14, <http://www.archive.org/details/s1historicalmaga07morruoft>. This was the first of a number of unanimous elections that GW was honored with in his lifetime. More notable unanimous elections, which he always accepted with a degree of reluctance, included the appointment to the chief command of the Continental Army, to the presidential chair of the Constitutional Convention, to the first and second presidential terms, and to the chief command of armies again 1798.

<sup>672</sup> DSF 3:177.

<sup>673</sup> Richard Labunski, *James Madison and the Struggle for the Bill of Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 33, <http://books.google.com/books?id=JvmZbFMxCHsC>.

<sup>674</sup> H. R. McIlwaine, ed., “Justices of the Peace of Colonial Virginia,” *Bulletin of the Virginia State Library* 14, nos. 2, 3 (April, July 1921), 56, <http://www.archive.org/details/justicespeaceco00inglgoog;DGW1:224>. The latter source also states that GW declined justiceship for the King George County issued in “summer” 1759.

<sup>675</sup> McIlwaine, “Justices of the Peace,” 77. The 1770 commission of the peace explicitly omitted the name of GW and two others because of “not resid[ing] in the said County.” Benjamin J. Hillman, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 6 vols., (Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library, 1966), 6:345, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015004161017>.

George William Fairfax, John West, George Mason, Bryan Fairfax, John Carlyle and seventeen other men of influence in his home county court.<sup>676</sup>

It may seem that Washington's obligations arising from being planter, burgess, and a vestryman must have been already extensive, "but it was part of the pattern of life that society had established for him and he had set for himself."<sup>677</sup> In colonial Virginia, "the justiceship of the peace was an honorable and dignified office." An incumbent of this office usually had the honorific of "gentleman" or "Esq." suffixed to his name. "Gentlemen justices," sitting on the governing body of the county, were also men of wealth, and as such, they were often on the list of burgess candidates.<sup>678</sup> In 1765, the law extended the rights of county court justices to include "a general commission of oyer and terminer," which empowered the justices to try all slaves within their county.<sup>679</sup>

Upon their induction, Washington and all other justices were required to publicly "take and subscribe the oath of abjuration, repeat and subscribe the test," pledge to conduct impartial justice to both the poor and rich, and eschew all forms of bribery.<sup>680</sup> The colonial law dictated that there be at least eight justices appointed per county who were obliged to meet every month on a prescribed day.<sup>681</sup> Justices were responsible for settling suits for minor debts, issuing peace bonds, and summoning indicted persons to appear at the county court. The turnover of the Virginia's county court personnel was low and "many a man served for twenty or thirty years."<sup>682</sup> Additionally, when vacancies were to be filled with new members,

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 84-85, 88; *DGW* 2:94. GW renewed his appointment to the justiceship for the Fairfax County when a new commission was issued on June 13, 1770, see McIlwaine, "Justices of the Peace," 102-03.

<sup>677</sup> DSF 3:209.

<sup>678</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 64-66.

<sup>679</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 8:138; John Pendleton to GW, 15 December 1771, in *PGW*.

<sup>680</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 5:489-90.

<sup>681</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619* (Richmond: Franklin Press – W. W. Gray, 1819), 5:489, <http://www.archive.org/details/statutesatlargeb05virg>.

<sup>682</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 76.

it was the justices themselves who presented the list of nominees to the governor's council for consent.<sup>683</sup>

In the colonial Fairfax County, nearly 90 percent of the burgess candidates had served in either a county court or a parish, and 56 percent had already been honored with both offices. Successful burgess candidates were typically those with extensive experience in the local political offices because “the more local offices held, the greater the likelihood of success.”<sup>684</sup>

The pathway to political power was more or less uniform throughout the counties of Virginia “and seldom did anyone with political ambition stray far from it.” The beginnings of political careers of those that became members of the House of Burgesses were often very similar. Most of them were first involved in the public affairs of their home county, typically serving in the combined ecclesiastical and political capacity of a vestryman in the parish. Usually after a few years of service, an admission to the office of justice of the peace at the county court followed.<sup>685</sup>

An examination of most pre-Revolutionary Virginia vestry books with a list of the colony's justices of the peace confirms that many gentlemen occupied both positions either concurrently or at different times, which attests the extant *aristoi* hegemonic influence at the upper levels of colonial politics.<sup>686</sup> Washington's contemporaries such as Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Wythe, and Mason, as well as a large majority of Virginians that signed the Declaration of Independence or attended the Constitutional Convention had sat on the bench

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<sup>683</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 214n3.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 143; Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 84, 100.

<sup>686</sup> My argument is based on research in the following sources: R. A. Brock, ed., *The Vestry Book of Henrico Parish, Virginia, 1730-'73* (Richmond, VA: [s.n.], 1874), 129 (vestrymen as of 1767), <http://www.archive.org/details/vestrybookhenri00brocgoog>; C. G. Chamberlayne, ed., *The Vestry Book of Petsworth Parish, Gloucester County, Virginia, 1677-1793* (Richmond, VA: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1933), 338 (vestrymen as of 1768), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015004875616>; Chamberlayne, *Vestry Book of Blissland (Blissland) Parish*, 176 (vestrymen as of 1768); Mellwaine, “Justices of the Peace,” *passim*. My conclusion, therefore, corroborates Sydnor's and Seiler's findings, see Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 84; Seiler, “Anglican Parish Vestry in Colonial Virginia,” 315n20.

of the county court “near the beginning of their political careers.” Patrick Henry and John Marshall were among the few high-profile Virginians that were never commissioned to this office, but they represented a minority whose families had an extensive influence in local affairs.<sup>687</sup>

In light of this ladder to power, Washington’s climb in the realm of politics was only partially conventional. His first political office was neither vestry nor justiceship, but a membership in the more prestigious House of Burgesses, which governed the whole colony. His successful burgess election in 1758 without first being a justice or a vestry may be attributed to a combination of several factors, including his high military reputation and familiarity with the leading gentry.<sup>688</sup> The patterns of colonial society then enabled Washington an easy, and probably anticipated, entry into other offices of parochial or county jurisdiction. Through his appointment to the parish vestry in 1762 and his admission to the justiceship of the county court in 1768, Washington assumed duties that the contemporary society believed were expected to be reserved to the well-off planters and the gentry.<sup>689</sup>

Washington attended the Fairfax County court on the third Monday of every month, that day being set by law.<sup>690</sup> Washington attended the court regularly, though he often missed part of the proceedings. On occasion, the justices convened for several consecutive days to transact the necessary business that was on the court docket.<sup>691</sup> Washington’s occasional absence or partial attendance on a court day was not uncommon since justices usually attended when their “affairs allowed or when a matter of special concern was to be heard.” The irregularity of attendance apparently caused no hindrance in the proceedings of the

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<sup>687</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 100-01.

<sup>688</sup> Enclosure V: Frederick County Poll Sheet, 1758, 24 July 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>689</sup> Slaughter, *History of Truro Parish*, 34; DSF 3:209.

<sup>690</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 8:47.

<sup>691</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 5:491.

Fairfax County court since only four out of the twenty-three justices were needed to form a quorum.<sup>692</sup>

*The Burgess Elections of 1768, 1769, 1771, and 1774*

Another burgess election in the Fairfax County was held in 1768 when the colony of Virginia received a new governor, Lord Botetourt. There was no particular reason for Washington to resign since “he felt the responsibility and he enjoyed the distinction,” so he decided to stand for reelection.<sup>693</sup>

On the first day of December of that year, scores of freeholders gathered at the Alexandria’s County courthouse to choose their two burgess representatives to the Assembly. The candidacy list was identical to the one three years earlier, for Colonel John West, like Washington, stood for reelection and Captain John Posey was the third candidate, in all probability considering his chances of unseating West were not unrealistic.<sup>694</sup>

The tested recipe for Washington’s earlier successful elections was followed once again. By reasonable assumption, it may be argued that at his instigation, Washington rallied his friends to the front of the crowd so that they could be among the first ones at the polls and thus gain a crucial early lead, a tactical maneuver that often facilitated one’s success at an election. Once the sheriff determined that the election might begin, no one questioned that the first voter should be Lord Fairfax, the only English peer present. Fairfax, whose preeminence among the freeholders warranted him such a privilege, proceeded to the sheriff and openly voiced his preferences in favor of Washington and West. The peer was followed by George William Fairfax, his first cousin once removed, who could hardly be expected to vote

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<sup>692</sup> *DGW* 2:109n, 141, 151-60.

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:113n; *DSF* 3:209.

<sup>694</sup> *DGW* 2:113n.

otherwise. The Fairfaxes were then followed by freeholders of no particular political or military distinction. Remarkably though, fifteen voters passed through the polls before anyone withheld a vote from Washington.<sup>695</sup>

The early lead gave Washington an important momentum that contributed to his reelection with 185 votes, the most of all candidates. West was equally reelected but with slightly a smaller number of votes (142), but Posey lost with only 87 freeholders favoring him with a vote.<sup>696</sup> Compared with his first successful election ten years earlier, Washington kept a rein on his expenses, though after the election, Washington provided cakes and other some other refreshments and in the evening hosted a ball.<sup>697</sup>

Governor Botetourt adjourned the first session of the House of Burgesses until May 8, 1769. The session itself, however, lasted only nine days before it was dissolved shortly after the House passed several resolutions calling for a redress of grievances related to increasingly oppressive British legislation against her American colonies. “I have heard of your Resolves, and augur ill of their Effect,” retorted Lord Botetourt, “You have made it my Duty to dissolve you; and you are dissolved accordingly.”<sup>698</sup>

Neither Washington nor West decided to retire from service in the House of Burgesses and intended to stand for reelection scheduled for a few months later. That Washington’s career path was certainly not unique is evidenced by his burgess colleague. In fact, Washington and West had pursued almost identical professions, though with varying distinction. Both Washington and West had been active in the military, engaged in trade and

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<sup>695</sup> Fairfax County Poll Sheet, [1 December 1768], in *PGW*. Excepting the Fairfaxes, none of the first fifteen freeholders voting for GW appears in Tyler’s biographies of prominent Virginians, see Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, vol. 1.

<sup>696</sup> Fairfax County Poll Sheet, [1 December 1768], in *PGW*. Due to different sources, there is a discrepancy of the number of votes in *DGW* 2:113n and *DSF* 3:141.

<sup>697</sup> Cash Accounts, [December 1768], in *PGW*; Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 70; *DGW* 2:113.

<sup>698</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1766-1769*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1906), 11:187, 215-18, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouse11virg>.

business, served as justices of the peace and as vestrymen, and were the current burgesses from their home county.<sup>699</sup>

To what extent West actively campaigned during the summer of 1769, we cannot determine due to scarcity of historical records.<sup>700</sup> Washington's activities, on the other hand, were fastidiously recorded in his diaries on a daily basis. In the afternoon of the dissolution of the Assembly (May 17, 1769), Washington and other burgesses quickly gathered for an unofficial meeting in the Apollo Room of the Hay's Raleigh Tavern a few doors down the street to discuss "their distressed Situation." Being one of the committee members, Washington took the lead in resolving on non-importation measures to remonstrate against recent parliamentary actions against the American colonies.<sup>701</sup> On May 26, Washington attended a horse race at Cameron. The following day, he rode to Alexandria to enjoy the company at a barbecue party. On May 31, Washington took his family to a baptismal ceremony of Bryan Fairfax's son for whom he stood as godfather. On June 2, he went up to Alexandria again to attend a funeral sermon in memory of one of his tenants. Later that month, Washington returned to the city five more times; once to stand as a godfather at another christening, and four times to sit as justice at the county court there.<sup>702</sup>

The election writs were not issued by the governor yet and judging from the nature of Washington's activities the first month after the dissolution of the Assembly, he made his public appearances mostly out of other obligations rather than for the prospect of campaigning. During the following two-month period prior to the election, Washington had minimal contact with the voters of the Fairfax County. Besides attending to his duties at the

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<sup>699</sup> Robert A. Rutland, ed., *The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 1:civii, quoted in Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 19.

<sup>700</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 20.

<sup>701</sup> *DGW* 2:152n; Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 11:xxxix-xl.

<sup>702</sup> *DGW* 2:154, 158-60.

county court and parish, Washington spent the rest of his time with his family or on his farms.<sup>703</sup>

Washington's abstaining from electioneering was probably occasioned by his awareness that no third burgess candidate from the Fairfax County registered for the upcoming election. Furthermore, it was unlikely that any surprise last-minute would-be burgess could pose a significant enough threat to Washington's or West's candidacy. Accordingly, since no one else ran for the office, the sheriff simply took the vote "by view" (which occurred only rarely), "their being no opposition."<sup>704</sup>

Washington was afforded another opportunity of gaining further experiences attending preparation of general burgess election at the close of 1771. The dissolution of the Assembly was necessitated by the arrival of a new (and last) colonial Governor John Murray, earl of Dunmore.<sup>705</sup> Washington's and West's candidacy at the burgess election was literally unbeatable for any would-be opponent and it was not for any kind of admirable political skill they may have been endowed with, but rather for their long-term tenure and status associated with their membership in the Assembly. In fact, "only one incumbent suffered defeat during the colonial period" of the Fairfax County. Therefore, once one obtained a burgess seat, his tenure then lasted until retirement, and Washington was heading the same direction.<sup>706</sup>

Presumably, since it was known that Washington and West would not retire yet, no other man in the Fairfax County volunteered to suffer an almost sure defeat at the polls in 1771. On the day of the election when the sheriff ascertained that there was no third candidate forthcoming, "no Pole was taken" and Washington and West could congratulate each other again and proceed to provide some entertainment and refreshment as the principles of

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 2:167-80; Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 20-21.

<sup>704</sup> *DGW* 2:180n.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid., 3:65n; John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1770-1772*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1906), 12:145, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouseo12virg>.

<sup>706</sup> Kolp, *Gentlemen and Freeholders*, 137-39. Incumbent John Colville finished third in 1748 burgess election, behind by Lawrence Washington, the other incumbent, and Richard Osborne, a new candidate.

generosity and public mindedness advised. Washington hosted a ball that night in Alexandria and served a supper, cakes, and “sundries,” and paid for a servant playing a fiddle there.<sup>707</sup>

The last general burgess elections of the colonial Virginia were held in 1774 amid widespread frustration with the forcible closure of the Boston harbor in consequence of American resistance to additional tax levies. Washington was present when the House passed a resolution in late May to set aside June 1 “as a day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer.”<sup>708</sup> Learning of this resolution from a broadside, Dunmore’s reaction was abrupt. Judging that it was “conceived in such Terms as reflect highly upon His Majesty and the Parliament of Great Britain; which makes it necessary for me to dissolve you; and you are dissolved accordingly,” echoing the agitation of Lord Botetourt, his predecessor, five years earlier.<sup>709</sup>

When Washington was first elected a burgess for the Fairfax County in 1765, John West had already served in that capacity for more than a decade. As incumbents, they were likely to keep being reelected until retirement. In 1774, when West, at a local church, announced his resignation, the field became open for his replacement to serve along with Washington. Charles Broadwater, member of the Fairfax parish, declared his candidacy soon afterward, but Washington, though he considered Broadwater “a good man,” hoped that someone else with a great political acumen would run for the “the country never stood more in need of men of abilities and liberal sentiments than now.”<sup>710</sup>

Washington’s seat in the Assembly was practically secure no matter what new candidates would appear on the scene so he voiced his suggestions (for the first and last time) on whom he would be pleased to have as a running mate at the upcoming election.

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<sup>707</sup> *DGW* 3:92; GW to Samuel Washington, 6 December 1771, Cash Accounts, [December 1771], Cash Accounts, [May 1772], in *PGW*.

<sup>708</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses, 1773-1776, Including the Records of the Committee of Correspondence*, 13 vols. (Richmond, VA: [Colonial Press, E. Waddey], 1905), 13:124, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofhouseo13virg>. On June 1, 1774, GW recorded in his diary: “Went to Church & fasted all day.” *DGW* 3:254.

<sup>709</sup> Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 13:132.

<sup>710</sup> GW to Bryan Fairfax, 4 July 1774, in *PGW*; *DGW* 3:260-61n.

Washington considered Bryan Fairfax a viable candidate and expected him to declare his candidacy. Washington also entreated several gentlemen “to press Colonel Mason” to offer his candidacy, considering him a man of talent.<sup>711</sup>

However, to neither did Washington pledge support, “because I early laid it down as a maxim not to propose myself, and solicit for a second.” Being called to a position by others rather than seeking an office himself was one of Washington’s maxims he wished to follow since his appointment to the chief command of Virginia forces was becoming imminent in 1755. Back then, he feared others would despise him for carrying “a face of too much self sufficiency” if he actively sought the chief command. Therefore, he preferred to have the office “press’d upon me by the genl voice of the Country.”<sup>712</sup>

In the 1774 burgess election in Washington’s home county, George Mason was not persuaded to run and Fairfax changed his mind and declined running on the grounds of his opposition to stern resistance to British taxation, which he knew did not represent the sentiments of the majority of freeholders in the county.<sup>713</sup> According to an English visitor to Alexandria, there was a third candidate on the day of the election, but his identity is unknown. Whoever that was, he could have hoped of challenging Broadwater only since Washington’s incumbency almost guaranteed a smooth reelection. Therefore, it was not surprising that “the Poll was over in about two hours and conducted with great order and regularity.” The elected burgesses then provided refreshments and a ball in the evening “to the Freeholders and Gentlemen of the town. This was conducted with great harmony.”<sup>714</sup> Thus, Washington successfully retained the honor of the prestigious political recognition of a burgess (finishing

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<sup>711</sup> GW to Bryan Fairfax, 4 July 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, GW to Warner Lewis, 14 August 1755, GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>713</sup> Bryan Fairfax to GW, 3 July 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>714</sup> Lincoln MacVeagh, ed. *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774--1777* (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 2007), 27-28, <http://books.google.com/books?id=vePGIIXnflYC>; *DGW* 3:260.

first in all seven distinct burgess elections) since 1758 until the momentous year of 1775 when the Revolutionary crisis necessitated his return to the field.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## “MY PLAN IS TO SECURE A GOOD DEAL OF LAND”

After his resignation from the chief command of the Virginia forces and marriage with Miss Custis in the winter of 1758/59, Washington’s responsibilities turned primarily to domestic life, agriculture, farming, trade, and acquisition of lands. As explained in chapter one, Washington’s access to land was expedited by his early surveying practice and his close friendship with the Fairfaxes, his neighbors and one of the wealthiest landed gentry families in the province.

When writing to John Robinson during the French and Indian War, Washington expressed his fears of the encroaching enemy “not only as an officer, but as a friend, who has property in the Country, and is unwilling to loose it.”<sup>715</sup> Washington grew up in “an ambitious landed society” where a man’s wealth and social status was largely determined by his acreage rather than by ready money.<sup>716</sup> Moreover, the Virginian culture was then dominated by “landed ethos,” which considered wealth accumulated by cultivating one’s land more “genteel” than prosperous commercial pursuits.<sup>717</sup>

It is apparent that Washington was keenly aware of the value of land and its association with one’s status. Early on, he had envisioned the great potential benefits arising from leasing or selling the land to small farmers and tenants. Accordingly, Washington’s interests in further acquisition of land continued to grow.

In addition to the lands he inherited and acquired during his early surveying practice before the French and Indian War, Washington purchased 200 hectares in the Fairfax County

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<sup>715</sup> GW to John Robinson, 25 October 1757, in *PGW*.

<sup>716</sup> DSF 1:1.

<sup>717</sup> Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 65, 61.

from one Mr. Darrell in late 1757.<sup>718</sup> In 1758, the clerk of the Fairfax County received from Washington a list of lands subject to taxation. The list contained four tracts in Frederick County, totaling 926 hectares, and Mount Vernon tract and one tract from Mr. Darrell in the Fairfax County, totaling 960 hectares.<sup>719</sup>

Washington's interest in the acquisition of lands was so keen that he even recorded in his diary that Captain Posey, one of his neighbors, "obliquely hinted" an intention of selling a parcel of his land.<sup>720</sup> Later, Posey helped Washington buy a piece of ground adjoining Mount Vernon farms from "Orphan Diana."<sup>721</sup> John Frogg, colonel of the militia, called on Washington and offered to sell 960 hectares "well Water'd Timberd & of a Fertile Soil—no Impr[ove]ments on it" in Culpeper County for £400.<sup>722</sup> "Being informd" that two men were seeking to purchase a tract "not far from" Mount Vernon, Washington became interested in it as well, inquiring after the price "so soon as" the tract was offered for sale.<sup>723</sup> Washington even proposed to buy a parcel of land from Colonel Fairfax despite the fact that it was not for sale at that time. Fairfax, if nothing else, promised Washington "the preference if he shd. sell" it.<sup>724</sup> By the summer of 1760, Washington's possession of lands grew to 1,773 hectares in Fairfax County, 926 hectares in Frederick County, 500 hectares in King George County, and 96 hectares in Hampshire County.<sup>725</sup>

William Clifton, another neighbor of Washington, offered him to sell "all his Land" in the Northern Neck of Virginia and another piece of ground nearby known as Brents. One week later, he inspected the lands at sale and the price for which Clifton offered it, which

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<sup>718</sup> Sampson Darrell to GW, 28 December 1757, GW to George Johnston, 5 January 1758, Memorandum, [1758-59], in *PGW*.

<sup>719</sup> Memorandum, [1758-59], in *PGW*.

<sup>720</sup> *DGW* 1:235.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:254, 254n.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:263-64, 264n.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:268.

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:279.

<sup>725</sup> Memorandum List of Quitrents, [ca. May 1760], Memorandum List of Taxable Land and Property, [ca. May 1760], in *PGW*.

“pleas’d me exceedingly,” Washington buoyed up, especially since it seemed feasible that the adjoining 120 hectares, belonging to Colonel Carlyle, could be purchased for about the same rate as well. Accordingly, Washington agreed to purchase Clifton’s 722 hectares for £1,150 sterling.<sup>726</sup> But the agreement was not left undisputed for long, because Clifton soon decided to annul the bargain he had just made and sell the land to Thomson Mason for a slightly higher price.<sup>727</sup>

The negotiations accompanying Clifton’s sale of land turned into an awkward and “tedious Affair,” because as a commissioner, Washington was expected to submit an objective and “disinterested report” to the General Court in chancery on the way the case ought to be correctly settled.<sup>728</sup> Although the wrangle over various legal issues was taking several months Washington did not give in and continued to seek advice from competent lawyers on how to proceed.<sup>729</sup> The prospects of retaining the land were bleak for Washington, but the chancery court ruled that Clifton’s land in the Northern Neck be sold at auction to the highest bidder, thus giving Washington another chance, though for an unpredictable price. At the auction, Washington finally bought the land for £1,250 sterling. Remarkably, this affair demonstrates how Washington persevered until he obtained a full legal title to the piece of ground close to his Mount Vernon estate despite being “under many threats and disadvantages,” which consisted of lodging an appeal and the loss of mortgages and rents.<sup>730</sup>

To encourage enlistment of volunteers for the defense of the Virginia frontier, Governor Dinwiddie issued a proclamation in 1754 promising that 80,000 hectares on the Ohio River shall be divided among volunteer soldiers, “immediately after” their service, in

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<sup>726</sup> *DGW* 1:237, 243, 246.

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:250, 252, 260n; GW to Benjamin Waller, 2 April 1760, in *PGW*.

<sup>728</sup> *DGW* 1:255n; GW to Benjamin Waller, 2 April 1760, in *PGW*.

<sup>729</sup> GW to Benjamin Waller, 2 April 1760, Robert Carter Nicholas and George Wythe to GW, 27 May 1760, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:351.

<sup>730</sup> Augustine Washington to GW, [ca. April 1760], Robert Carter Nicholas and George Wythe to GW, 27 May 1760, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:281, 281n.

proportion “to their respective Merit” without the obligation of paying any rights and quitrents for fifteen years.<sup>731</sup> This sounded like a substantial bounty, indeed.

With a view obtaining his due share, Washington, even before his retirement from his military service, proposed to his friend and his former aide-de-camp George Mercer “an Entry on the Ohio.” Mercer, who had already considered some plans in this regard, was pleased by Washington’s proposal “to be a Partner in the Scheme.” Mercer, too, foresaw great benefits arising from extensive land ownership, for he wished to secure “to myself so much Land, as I was entitled to by the governor’s Proclamation.” “Lands on the Ohio will be valuable,” Mercer further asserted Washington, and “we will leave no Stone unturned to secure to ourselves this Land.”<sup>732</sup> Likewise, Robert Stewart was inquisitive about “what Steps have been taken, in securing to us, those Lands,” for he, too, was aware that they would “soon be very valueable.”<sup>733</sup>

Evidently, Washington was not the only soldier who was entitled to Governor Dinwiddie’s land grant on the Ohio and who pushed forward to procure his share. In this respect, both George Mercer and Captain Thomas Bullitt of the Virginia Regiment, applied for the office of a surveyor of the upper Ohio Valley, which they learned was planned to be split up into two districts and they hoped to be assigned one district each. But Adam Stephen was backing Bullitt insomuch that Mercer called both “mighty Schemers” to snatch those lands that would earn them the most profits as future proprietors to the disadvantage of others.<sup>734</sup>

Meanwhile, Washington lost no time in contacting proprietors of lands that neighbored his own possessions in Virginia, querying them about their willingness to sell.<sup>735</sup> On occasion,

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<sup>731</sup> Hall, *Executive Journals of the Council*, 5:462, 499-500.

<sup>732</sup> George Mercer to GW, 16 September 1759, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:193n57.

<sup>733</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 28 September 1759, in *PGW*.

<sup>734</sup> George Mercer to GW, 17 February 1760, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:245.

<sup>735</sup> Thomas Hanson Marshall to GW, 21 June 1760, in *PGW*.

Washington succeeded in making “a valuable purchase,” be it afar or adjoining his estate.<sup>736</sup>

At other times, he asked his friends for plats of tracts he was interested in.<sup>737</sup>

Learning that the General Assembly was restrained from making grants for lands in the upper Ohio Valley without the authority of the monarch, Washington partnered with Adam Stephen and Andrew Lewis, on behalf of the Virginia Regiment, in drawing up a petition addressed to no other than George III.<sup>738</sup>

All three had served since the initial stages of the Franco-British conflict and shared an appetite for a landed bounty as promised by Governor Dinwiddie’s Proclamation of 1754. Attesting to their soldierly deportment during the service, the three memorialists “were in hopes that as soon as” the intruded territory had been regained, “they should have reaped and enjoyed the benefit promised Them by the said Proclamation.”<sup>739</sup>

Washington kept dreaming big. He became interested in draining the Great Dismal Swamp spreading over the Virginia and North Carolina border. Washington, Fielding Lewis (his brother-in-law), Burwell Bassett (husband of Mrs. Washington’s sister), and a few others formed a company named “Adventurers for Draining the Dismal Swamp.”<sup>740</sup> Evidently, Washington wanted to be at the center of things, for he was one of the three volunteers that “offer’d their Service” to act as managers of the company, a responsibility that enabled them to inspect the surveyors’ records and accompany them during their measurements.<sup>741</sup> To

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<sup>736</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 10 August 1760, in *PGW*.

<sup>737</sup> George Mason to GW, 27 August 1760, in *PGW*; IV-D, Custis Estate Account in Ledger A, 1759–60, August 1759—October 1760, Memorandum List of Quitrents, 1763, George William Fairfax, to GW, 16 November 1765, in *PGW*.

<sup>738</sup> Petition to the King for the Virginia Regiment, [ca. 11 March—10 July 1762], in *PGW*.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, GW to Adam Stephen, 22 March 1754, GW to Andrew Lewis, 6 September 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>740</sup> *DGW* 1:319; Mellow Egerton Sorley, *Lewis of Warner Hall: The History of a Family, Including the Genealogy of Descendants* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2000), 136, <http://books.google.com/books?id=yeWgvfDpwbwC>; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:181, 220-21, 277.

<sup>741</sup> Dismal Swamp Land Company Minutes of Meeting, 3 November 1763, in *PGW*.

protect them from being liable to suits for damages in constructing canals and causeways, the Virginia Assembly passed an act enabling them to legally undertake such a large project.<sup>742</sup>

In 1763, Washington joined eighteen other ambitious “Adventurers” from Virginia and Maryland in establishing the Mississippi Land Company “with a view to explore and settle” selected tracts of land adjoining the chief river. Some of them, including George Washington, Presley Thornton, and four members of the prominent Lee family, also participated with the Ohio Company.<sup>743</sup> In fact, there were two more Washingtons that joined the team of the Mississippi Land Company. Washington’s younger brothers John Augustine was also among the founding members and Samuel joined the company four years later. It was intended that an agent would be sent to England to obtain a grant of lands from the Crown. Each member was to own 20,000 hectares. The obtained lands were to be free of quitrents and other financial obligations and were not planned to be “held in Jointenancy but that every adventurer hold his respective share to himself and his Heirs in Fee simple.”<sup>744</sup>

In September 1763, the members of the land company composed a memorial to the British King petitioning him for a land grant. Thus, the British monarch again heard of Washington’s name, this time in connection with his land interests in the upper Ohio on behalf of the Virginia Regiment and in the the Mississippi Valley on behalf of the newly established land company.<sup>745</sup> Whatever plans for the acquisition of lands seemed to be under consideration at this time, Washington was one of the first ones to become involved.

The memorialists’ main arguments for the vast land grants rested on the profitability of settling the region “as speedily & effectually as possible,” enabling “the extension of Trade and the enlargement of the revenue” in the distant part of the country. The memorialists asked

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<sup>742</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 8:18-19.

<sup>743</sup> Mississippi Land Company Articles of Agreement, 3 June 1763, in *PGW*; Eugene M. Del Papa, “The Royal Proclamation of 1763: Its Effect upon Virginia Land Companies,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (October 1975): 410.

<sup>744</sup> Mississippi Land Company Articles of Agreement, 3 June 1763, Mississippi Land Company Minutes of Meeting, 16 December 1767, in *PGW*.

<sup>745</sup> Mississippi Land Company’s Memorial to the King, 9 September 1763, in *PGW*.

the king for no less than an impressive one million hectares “to be laid off” with the intention of settling the area with at least two hundred families within the following twelve years. However, surveying and settling frontier regions was often associated with the threat of possible harassments by “savages” or French settlers that claimed an equal title to the lands. Washington, who was familiar with the frontier, may have been the memorialist that suggested that a “Garrison [be] placed at the junction of Ohio with Mississippi.”<sup>746</sup>

Two and a half months later, apprehensive of minimal progress in these matters, the members of the Mississippi Land Company were of the opinion that a “solicitation of their Grant shall be pushed with all prudent vigour.” They stressed the importance of their agent’s “acquaintance, and Influence with those now in power” and at times probed into the probability of their success in applying to the members of the British Ministry.<sup>747</sup>

The memorialists’ prospects of leasing western lands were dimmed that fall by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (issued on October 7), which “strictly forbid” purchases or settlement of lands beyond the set limits along the Appalachian Mountains. Moreover, those that had already lived beyond the bounds, were required “to remove themselves from such Settlements.” The Proclamation aimed at preserving the frontier regions beyond the newly set boundaries as the Indians’ “Hunting Grounds,” a measure that primarily served to satisfy the tribal chiefs in order to sustain a mutually prosperous trade.<sup>748</sup> Although this policy was in force and not limited in time, Washington could not help but interpret it as only a “temporary expedien<t> to quiet the Minds of the Indians & must fall of course in a few years

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<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

<sup>747</sup> Mississippi Land Company Memorandum, 22 November 1765, in *PGW*.

<sup>748</sup> Clarence S. Brigham, ed., *British Royal Proclamations Relating to America, 1603-1783* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1911), 215-16, <http://archive.org/details/britishroyalproc00gearich>.

especially when those Indians are consenting to our Occupying the Lands.”<sup>749</sup> In this respect, Washington’s prevision soon proved correct.<sup>750</sup>

Washington employed William Crawford, a surveying agent, to keep an eye on and make purchases of good land when such a bargain seemed feasible. Washington believed that if he missed the actual opportunity of identifying and marking some alluring tracts as his own, though beyond the boundaries as set by the Proclamation, he would not be afforded another equal chance. With this mindset, Washington directed Crawford to examine the conditions of lands there so that he could secure them “so soon as there is a possibility.”<sup>751</sup>

Washington’s interpretation of the Proclamation’s restrictions may seem quite daring to the modern reader, but he was not the only one holding such a position on untenanted tramontane lands, for other “Virginians and Pennsylvanians were rapidly pushing their settlements on the Indian territory west of the Alleghany mountains.”<sup>752</sup> Likewise, the commissioners for trade with the Indians observed that the Royal Proclamation of 1763 consisted of “mere provisional Arrangements adapted to the Exigence of the Time.”<sup>753</sup>

“My Plan is to secure a good deal of Land,” Washington admitted to his land agent. Washington’s preferences were that newly acquired tracts of land be flat and rich and be contiguous to each other. His steps toward acquiring vast tracts of land beyond the boundaries set by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, however, had to be taken in a cautious manner. “Keep this whole matter a profound Secret, or Trust it only with those in whom you can confide,” Washington wrote in 1767. There were two main reasons for such discretion in the scheme. First, Washington knew that he “might be censured for the opinion” he held with regard to the settlement of lands beyond the Alleghany Mountains. Second, an indiscreet management

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<sup>749</sup> GW to William Crawford, [17] September 1767, in *PGW*.

<sup>750</sup> Papa, “The Royal Proclamation of 1763,” 406.

<sup>751</sup> GW to William Crawford, [17] September 1767, in *PGW*.

<sup>752</sup> Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 14 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1889), 2:221n1, <http://www.archive.org/details/georgefordworth02washrich>.

<sup>753</sup> Samuel Hazard, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives* (Philadelphia: Joseph Severns, 1853), 4:315, <http://books.google.com/books?id=rM4LAAAAYAAJ>.

could disclose the aims of the undertaking and entice new land speculators “before we could lay a proper foundation for success ourselves.”<sup>754</sup>

Although “the Proclamation of 1763 was markedly successful in preventing the . . . land companies from undertaking collective, organized settlement in the trans-Appalachian region from 1763 to 1768,” there were some land speculators, like Washington, that were not deterred by the obviously only temporary measure and literally kept looking over the horizon.<sup>755</sup> Furthermore, to Washington and other officers of the Virginia Regiment, the Proclamation of 1763 may have appeared all the more bewildering, as it did not correspond with the purport of Governor Dinwiddie’s promises in his proclamation issued almost a decade earlier.

Washington’s abilities in land speculation lay not only in his surveying expertise and acquaintance with the situation on the frontier, but also in how he was able to present rational arguments to particular men of influence. One such evidence can be found in his letter to Pennsylvania’s land office secretary, in which Washington explained, “I was anxious of obtaining some *little* possession in a Country that I have experienced *many* toils and hardships in.”<sup>756</sup>

Not withholding his voice even from the governor’s ears, Washington reminded Lord Botetourt of Dinwiddie’s Proclamation granting the three hundred soldiers of the first Virginia Regiment untenanted lands on the Ohio. In the pre-Revolutionary years, when sensible Americans began to notice increasing partiality of the British government, Washington probably sensed that further delay would only decrease the probability of success in these matters. Thus, in order to provide “more full and perfect State of the nature of our claim,” Washington began to urge his Lordship to lift the restrictions of their surveying it on

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<sup>754</sup> GW to William Crawford, [17] September 1767, in *PGW*.

<sup>755</sup> Papa, “The Royal Proclamation of 1763,” 411.

<sup>756</sup> GW to James Tilghman, 25 May 1769, in *PGW* (my italics).

account of their right and merit to such lands and ongoing illegal settlement by mostly poor immigrants that would be almost impossible to expel once established.<sup>757</sup>

Washington also put together an official petition to the governor “in behalf of himself and the Officers and Soldiers who first Imbarkd in the Service of this Colony,” beseeching him to take the necessary steps for the allotment of lands, including an appointment of a surveyor and giving them a “prefixd time” when their claims would be ascertained.<sup>758</sup>

Washington’s assiduity and persistency in these matters yielded the first fruits in the last month of 1769 when Botetourt authorized Washington to collect the respective claims of the soldiers “in order that the whole may be laid before” the governor’s council by fall of the following year.<sup>759</sup> In collecting the respective claims, Washington sensed that he could take further advantage of this assignment. He wondered whether any of the soldiers or officers would waive their right to their acreage and offer it for sale. He advised his younger brother Charles to discreetly find out such a possibility among any soldiers he might encounter “in a joking way, rather than in earnest at first,” and in case of an opportunity of a purchase, “let it be done in your own name” so that it would not be detectable that Washington had “any concern therein.”<sup>760</sup>

By all accounts, there were some soldiers for whom the distant lands in the Ohio Valley were “inconvenient” and preferred ready money instead. Among them were, for instance, George Muse and John Posey. Once Washington learned of their willingness to sell their rights for an agreed amount, he proceeded to form legal bonds or agreements with them.<sup>761</sup>

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<sup>757</sup> GW to Botetourt, 8 December 1769, in *PGW*.

<sup>758</sup> Petition to Botetourt, [ca. 15 December 1769], in *PGW*.

<sup>759</sup> Advertisement, 16 December [1769], in *PGW*.

<sup>760</sup> GW to Charles Washington, 31 January 1770, in *PGW*.

<sup>761</sup> Agreement with George Muse, 3 August 1770, Bond of John Posey, 14 October 1770, in *PGW*.

While the respective claims of the soldiers were being collected, Lord Botetourt permitted Washington and others “to take such steps at their own expence and rick” to secure their lands, but still could not guarantee them an absolute grant. Washington feared that an unverified report he had recently come across that the lands on the upper Ohio were granted to some English land company was not altogether a sham. Once the report was confirmed, Washington realized that the ruthless scramble for the alluring tracts of the Ohio Country had commenced.<sup>762</sup>

Washington could not wait any longer. In October 1770, he set out on an almost two-month long journey to western Pennsylvania and the upper Ohio Valley to locate the bounty lands himself.<sup>763</sup> Some of the tracts Washington spotted were “as fine Land as ever I saw” which only increased his appetite for land and to seek a purchase of no less than an impressive tract of six thousand hectares.<sup>764</sup>

Upon his return, Washington called for a special meeting with the officers of the Virginia Regiment to discuss *modus vivendi* “under our present discouragements.”<sup>765</sup> There, they could not resolve otherwise than to have each make a contribution to defray the surveyor’s expenses and to “proceed as fast as possible” to secure their lands in the upper Ohio.<sup>766</sup>

After the royal legal restrictions to survey the western territories were dropped, Washington “was one of the men who claimed huge tracts of the best land and had them

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<sup>762</sup> GW to Botetourt, 9 September 1770, 5 October 1770, GW to Burwell Bassett, 9 September 1770, in *PGW*.

<sup>763</sup> *DGW* 2:277-328.

<sup>764</sup> GW to George Croghan, 24 November 1770, in *PGW*.

<sup>765</sup> To the Officers of the Virginia Regiment of 1754, 20 January 1771, in *PGW*.

<sup>766</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Officers of the Virginia Regiment of 1754, 5 March 1771, in *PGW*. For a roll of the officers of the first Virginia Regiment, see A Roll of the Officers and Soldiers in the Virginia Regiment of 1754, 30 April 1771, in *PGW*.

surveyed in order to make his claim legal and obvious on the landscape.”<sup>767</sup> He observed and understood that the rapid population growth in the colonies would inevitably lead to further westward expansion and demand for land. “Look to Frederick [County],” wrote Washington to one of his debtors, “see what Fortunes were made by the Hite’s & first takers up of those Lands: Nay how the greatest Estates we have in this Colony were made; Was it not by taking up & purchasing at very low rates the rich back Lands which were thought nothing of in those days, but are now the most valuable Lands we possess?”<sup>768</sup> These words reverberate with more than a subtle hint that the author considered it a blueprint of his own.

But there were others that possessed a similar foresight of the potential value of lands, wherever the virgin tracts could be surveyed and patented. The awareness of their profitability led Robert Stewart, an ever aspiring military officer and Washington’s long-time friend, to admit that he was so obsessed with the subject that he admitted, “I am become Land mad.”<sup>769</sup> Washington and Stewart were among the many others that were affected by the eighteenth-century “landed model” of a colonial gentleman. As Michal J. Rozbicki explains, acquisition of a landed wealth, more so than commercial pursuits, served as the steps toward a genteel legitimacy and an ultimate membership among the “well-established and hermetic British elite” in the American colonies.<sup>770</sup> But only the most ambitious of land speculators (Washington was one of them) “could operate on a scale large enough to affect the overall geopolitical situation of the North American backcountry.”<sup>771</sup>

Washington knew he was running out of time. New immigrants began to move further inland while establishing illegal settlements and even some of Washington’s charter lands

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<sup>767</sup> Cameron B. Strang, “Michael Cresap and the Promulgation of Settler Land-Claiming Methods in the Backcountry, 1765-1774,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 118, no. 2 (March 2010): par. 29, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=51362326&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>768</sup> GW to John Posey, 24 June 1767, in *PGW*.

<sup>769</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 25 January 1769, in *PGW*.

<sup>770</sup> Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 64, 69.

<sup>771</sup> Strang, “Michael Cresap,” par. 35.

began to be occupied by these encroaching incomers.<sup>772</sup> Part of the Ohio land grant was feared to be solicited for by “People of Power in Great Britain.”<sup>773</sup> Moreover, other landjobbers attempted to lay claim on the very same lands Washington had already surveyed.<sup>774</sup> That constituted, I believe, another reason that compelled Washington to keep penning one letter or memorial after another to the governor of Virginia to obtain royal grants for these lands.<sup>775</sup>

Another reason of his persistence was the uncomfortable uncertainty of the result of their locating and surveying these lands. Washington’s expenses for the cause were not trifling, yet no real progress, besides hearing pleasing words of promise from the governor, had been made.<sup>776</sup> In the few years before the Revolution, Washington warned Lord Dunmore that further delay in the cause would almost “equal to a refusal” and subsequently result in “the loss of the Land.”<sup>777</sup>

The difficulties and delay attending the obtaining of patents rendered the whole cause an “incumbrance instead of a bounty” for Washington and the rest of the soldiery.<sup>778</sup> But Washington’s personal exploration of those alluring backcountry tracts—that “cream of the Land”—contributed to his perseverance in becoming their owner at almost any cost. Lest he be charged with avarice and disregard for the remaining officers, it is worth noting that when almost two thirds of the Ohio grant had been surveyed, Washington offered to “give up all *his* Interest under *his* Patents & submit to such Regulations as the [Council] Board may think fit

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<sup>772</sup> William Crawford, 29 December 1773, in *PGW*.

<sup>773</sup> GW to John Polson, 24 June 1771, GW to William Crawford, 6 December 1771, in *PGW*.

<sup>774</sup> GW to John Briscoe, 3 December 1772, GW to Michael Cresap, 26 September 1773, in *PGW*.

<sup>775</sup> Document I: Memorial to Governor and Council, [ca. 1-4 November 1771], Document II: Minutes of the Council, 4 and 6 November 1771, in *PGW*.

<sup>776</sup> GW to George Mercer, 22 November 1771, in *PGW*.

<sup>777</sup> GW to Lord Dunmore, 15 June [1772], 2 November 1773, in *PGW*.

<sup>778</sup> Petition to Lord Dunmore and the Virginia Council, [ca. 4 November 1772], in *PGW*.

to prescribe” in case his suggested distribution of surveyed lands among the officers be deemed in any degree unequal.<sup>779</sup>

But this magnanimous gesture bears a tinge of vexation—in this case apparently over biased land allocation. But Washington had his own way of proving his impartiality. With respect to the preservation of his reputation, it mattered only a little that the officers were more concerned with complying with the demanding royal regulations of settling the granted lands than their exact partition. The gesture effected a desired response, making the officers appreciate it as a “proof of his *disinterested* conduct, and the order expressive of an Intention to administer Impartial Justice.”<sup>780</sup> Pursuant to the wishes of members of the Council, the following month Washington submitted the allotment of the Ohio grant lands to the editor of the weekly Virginia Gazette so that the exact figures be made public. The document submitted by Washington did not fail to cite his willingness to surrender “all his interest under his patents” but omitted the officers’ evaluation of such an offer.<sup>781</sup> Washington’s conscious efforts to be perceived as disinterested in his pursuit of land acquisition represent another piece of the mosaic that aids us in comprehending Washington’s moral qualities that served as the basis of his actions.

The ethics Washington adhered to prompted him to expedite measures to acquire a land bounty that was justly due him but at the same time made him refrain from anything that might stain the “approbation of my conduct.”<sup>782</sup> He realized that “surveys and other formal means for securing a land title were useless unless accompanied by actual settlement” but

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<sup>779</sup> Resolutions of the Officers of the Virginia Regiment of 1754, 23 November 1772, in *PGW*.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.* (my italics).

<sup>781</sup> To the Officers and Soldiers of the Virginia Regiment of 1754, 23 December 1772, in *PGW*; “Mount Vernon, December 23, 1772, Mr. Rind,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), January 14, 1772, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>.

<sup>782</sup> To the Officers of the Virginia Regiment, 10 January 1759, in *PGW*.

despite his relatively loose grip on his surveyed lands he did not resort to Michael Cresap's or Lord Dunmore's intentionally hostile measures that escalated into Dunmore's War of 1774.<sup>783</sup>

Despite his aggressive land tactics, Dunmore was well received by the Virginians and enjoyed a considerable degree of popularity for being a "gentleman of benevolence & universal Charity & not unacquainted with either Man or the World."<sup>784</sup> The colonial governor acted only as an intermediary in the process of granting patents of lands on the Ohio and was not "impowered" to issue them without the assent of Whitehall.<sup>785</sup> While waiting for the patents, Washington submitted a report containing a detailed division of surveyed and already certified lands to the governor and his council. Since Washington and George Muse expended the most resources of all officers concerned on surveying and certifying the lands, they were the prime beneficiaries of a bonus land set aside to reimburse those who had financially contributed the most to the cause.<sup>786</sup>

In sum, analysis of Washington's interwar endeavors to secure the pledged bounty lands by Governor Dinwiddie's Proclamation, his membership in the Ohio Company and the Mississippi Land Company, as well as being one of the adventurers interested in draining the Great Dismal Swamp, discloses the unceasing industrious alacrity of the retired chief commander of Virginia. Far from a short-lived infatuation, Washington's systematic application to securing tracts either close at hand or far-off his residence resulted from his awareness that the lands were typically claimed on a first-come, first-served basis. Foreseeing continued inland migration and profitability of selling or leasing his lands to future tenants, Washington teamed up with other prescient land speculators in a number of ambitious

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<sup>783</sup> Strang, "Michael Cresap," par. 31. For GW's seeking settlers for his lands, see Advertisement of Western Lands, 15 July 1773, in *PGW*.

<sup>784</sup> John Connolly to GW, 29 August 1773, in *PGW*.

<sup>785</sup> Lord Dunmore to GW, 24 September 1773, in *PGW*.

<sup>786</sup> GW to Lord Dunmore and Council, [ca. 3 November 1773], GW to John Fry, 10 March 1773, in *PGW*.

projects that not only augured long-term returns but also “affect[ed] the overall geopolitical situation of the North American backcountry.”<sup>787</sup>

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<sup>787</sup> Strang, “Michael Cresap,” par. 35.

## CHAPTER SIX

“CERTAIN I AM NO PERSON IN VIRGINIA TAKES MORE PAINS TO MAKE THEIR  
TOBO FINE THAN I DO”

“Since farmers were known to be ideal republican citizens by nature,” writes Bushman, “they required no definition.”<sup>788</sup> As James Madison explained in an anonymous essay, “The class of citizens who provide at once their own food and their own raiment, may be viewed as the most truly independent and happy.”<sup>789</sup> Washington engaged in husbandry on his ever expanding Mount Vernon farms with great gusto and strove toward such self-sufficiency. Like other ambitious planters in the Chesapeake Bay region, Washington took special pains with cultivating the finest tobacco crop possible with a view of earning great profits.<sup>790</sup>

Among the many items Washington ordered from London in 1759 was a publication *A new System of Agriculture, or a Speedy way to grow Rich*.<sup>791</sup> At that time, Washington began to educate himself about the potential profits arising from effective agriculture. The resources he had were numerous, for his household reared diverse livestock, ran a fishery, operated a grain mill, grew tobacco, wheat, barley, oats, turnips, apples, cherries, among many others.<sup>792</sup>

Washington enjoyed managing his plantation and the degree in which he became engaged in farming is evidenced by his numerous experimentations with plant growth, animal breeding, or tool innovation. He ventured at mixing composts with earth and other fertilizers

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<sup>788</sup> Richard Lyman Bushman, “A Poet, a Planter, and a Nation of Farmers,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3124920>.

<sup>789</sup> “For the National Gazette. Republican Distribution of Citizens,” *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), March 5, 1792, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>.

<sup>790</sup> Richard Lyman Bushman, “Markets and Composite Farms in Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (July 1998): 368, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2674528>.

<sup>791</sup> Enclosure: Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, 1 May 1759, in *PGW*.

<sup>792</sup> William Poole to GW, 9 July 1758, GW to Robert Cary & Company, 2 July 1759, GW to Burwell Bassett, 12 February 1774, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:255, 265-66, 312, 315.

“to try their several Virtues.”<sup>793</sup> He weighed his hogs before and after a fast.<sup>794</sup> One day he recorded in his dairy, “Spent the greatest part of the day in making a new plow of my own Invention.”<sup>795</sup>

However, the most significant part of Washington’s planter-business activities in the early 1760s was his cultivation of tobacco. An enterprise with no other crop carried so much prestige among the Tidewater Virginians. T. H. Breen argues that the price of one’s tobacco was an indicator of a planter’s success and self-esteem. The value of this commodity had been such that it continued to be at times used in place of currency well into the eighteenth century.<sup>796</sup>

Like other well-off Chesapeake Bay planters, Washington shipped his tobacco overseas to capitalize from the consignment system, which entrusted (or consigned) the sale of his crop to mercantile houses in England. The main advantages of this transatlantic commerce were the planter’s assurance of the highest price for his crop and a convenient access to England’s premium shops and stores.<sup>797</sup>

In the eighteenth-century Virginia, tobacco trade offered “a lucrative if narrow opportunity for planters able to produce large, quality crops.” Tobacco was probably Washington’s major crop in the early 1760s and his annual production was sizable, for it was the key requirement for the establishment of overseas trade with London mercantile firms.<sup>798</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> *DGW* 1:261, 266-67.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:293-94.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:257.

<sup>796</sup> T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 65, 76, <http://books.google.com/books?id=toD7o4Q44AcC>; Lease of Mount Vernon, 17 December 1754, Lease to Samuel Johnston, 25 December 1761, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:293; T. H. Breen, “Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1977): 252.

<sup>797</sup> Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, xviii; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 48-49.

<sup>798</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 48; GW to Stewart & Campbell, 4 September 1766, GW to Carlyle & Adam, 15 February 1767, in *PGW*.

It was the Custis estate, one of the most valuable in the province and spreading over 7,200 hectares, from where most of Washington's tobacco was sent to the Old Continent.<sup>799</sup>

As in almost everything else, it seems, Washington exercised his enterprising skills methodically. He purchased literature on husbandry from overseas and followed various procedures to ascertain maximum advantages.<sup>800</sup> Exercising his prudential judgment, Washington eventually confined his major orders to only one mercantile house in hopes of receiving the fairest price.<sup>801</sup>

Washington took especial care in his cultivation of tobacco. "Certain I am no Person in Virginia takes more pains to make their Tobo fine than I do," wrote he confidently to his London firm in 1761.<sup>802</sup> His business cooperation with English firms depended largely on the quantity of the crop sent overseas, but it was the quality of the tobacco leaves that increased his returns, so Washington was particularly concerned when there were problems with the cultivation or shipment of his crop. Whenever he discovered an issue, for example, finding the hogsheads of tobacco being stored improperly, he immediately "engagd the Inspection of it."<sup>803</sup>

It is evident that Washington spent a substantial amount of his time, probably more so than an average landed gentleman, at inspecting or working in his farms, fields, and gardens in the early 1760s.<sup>804</sup> But he soon realized that his tobacco crop depended on and therefore suffered from unpredictable weather conditions over which he had no control, which impeded his ambitious plans for his developing estate. In 1760, a great amount of his tobacco was

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<sup>799</sup> Settlement of the Daniel Parke Custis Estate: III-A-6: Auditor's Account of Lands and Acreage in the Estate, [1759], in *PGW*; Bruce A. Ragsdale, "George Washington, the British Tobacco Trade, and Economic Opportunity in Pre-Revolutionary Virginia," in *George Washington Reconsidered*, Higginbotham, 68-69; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 48-49.

<sup>800</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 24 October 1760, List of Books at Mount Vernon, [ca. 1764], in *PGW*.

<sup>801</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 26 April 1763, GW to Stewart & Campbell, 4 September 1766, in *PGW*.

<sup>802</sup> GW to William Crawford, [17] September 1767, in *PGW*.

<sup>803</sup> *DGW* 1:228.

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:230.

“drownd” due to a nearly month-long rain.<sup>805</sup> Two years later, his crop was greatly diminished by prolonged droughts.<sup>806</sup> To his disappointment, Washington faced additional troubles with his tobacco business. Although the tobacco he shipped overseas was “Sweetscented and neatly managd,” the price value the English mercantile houses set on it remained too often below his expectations.<sup>807</sup>

“The discouraging Sales” of tobacco made Washington even more suspicious once he learned that his neighbor sold some of Fairfax’s tobacco crop for much more than his own, though “in fact Mr Fairfax’s Plantation’s & mine upon Shannondoah lye in the same neighbourhood—The Tobo brought to the same Inspection—and to be short, is in all respects exactly alike.”<sup>808</sup> Washington apparently never received a satisfactory explanation of why his tobacco crop sold for less than his neighbor’s, which may have been another element that undermined his confidence in the impartiality of London’s transatlantic business.

Additional problems Washington’s overseas commerce suffered from included other discrepancies such as dubious invoices of his English mercantile partners. Occasionally, the master of Mount Vernon was sent too many or overpriced goods and once, he discovered, was charged twice for one order. He even chided his mercantile partner for sending him some goods he regarded as “useless lumber” and some so out of fashion “that coud only have been used by our Forefathers in the days of yore.”<sup>809</sup> At another time, one shipment of tobacco was lost during the voyage.<sup>810</sup>

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<sup>805</sup> Joseph Valentine to GW, 9 August 1760, GW to Capel & Osgood Hanbury, 10 August 1760, in *PGW*.

<sup>806</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 20 June 1762, in *PGW*.

<sup>807</sup> GW to Richard Washington, 10 August 1760, in *PGW*.

<sup>808</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 28 May 1762, GW to Robert Cary & Company, 26 April 1763, in *PGW*.

<sup>809</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 10 August 1760, 28 September 1760, 1[-6] August 1761, 18 September 1762, 30 September 1762, 20 September 1764, 25 October 1765, 22 August 1766, GW to Charles Lawrence, 10 August 1764, GW to Richard Washington, 20 September 1765, in *PGW*.

<sup>810</sup> GW to Capel & Osgood Hanbury, 28 May 1762, GW to Robert Cary & Company, 10 August 1760, in *PGW*.

In his study of colonial gentlemen, Rozbicki describes the emergence of new Virginian planters in the context of the established European court culture. Sufficient wealth, appropriate lifestyle, and social respectability were qualities, which authorized ambitious men to become affiliated with the landed gentry of the pre-Revolutionary America. The new elites consisted of men who climbed the social ladder by the means of matrimony or who filled employment “positions that carried the label of gentility.” Nevertheless, the line between “true” members of the gentry and those who “styled themselves gentlemen” was blurred.<sup>811</sup>

Despite Washington’s legitimate ascent to the upper crusts of the Virginia gentry—which bore perhaps a closer resemblance to the landed gentry’s lifestyle in England than any other American colony did—he and others who had taken a similar path confronted “the entrenched British . . . elites” who “denied them legitimacy and routinely labeled them as mere provincial upstarts.”<sup>812</sup> The parvenu mark attached to such American social climbers may have been a factor in the quasi-genteel manner the English mercantile houses handled Washington’s trade and orders for goods.

But Washington’s complaints about the low prices his tobacco was sold for in England echoed those of other Virginia planters.<sup>813</sup> Although his calculations had aimed at a prosperous overseas trade, his financial situation was becoming somewhat strained, because besides the exorbitant prices of some of the shipped goods, Washington was additionally charged for various payments such as searchers fees, shipping charges, freight primage, bills of lading, insurance, and commissions associated with transatlantic shipments.<sup>814</sup>

Washington’s intercontinental orders for goods were by no means small. Half of his orders during the interwar period cost about or over £300 and some of his long orders

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<sup>811</sup> Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 28-29, 36.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>813</sup> Ragsdale, “George Washington,” 77.

<sup>814</sup> See for example, Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, 13 April 1763, 20 December 1765, in *PGW*.

included items from over three dozens of different tradesmen.<sup>815</sup> Although Washington's interwar expenses could seem unreasonably extensive, his wealth and prospects in the early 1760s reached such proportions that he could reasonably afford it. By trading with England's premium mercantile houses, Washington stood side by side with other Virginia patricians who ordered bulks of accessories, fine attire, or other luxury items from the same sources.<sup>816</sup> Jack P. Greene reminds us that only "the very elevated sort" of gentle families "wore finery imported from London."<sup>817</sup>

Washington continued to take pride in his gentry status and the prestige that was inevitably associated with it. One such illustration is found in Washington's instruction to his English mercantile partner, where he wrote of his wish to have a carriage made. Not any kind would do, it had to be "in the newest taste, handsome, genteel." Washington further specified that the carriage ought to be constructed "by a celebrated Workman," to be painted in a color now in vogue, lightly gilded, decorated with fashionable ornaments and with Washington's coat of arms imprinted on the carriage door as well as on the harness.<sup>818</sup>

Such specifications could not have been required by someone who was not fond of a noble lifestyle, because carriages were expendable, costly, and "were acquired only by those of high social position or with aspirations in that direction." The duty on chariots "was in the nature of a luxury tax," the owner paying according to the number of wheels.<sup>819</sup> "A love of

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<sup>815</sup> Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, 6 August 1759, 15 March 1760, 31 March 1761, 10 April 1762, 13 April 1763, 13 February 1764, 2 April 1764, 13 February 1765, 20 December 1765, 27 March 1766, 17 November 1766, 29 October 1767, 28 September 1768, 23 January 1770, 13 November 1770, 3 December 1771, 29 September 1772, in *PGW*.

<sup>816</sup> Ragsdale, "George Washington," 76.

<sup>817</sup> Greene, Bushman, and Kammen, *Society, Freedom, and Conscience*, Jellison, 18.

<sup>818</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 6 June 1768, in *PGW*; Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 170. Rozbicki points out that one's crest on the carriage door was a potent symbol of gentility.

<sup>819</sup> Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries*, 65, 146. In 1788, one third of the carriages in Virginia were owned by justices of the peace. The sample counties subjected to this analysis were Charles City, Northumberland, Essex, Albemarle, Orange, Halifax, Rockbridge, Shenandoah.

wealth, and a love of ease,” later observed John Taylor of Caroline County, are “the two strongest human propensities.”<sup>820</sup>

But since one’s lot and circumstances are not always easily predictable, Washington began to accumulate debts. That Washington monitored his expenses closely is evidenced by his request to receive the accounts of his estates held by his English mercantile firm so that he could compare them with his own records.<sup>821</sup> Despite Washington’s efforts to the contrary, “my debt is greater than I expected to have found it,” he admitted in 1763.<sup>822</sup> When Robert Stewart asked him for a loan that year, Washington apologized for his inability to lend the requested amount. He explained, “I had Provision’s of all kinds to buy for the first two or three years, and my Plantations to Stock—in short with every thing—Buildings to make, and other matters, which swallowed up before I well knew where I was, all the money I got by Marriage.”<sup>823</sup>

Had Washington sold his tobacco for a price he had expected, he knew he would “have fallen very little in arrears.”<sup>824</sup> He thought deeply about his difficulties and came to an acknowledgment that he either “met with very bad luck” or he had to “confess it to be an Art beyond my skill, to succeed in making good Tobo as I have used my utmost endeavours for that purpose this two or 3 years past.”<sup>825</sup>

But in retrospect of his utmost exertions, Washington perceived that “Mischances rather than Misconduct hath been the causes” of his debts. “It was a misfortune” that weather conditions in the previous three years were unfavorable to his crops, likewise “it was a misfortune” that his crops sold for so little, and it was “as unlucky at least” that his remission

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<sup>820</sup> John Taylor, *Arator; Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical & Political: In Sixty-One Numbers* (Georgetown, Columbia: J. M. Carter, 1814), 53, <http://www.archive.org/details/aratorbeingserie00tayl>.

<sup>821</sup> GW to Capel & Osgood Hanbury, 20 September 1765, in *PGW*.

<sup>822</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 26 April 1763, in *PGW*.

<sup>823</sup> Robert Stewart to GW, 2 March 1763, GW to Robert Stewart, [27 April 1763], in *PGW*.

<sup>824</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 1 May 1764, in *PGW*.

<sup>825</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 28 May 1762, in *PGW*.

of debts could not be accepted unless they be in bills void of credit.<sup>826</sup> But notwithstanding his diligence in overseeing his tobacco cultivation and regular correspondence with his mercantile firm, Washington admitted that he had “lost (at least) four years out of five by my consignments having better prices offered in the Country than my Tobo has sold for in England.”<sup>827</sup>

At length, after he was sufficiently convinced of the unprofitability of further cultivation of tobacco, Washington determined to change the “system of my management” and shift to cereals as his principal crop. Apparently, he was one of the first major plantation owners in Virginia to do so.<sup>828</sup> His “most accurate experiments” included testing various methods of cultivating his wheat so as to minimize losses suffered by wheat rust.<sup>829</sup> Before the Revolutionary War, Washington produced, according to his own estimate, “about 7,000 Bushels of Wheat and 10,000 bushels of Indian corn which was more the staple of the farm.”<sup>830</sup>

In light of his assiduous farming industry and intercontinental trade during the 1760s, one may view Washington’s enterprising ventures as ambitious. Indeed, Washington’s combined ownership of Mount Vernon and Custis estate unavoidably ranked him among the the most elite planters in Tidewater Virginia and as such his planter business, though troubled by misfortunes and fishy accounts by the English mercantile houses, adequately reflected the scope of his landed wealth. In the interwar period, his prominent status among the gentry had been additionally entrenched by his admirable military record, joining in matrimony with one of the richest widows in the colonies, and membership in the House of Burgesses.

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<sup>826</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 10 August 1764, in *PGW*.

<sup>827</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 20 June 1768, in *PGW*.

<sup>828</sup> *Ibid.*; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 52.

<sup>829</sup> *DGW* 2:82.

<sup>830</sup> Zagari, “*Life of George Washington*”, 24.

It is worth noting that a colonial gentleman's wealth usually proceeded from his plantation rather than any public office he may have held. In consequence of notoriously parsimonious legislatures, "the Scene of public Action" provided scant material stimulus for men to pursue fame in this direction.<sup>831</sup> Offering only "small Profit," executive positions, judgeships, and legislative offices were associated with such a trifling remuneration that their incumbents were obliged to "draw their Subsistence, in great Part, from their private Estate."<sup>832</sup> Accordingly, as if providing explanation of his transatlantic tobacco trade to a mercantile house in England, Washington wrote, "How then am I to make remittances for Goods to Cloath a numerous Family, Supply a House in various necessaries, & support it in all its various expences? Have I any hidden resources do you imagine, that will enable me to do this?"<sup>833</sup>

In 1765, in hopes of diversifying his crops and, more importantly, becoming more prosperous, Washington began to grow hemp and flax in greater abundance. After all, the British Parliament promised a financial "bounty" for raising these plants in the American colonies. His motives being strictly economic, Washington asked his English merchants about how much he could expect to be paid for them in order to "form some Idea of the profits resulting from the growth." Although his hitherto experiments with these two plants had not been highly successful, Washington admitted he would endeavor to essay further cultivation, provided that "the bounty is easily obtaind."<sup>834</sup>

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<sup>831</sup> William Smith, *A General Idea of the College of Mirania* (New York: J. Parker and W. Weyman, 1753), 17, quoted in Jack P. Greene, *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 228-29.

<sup>832</sup> William Smith, *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania* (London: R. Griffiths, 1755), 6, <http://www.archive.org/details/briefstateofprov00insmit>; *An Address to the Freeholders of New-Jersey, on the Subject of Public Salaries* (Philadelphia, 1763), 3, quoted in Greene, *Imperatives, Behaviors, and Identities*, 229; Wood, *Radicalism*, 82.

<sup>833</sup> GW to Carlyle & Adam, 15 February 1767, in *PGW*.

<sup>834</sup> GW to James Gildart, 20 September 1765, GW to Capel & Osgood Company, 20 September 1765, in *PGW*; *DGW* 1:340; William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, 13 vols. (Richmond: Franklin Press – W. W. Gray, 1820), 4:96-99, <http://vagenweb.org/hening>.

Economic prosperity stood behind another Washington's project. The potential farther inland navigability of the Potomac River, main artery of the Chesapeake Bay, had caught his attention as early as 1754, which made him one of the pioneers who sketched specific observations on the subject.<sup>835</sup> In 1769, Washington and Richard Henry Lee presented to the House of Burgesses a bill "for clearing and making navigable" the said river from the Great Falls up to Fort Cumberland.<sup>836</sup> Washington corresponded with other sympathizers of the venture and professed that "no person . . . wishes to see an undertaking of the sort go forward with more facility and ardour than I do."<sup>837</sup>

He believed that the navigation of the Potomac would "at once fix the Trade of the Western Country . . . and end, in amazing advantages."<sup>838</sup> Significantly, Washington's initiative in this regard was "actuated by motives of Publick Spirit" as well as "salutary effects" resulting from the proximity to the river.<sup>839</sup> Washington's involvement in undertakings of this nature not only opened the door to discussion of the profitability of this trade route but also helped to establish further intercolonial cooperation—ties that were vital for economic and political unification of the American colonies.

The expanding scope of Washington's enterprises becomes increasingly manifest in the years prior to the Revolutionary War, when Washington's business connections spread literally over half a globe, his name not being unknown to merchants in his province, England (where most of his purchases were made), Madeira (a Portuguese archipelago from where he

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<sup>835</sup> GW to Charles Carter, [August 1754], in *PGW*; Douglas R. Littlefield, "Eighteenth-Century Plans to Clear the Potomac River: Technology, Expertise, and Labor in a Developing Nation," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 93, no. 3 (July 1985), 296, 299.

<sup>836</sup> Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 11:314, 322, 334, 338; Littlefield, "Eighteenth-Century Plans to Clear the Potomac River," 302n14. Although the bill was passed by the burgesses, it never received the assent of the governor's council.

<sup>837</sup> GW to Thomas Johnson, 20 July 1770, in *PGW*.

<sup>838</sup> GW to Jonathan Boucher, 5 May 1772, in *PGW*.

<sup>839</sup> GW to Thomas Johnson, 20 July 1770, in *PGW*.

ordered a high-quality wine), Barbados and Jamaica (British colonies to which he exported his flour and herrings).<sup>840</sup>

Evaluating Washington's business endeavors during the interwar period, it appears that he was not satisfied with mediocrity. His conspicuousness in planter and business enterprises can be credited, in large measure, to his industry and conscientious exertion to contribute to the expansion and improvement of whatever he was involved in. These attributes and characteristics played a role in his further ascent among the notable gentlemen of Virginia and beyond.

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<sup>840</sup> Scott, Pringle, Cheap, & Company to GW, 2 August 1766, GW to Scott, Pringle, Cheap, & Company, 23 February 1768, Robert McMickan & Company to GW, 29 May 1771, GW to Daniel Jenifer Adams, 20 July 1772, GW to Robert McMickan, 12 January 1773, in *PGW*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## “GEORGE WASHINGTON, ESQ. WAS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED”

An American historian Allen French once wrote that “the Revolution began with the Stamp Act opposition—unless, of course, we wish to begin with John Winthrop.”<sup>841</sup> The Stamp Act of 1765, which aimed at raising revenue to defray British military expenses following the French and Indian War, triggered an immediate resistance in Virginia and elsewhere.<sup>842</sup> One of Washington’s earliest written comments about the act described it as “ill judgd Measures” that might eventually result in what “I will not undertake to determine.”<sup>843</sup>

American colonies succeeded in repealing the act the following year and “ended the greatest of tax disputes in the history of the Colonies,” a fact that was also welcomed by England’s mercantile houses whose profit in part depended on transatlantic trade.<sup>844</sup> But it did not take long before another taxation was enforced. The “external” taxation of the Townshend duties was soon perceived to be “as much designed to collect revenue” as the recently repealed “internal” Stamp Act.<sup>845</sup>

In the Old Dominion, the patriot cause was highly solidified by reason of the provincial structure of power, which rested in large measure on members of the planter aristocracy, a relatively small group of able men who governed both houses of the General Assembly as well as county courts and parish vestries. “In this situation there was little chance for factionalism to arise among” the leading Virginians. “Since there were no separate sources of local power, the Revolutionary movement was most likely directed from the center

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<sup>841</sup> Quoted in James R. Gaines, *For Liberty and Glory: Washington, Lafayette, and Their Revolutions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 20n.

<sup>842</sup> Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 10:lxxii.

<sup>843</sup> GW to Francis Dandridge, 20 September 1765, in *PGW*.

<sup>844</sup> Capel & Osgood Hanbury to GW, 27 March 1766, in *PGW*; Kennedy, *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, 10:lxxv.

<sup>845</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 349.

outward to the counties.”<sup>846</sup> On the eve of the Revolution, Washington’s high status among the colony’s gentry class was indisputable. He was the colony’s retired chief commander, burgess, justice, vestryman, and an eminent landowner and planter. He was in a position where his sentiments would inevitably influence the direction of the colony’s Revolutionary cause.

One of the more expressive letters revealing Washington’s sentiments on Britain’s increasing taxation of the American colonies is the one sent to George Mason, his neighbor and fellow vestryman with whom Washington tended to have a frank and open communication. Accusing the ministerial “lordly Masters” of their “deprivation of American freedom,” Washington’s thoughts did not fail to forecast a more radical, yet unwished-for course of action, “That no man shou’d scruple, or hesitate a moment to use a—ms [arms] in defence of so valuable a blessing, on which all the good and evil of life depends; is clearly my opinion; Yet A—ms I wou’d beg leave to add, should be the last resource; the de[r]nier resort.”<sup>847</sup>

In politics, Washington acted neither in a headstrong nor impetuous manner. In the approaching colonial crisis, Washington seems to have been attentive to all the circumstances and probable consequences of a particular action. Although more known for his military adventures than for political expertise, he was generally recognized as a man who preferred diplomatic and economical rather than military measures to defuse the growing crisis.

“Starving their Trade & manufactures” seemed like a plausible and affordable alternative to Washington, “This scheme—In my opinion it is a good one,” he wrote in 1769. As much as Washington was fond of ordering genteel and highly fashionable articles from England, he was now willing to forego their import to protest the British taxation for raising

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<sup>846</sup> Thad W. Tate, “The Coming of the Revolution in Virginia: Britain’s Challenge to Virginia’s Ruling Class, 1763-1776,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (July 1962): 342, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1920086>.

<sup>847</sup> GW to George Mason, 5 April 1769, in *PGW*; Slaughter, *History of Truro Parish*, 95n.

revenue in America. Principles of liberty and fairness, which he readily recognized were at play, were loftier goals than seeking one's "own gain" or having "lucrative views."<sup>848</sup>

Washington's sentiments on the issue were in accord with George Mason's and many other patriots who advocated, "Comforts of Life, when set in Competition with our Liberty, ought to be rejected not with reluctance but with Pleasure."<sup>849</sup> Washington's mind was so firmly set against recent British taxation that he determined that not ordering selected goods from England's mercantile firms was a form of a boycott he would "religiously adhere to."<sup>850</sup>

Washington had many opportunities to discuss the ongoing imperial efforts at raising revenue with the most prominent men of Virginia. In the decade preceding the Revolutionary War, his Mount Vernon estate hosted a wide selection of guests of honor that stayed either for just a dinner or for several days, arriving from one of the neighboring counties or even a different province. Among the prominent guests from all walks of life (but mostly planters, merchants, and lawyers) were John Grymes, Captain Thomas Marshall, Ralph Wormeley, George Thornton, Colonel Edward Lloyd III, James Wood, Thomas Montgomerie, Richard Brooke, Colonel John Nash Jr., Robert Rutherford, Samuel Galloway, John De Butts, Lord Stirling, Colonel George Mason, Patrick Henry, and Colonel Edmund Pendleton.<sup>851</sup>

Being neighbors, the Washingtons and the Fairfaxes were perhaps the most frequent guests at each other's house—and Washington was genuinely fond of such propinquity. He was also honored with such a relationship with Lord Fairfax that was based on a cordial mutual respect and which enabled Washington, when the British peer and proprietary left his country seat at Greenway Court to visit the Fairfax County, to enjoy a light conversation with him at a dinner table or on a fox hunt, the latter being one of Washington's favorite

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<sup>848</sup> GW to George Mason, 5 April 1769, GW to Robert Cary & Company, 25 July 1769, in *PGW*.

<sup>849</sup> George Mason to GW, 5 April 1769, in *PGW*.

<sup>850</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 20 August 1770, in *PGW*.

<sup>851</sup> *DGW* 2:94, 133-34, 157, 175-76, 181, 221, 271, 3:6, 15, 31, 153, 271.

pastimes.<sup>852</sup> His membership in the House of Burgesses facilitated mingling with influential public officials, including members of the governor's council, on a regular basis. Washington did not turn down the social fringe benefits of participating at dinners, attending balls, and lodging at the governor's "Palace."<sup>853</sup>

In other words, Washington's connections with gentry families in his home and neighboring provinces were extensive and furnished him with diverse perspectives on the impending imperial crisis, be it from a loyalist or patriotic viewpoint. On the other hand, Washington's numerous acquaintances or guests from outside of Virginia learned in detail of his enterprising plantation management and trade, unremitting efforts to obtain patents for lands due him and other officers under Governor Dinwiddie's Proclamation, progressive plans concerning the navigability of the Potomac River and expanding trade connections farther inland, and his advocacy of the non-importation association. However, most importantly with respect to his indispensable role in the ensuing armed conflict, Washington was increasingly respected for being methodical and judicious in treating these matters of intercolonial significance.

The increasing disagreements between Great Britain and her American colonies may have evoked Washington's memories of his distinguished military service and his possible return to arms to a greater extent than his biographers generally portray. Although Washington believed that "Arms" ought to remain "the de[r]nier resort" after all economic and political resistance is attempted, he never lost sight of this possible outcome of the present crisis and what role he might play in it.<sup>854</sup>

In August 1771, his orders to his English mercantile house included some typical soldierly items, such as holsters for a "pair of pistols," "a Fash[ionabl]e and handsome small

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<sup>852</sup> For examples, see *DGW* 2:93, 110, 175, 3:114.

<sup>853</sup> For examples, see *DGW* 2:150, 153, 202.

<sup>854</sup> GW to George Mason, 5 April 1769, in *PGW*.

Sword wt. Belt Swivels,” and “a Neat Sword Belt with Swivels.”<sup>855</sup> The following year, Washington sat for his first portrait ever by Charles Wilson Peale, a young American artist who had studied his trade in Boston and London.<sup>856</sup> By all accounts, he was reluctant to sit for a painting at first but he “yielded to [Peale’s] Importunity.”<sup>857</sup> Washington knew that his own painting would describe “to the World what manner of Man I am.”<sup>858</sup> He was painted as neither Washington the citizen, nor Washington the burgess, but Washington the soldier.<sup>859</sup> Having donned his old military uniform, Washington had Peale record his “one-time soldier’s likeness” and his patriotic service during the French and Indian War, stirring “memories of that earlier fight to safeguard English and Virginia’s rights and interests.”<sup>860</sup>

In late 1773, when Washington encouraged his surveyor to hurry “lest some new *revolution* should again happen in our political System,” one may question to what degree he may have perceived the potential deeper meaning of the words he was writing.<sup>861</sup> Washington was now convinced that more and more of the British authorities held a “malignant disposition towards us poor Americans.”<sup>862</sup> The puzzle pieces seemed to fit into a picture that made it for him more easily recognizable that there were more issues in existence that may not be wholly disconnected, be it the ever-emerging impediments to land grants, suspicious dealings by England’s mercantile houses, or forcible taxation of American subjects without their parliamentary representation.

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<sup>855</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 12 August 1771, in *PGW*.

<sup>856</sup> *DGW* 3:108-09; GW to Jonathan Boucher, 21 May 1772, in *PGW*; Ferling, *First of Men*, 82.

<sup>857</sup> GW to Jonathan Boucher, 21 May 1772, Cash Accounts, [May 1772], in *PGW*. At Mount Vernon, Peale, besides GW’s portrait, painted miniatures of GW’s wife and his two stepchildren.

<sup>858</sup> GW to Jonathan Boucher, 21 May 1772, in *PGW*.

<sup>859</sup> It is not known whether the representation in a uniform was suggested by the painter or the model. In any case, Peale found GW unusually reticent about his military achievements or “actions in which he was engaged in last war.” Charles Willson Peale to Edmund Jennings, 29 August 1775, in Horace Wells Sellers, “Charles Willson Peale, Artist-Soldier,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 38, no. 3 (1914): 265, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20086174>; DSF 3:444n114.

<sup>860</sup> Longmore, *Invention*, 100.

<sup>861</sup> GW to William Crawford, 25 September 1773, in *PGW* (my italics).

<sup>862</sup> GW to James Wood, 20 February 1774, in *PGW*.

Washington's prognoses, though rather dismal, were never far from truth. Anticipating the adoption of "vigorous measures" by the American colonies, the vision of what could follow gestated in Washington's mind. One year before his appointment to the head of the Continental Army, Washington wrote to his friend George William Fairfax who was now in England, "we shall not suffer ourselves to be sacrificed by piecemeal though god only knows what is to become of us."<sup>863</sup>

The turbulent events attending the closure of the Boston harbor in 1774 reverberated throughout the colonies and led Washington and others to think whether the crisis had reached "the last extremity" and whether "our virtue and fortitude" ought to be put "to the severest test."<sup>864</sup> He regularly gathered more intelligence from the popular Maryland and Virginia Gazettes and other periodicals.<sup>865</sup> Most importantly, as a burgess with extensive military, business, and political connections, Washington had an easy access to the hub of major activities of the colony that took one of the leading roles in the resistance movement of the Revolutionary period.<sup>866</sup>

For these reasons, Washington's prominence in the resistance movement was rising. Washington was George Mason's one of the key collaborators in drafting the Fairfax Resolves of 1774 and was appointed a chairman at a general meeting of the county citizens at Alexandria's court house where the Resolves were publicly presented and accepted.<sup>867</sup> The twenty-four points contained in the Resolves "spelled out the situation for patriots in every crossroad of the colonies," demonstrating that the inhabitants of Virginia are not descendants of "the Conquered, but of the Conquerors," "that Taxation and Representation are in their

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<sup>863</sup> GW to George William Fairfax, 10[-15] June 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>864</sup> GW to Bryan Fairfax, 4 July 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>865</sup> Memorial to Governor and Council, [c.1-4 November 1771], Cash Accounts, [November 1771], GW to Jonathan Boucher, 4 May 1772, GW to George Muse, 29 January 1774, GW to Robert McMickan, 10 May 1774, GW to George William Fairfax, 10[-15] June 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>866</sup> Greene, Bushman, and Kammen, *Society, Freedom, Conscience*, Jellison, 6-7, 14-15.

<sup>867</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 120; Fairfax County Resolves, 18 July 1774, in *PGW*; *DGW* 3:261n.

Nature inseparable,” and calling for an almost complete boycott of British “Goods or Merchandize” until the American grievances be redressed.<sup>868</sup>

Writing to his friend Bryan Fairfax (who disagreed with the Fairfax Resolves), Washington elucidated the Resolves’ principles by saying that he and other patriots are not merely “asking a favour” from their Sovereign but “claiming a Right” that belongs to all men as part of “natural justice.” The Mother Country did not possess any “more Right to put their hands into my Pocket, without my consent,” Washington argued, “than I have to put my hands into your’s for money.”<sup>869</sup>

Washington and Charles Broadwater, who were elected burgesses for the Fairfax County in July 1774, were now also appointed to attend a special convention to be held the following month in Williamsburg to “present these Resolves” to the other counties of the colony.<sup>870</sup> Besides, Washington was appointed to head a 25-man committee responsible for laying out a course of action most beneficial for the county’s interests. Although nearly all Virginia counties gathered for a general meeting during the summer of 1774 to adopt similar resolves, Washington’s home county was unique in being one of only four counties that have formed a committee prior to the August convention in the colony’s capital. Never before was Washington’s political ascent so accelerated as during this year.<sup>871</sup>

At the Williamsburg convention, Washington’s statesmanship and credibility was further endorsed by being “appointed by Ballot” to be one of the seven delegates to attend the General Congress in Philadelphia the following month. Hence, Washington now joined a group of prominent men of Virginia such as Peyton Randolph, Richard Henry Lee, Patrick

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<sup>868</sup> Robert Allen Rutland, *George Mason: Reluctant Statesman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 40, <http://books.google.com/books?id=BE0bjPfrzqkC>; Fairfax County Resolves, 18 July 1774, in *PGW*. GW explained that it was not the size of the British duties they were opposing, but rather “the Right only, we have all along disputed” (GW to Bryan Fairfax, 20 July 1774, in *PGW*).

<sup>869</sup> GW to Bryan Fairfax, 20 July 1774, 24 August 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>870</sup> *DGW* 3:260; Fairfax County Resolves, 18 July 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>871</sup> *DGW* 3:261-62n. The three other counties being Dunmore, Frederick, Stafford. In the last-named county, five of the appointed committeemen were Washington’s cousins.

Henry, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and Edmund Pendleton in representing the interests of the Old Dominion. Edmund Randolph later wrote that each of the seven delegates was appointed with an expectation of fulfilling specific assignments, and Washington was allegedly anticipated to “command the army, if an army should be raised.”<sup>872</sup>

Ironically, some of the delegates’ belief of Washington’s readiness to participate in the armed defense of the colonies may have been based on a hearsay information.<sup>873</sup> In his diary entry for August 31, 1774, Adams recorded a claim by Thomas Lynch, a representative to the Continental Congress from South Carolina, to have heard Washington state in the Virginia Convention earlier that month that “I will raise 1000 Men, subsist them at my own Expence and march my self at their head for the Relief of Boston.”<sup>874</sup> It is not known how many delegates heard or believed this apocryphal statement (no direct evidence exists), but five days into the Congressional session (Washington was present), Silas Deane, a delegate from Connecticut, mentioned it in a letter to his wife and over a month later Lynch iterated it to another correspondent.<sup>875</sup>

The General Congress of 1774 “was not prepared to take any radical step” and its proceedings were principally of conciliatory nature.<sup>876</sup> Yet, before the Congress was over, Washington prevised that if the British ministries determine not to relent in their pressure

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<sup>872</sup> *DGW* 3:268n; “Williamsburg, August 5,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), August 4 [5], 1774, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>; William J. Van Schreeven et al., eds., *Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence*, 7 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973-), 1:227-28. Those that were also on the ballot but were not elected were Thomas Nelson Jr., Thomas Jefferson, Thomson Mason, James Mercer, Francis Lightfoot Lee, Archibald Cary, Robert Carter Nicholas.

<sup>873</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 1:23-24; DSF 3:377n27; Van Schreeven, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 1:225.

<sup>874</sup> John Adams Diary, 31 August 1774, in *Adams Family Papers*; John Adams Diary, 29 August 1774, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1 (12n4).

<sup>875</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 1:14, 2:18; Diary Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, 10 September 1774, Thomas Lynch to Ralph Izard, 26 October 1774, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1.

<sup>876</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 1:5-6.

“that more blood will be spilt on this occasion . . . than history has ever yet furnished instances of in the annals of North America.”<sup>877</sup>

If Fairfax County ranked among the most progressive counties in Virginia as far as plans for a coordinated economic boycott were concerned, the county was also in the first tier in forming independent companies of men ready to resort to an armed resistance. In September 1774, a group of men in Alexandria agreed to organize the Fairfax Independent Company of Volunteers, which was, by all accounts, the first “Independent Company” so constituted in the province.<sup>878</sup> The forty-nine volunteers of the company took “the Liberty to request [Washington] . . . to make some enquiries” about how supplies of materiel could be obtained for them.<sup>879</sup>

The mobilization campaign in Virginia was not void of opposition, for the freeholders “constantly fought among themselves about who ought to serve and on what terms, but Mason, who mapped out much of the colony’s military plan, described the Fairfax Company as a troop of “gentlemen of the first fortune and character.”<sup>880</sup>

Since the Prince William County was just a few kilometers to the south, information spread quickly. On November 11, 1774, the Independent Company of Cadets of this neighboring county unanimously resolved to appoint three delegates out of their number to “wait upon Collonel George Washington, and request of him to take the command of this Company as their Field Officer, and that he will be pleas’d to direct the fashion of their uniform.”<sup>881</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> GW to Robert McKenzie, 9 October 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>878</sup> *DGW* 3:291n; Longmore, *Invention*, 269n35.

<sup>879</sup> Fairfax Independent Company to GW, 19 October 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>880</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, “Class War? Class Struggles during the American Revolution in Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2006): 10th and 14th par., <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/63.2/mcdonnell.html>; Kate Mason Rowland, *The Life of George Mason, 1725-1792*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1892), 1:430, <http://www.archive.org/details/lifegeorgemason01rowlgoog>.

<sup>881</sup> Extracts from the Minutes of the Independant Company of Cadets of the 11th Nov. 1774, 11 November 1774, in Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed. *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers*, 5 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1902), 5:68-69, <http://www.archive.org/details/stanislausmurr05washrich>.

Although Washington's obligations were still, in large measure, of diplomatic character, the commandership of these cadets was not merely nominal. In late 1774, Washington garnished his own uniform by purchasing a new sash, epaulet, and a gorget, and in January 1775, he requested large orders from American gunsmiths.<sup>882</sup> Before long, similar independent companies began to be organized in most Virginia counties and Washington's martial responsibilities augmented accordingly. By the end of spring in 1775, he had accepted the command of additional three such companies in Virginia, namely that of Richmond, Spotsylvania, and Albemarle counties. These companies were independent and self-supporting bodies in the sense that they were not formed by the county committees of inspection, nor were they attached to any regiment or the militia system. Arguably, Washington could again be seen in his military uniform during the first half of 1775 as he periodically rode to personally muster and train the companies.<sup>883</sup>

Washington's dedication to the cause was wholehearted. Writing to his younger brother John Augustine, Washington commended him for training one of the independent companies and asserted him that he would "devote my Life & Fortune in the cause we are engaged in, if need be."<sup>884</sup> Washington's consecration to the cause and military experience was recognized and taken advantage of beyond his home province. For instance, on his way to Philadelphia with other delegates to attend the Congress, Washington was granted the

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<sup>882</sup> William Milnor to GW, 29 November 1774, Resolutions of Fairfax County Committee, 17 January 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>883</sup> *DGW* 3:291n, 303, 309, 313, 321-325; Richmond County Independent Company to GW, 17 March 1775 (GW was elected "unanimously"), GW to John Augustine Washington, 25 March 1775, Prince William Independent Company to GW, 26 April 1775, Spotsylvania Independent Company to GW, 26 April 1775, Albemarle Independent Company to GW, 29 April 1775, in *PGW*; From the Fairfax Independent Company, in Hamilton, *Letters to Washington*, 5:56n.

<sup>884</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 25 March 1775, in *PGW*.

privilege to review “four companies of the town militia” in Baltimore that were mustered on “the Common.”<sup>885</sup>

No one yet knew, of course, how large or how many armed conflicts would ensue between the American Patriots and the British forces (whom Washington and others prior to the Declaration of Independence still designated as “Ministerial troops” since they could not “yet prevail upon” themselves to call them the “the King’s Troops” because of their loyalty to the sovereign) before the “unhappy differences” between them would be reconciled.<sup>886</sup> Given his military record combined with his increasing military influence, however, Washington was slowly positioning himself in a wider public notice among non-Virginian delegates. Arguably, Washington could not expect otherwise than to be commissioned by the Congress to an important rank. What remained to be determined was what form should the Continental forces take and who could be entrusted with the supreme command.<sup>887</sup> Whatever steps Washington would take during the months prior to the sitting of the Second Continental Congress could add to his credibility and trustworthiness as a leader or diminish it.

As recorded in the entries of his diary in the first half of 1775, Washington spent a substantial amount of time with his family, attending to his farms, and hosting scores of men that came over to his estate discuss the ongoing crisis. We know that Washington rode to Alexandria to participate in a number of trustee and county committee meetings, to train the Independent Company, to Richmond to attend the Virginia Convention, and to other counties, on occasion, to review or train one of the other Independent Companies. Besides civil obligations and increasing military responsibilities, he actually spent the great majority of his

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<sup>885</sup> *DGW* 3:327; J. Thomas Scharf, *The Chronicles of Baltimore; Being a Complete History of “Baltimore Town” and Baltimore City from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Baltimore: Turnbull Brothers, 1874), 132, <http://www.archive.org/details/chroniclesofbalt00scharich>.

<sup>886</sup> GW to George William Fairfax, 31 May 1775, GW to Sarah Bomford, 28 August 1774, in *PGW*.

<sup>887</sup> Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 143; Resolutions of Fairfax County Committee, 17 January 1775, in *PGW*. The traditional concept of a standing army was repugnant to most colonial leaders and incompatible with their comprehension of a civil liberty.

time at home. During the first four months of 1775, Washington's most frequent diary entry contained the phrase "at home all day" and he averaged only eight days per month being away from Mount Vernon.<sup>888</sup>

Yet, despite the ample time spent at his estate during the early months of 1775, Washington had long been recognized as a leader. His name was familiar to a myriad of officials' ears in England and the intensifying colonial resistance only precipitated his return to the martial command. His military activities did not escape the notice of the concerned Londoners where it was reported that Washington was "Training the People of Virginia to the use of Arms."<sup>889</sup>

During the Richmond Convention in March 1775, Washington was appointed to a committee that was to report on munition manufactures and was also elected to attend the Second Continental Congress with the same six men who represented Virginia in Philadelphia the previous year. In the poll, Washington placed second behind Peyton Randolph only.<sup>890</sup>

More than a month before the determinative battles of Lexington and Concord, it was clear that a "Brother's Sword has been sheathed in a Brother's breast," setting a more radical agenda for the opening days of the Second Congress.<sup>891</sup> Before Washington even set out for Philadelphia, he was assured by Alexander Spotswood of the Spotsylvania Independent Company (of Virginia) that should armies be raised throughout the Continent that "their is not the least doubt But youl have the Command of the Whole forces in this Collony."<sup>892</sup> It was a sobering piece of intelligence that would have shaken any gentleman. Nevertheless, no matter how formidable the potential challenge appeared to him, Washington did not shrink.

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<sup>888</sup> *DGW* 3:302-23.

<sup>889</sup> George William Fairfax to GW, 2 March 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>890</sup> Van Schreeven, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 2:374-76 quoted in *DGW* 3:316n.

<sup>891</sup> GW to George William Fairfax, 31 May 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>892</sup> Alexander Spotswood to GW, 30 April 1775, Spotsylvania Independent Company to GW, 26 April 1775, in *PGW*.

Washington probably was not familiar with the contents of a letter written by James Warren, an influential member and a soon-to-be president of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts, to John Adams about the “shifting, fluctuating state” of the American armies stationed in the province and the need for “a more experienced direction.” In that letter, Warren proceeded to mention some names, “I could for myself wish to see your Friends Washington and L[ee] at the Head of it, and yet dare not propose it, tho’ I have it in Contemplation.”<sup>893</sup> Warren was not a delegate to the Continental Congress, but the recipient (Adams) was.<sup>894</sup> By that time, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts had authorized to raise 13,600 men and other New England states had followed suit in proportionate numbers. No one longer doubted that the American forces to be raised would reach continental proportions. The crucial question of who would be the general was inevitable and impending.

Unfortunately, there is not much of Washington’s correspondence from May 1775 to analyze, but the congressional records attest that on May 15, the fifth day of the congressional deliberations, Washington was given further military responsibilities; he was appointed to a committee overseeing the selection and adequate garrisoning of posts in the colony of New York.<sup>895</sup> The following day, he penned a letter to the Fairfax County Committee, of which he was a member, which discloses his anticipation of a continued congressional assignment. Washington asked the committee to select another man “Pro:tem. to serve in my Room” should there be another Virginia Convention called in the near future.<sup>896</sup> I believe he would not have written so, unless he expected to remain in the (military) service of Congress.

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<sup>893</sup> Johnson and Malone, *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. “Warren, James,” 19:478-79; John Adams to James Warren, 21 May 1775, note 1, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1; James Warren to John Adams, 7 May 1775, in *Warren-Adams Letters*, 1:47; G. Edward White, *Law in American History: From the Colonial Years Through the Civil War*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1:140, 157, 164, 168, <http://books.google.com/books?id=-xNmdt2BNRIC>. Organized early in the Revolution, provincial congresses, conventions, and assemblies assumed the function of rebel governmental bodies.

<sup>894</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:14.

<sup>895</sup> GW to Fairfax County Committee, 16 May 1775, in *PGW; Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:52-53.

<sup>896</sup> GW to Fairfax County Committee, 16 May 1775, in *PGW*.

On May 19, during the sitting of the Continental Congress, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts made a daring step by commissioning Artemas Ward “a General and Commander in Chief of all the Forces raised by the Congress aforesaid for the Defence of this and the other American Colonies.”<sup>897</sup> The first commander in chief of the American Revolution had been appointed. Ward had distinguished himself while serving under James Abercromby during the French and Indian War and later he successfully climbed the leadership ladder by being elected to the colony’s governor’s council. Although Ward was now in the foreground of American armed resistance, the authority of his generalship was established only by the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts, which of course left the appointment of the chief commander of all American forces still subject to further deliberations on the congressional floor in Philadelphia.<sup>898</sup>

There, on May 27, the delegates agreed that Washington head another committee, which was to recommend ways and means of supplying the colonies with “Ammunition and military stores.”<sup>899</sup> Two days later, Adams penned a letter to his wife touching on some of the proceedings in Congress. “The military Spirit which runs through the Continent is truly amazing,” Adams continued. “Coll. Washington appears at Congress in his Uniform and, by his great Experience and Abilities in military Matters, is of much service to Us.”<sup>900</sup>

In his letter to his friend George William Fairfax, who was now in England, Washington referred to the recent armed conflicts at Lexington and Concord and pointed out that America was left with only two alternatives, either its “peaceful plains” would “be drenched with Blood,” or worse, be “Inhabited by Slaves. Sad alternative!” Before closing the

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<sup>897</sup> Charles Martyn, *The Life of Artemas Ward: The First Commander-In-Chief of the American Revolution* (New York: Artemas Ward, 1921), 108 (*inset*), <http://www.archive.org/details/artemasrevolutio00martrich>.

<sup>898</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-27, 45, 108.

<sup>899</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:67.

<sup>900</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, 29 May 1775, in *Adams Family Papers*. Adams’ revolutionary ardor is evident in his closing remarks, “Oh that I was a Soldier! -- I will be. -- I am reading military Books. -- Every Body must and will, and shall be a soldier.” *Ibid.*

letter, Washington appended a question he intentionally left unanswered, “But can a virtuous Man hesitate in his choice?”<sup>901</sup> By referring to virtue as a quality that ought to influence a man’s point of view of the conflict, I believe that Washington acknowledges here that his involvement in the Revolutionary movement is not merely political, but morally binding.

Washington’s military involvement to the cause was confirmed by yet another congressional assignment related to the armed forces. On the third day of June, the Congress moved and resolved that a committee of five be appointed to provide an estimate of the amount of money necessary to be raised for the use of the Continental Army. Washington was among the five selected for the task.<sup>902</sup>

On June 2, when John Hancock, president of Congress, laid before the delegates a letter from the Provincial Convention of Massachusetts about the need for a general direction of America’s defense, it was apparent that consensus, above all, would be needed for the constitution of the all-American army. But the topic perhaps being too large and too serious to discuss at once, the letter was “Ordered to lye on the table” for a number of days.<sup>903</sup>

Signed by Joseph Warren, president of the Provincial Convention of Massachusetts, this letter was a crucial one in forming the army. Besides its recommendation that “the regulation and general direction of” the forces from various colonies be addressed, the letter also emphasized the vital need of the army’s subordination to civil authority. The fear of potentially usurping the power vested in the future commander in chief was widespread among American colonies and since it was obvious that “the sword should in all free states be subservient to the civil powers,” it was reasonable to advocate that the selection of the

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<sup>901</sup> GW to George William Fairfax, 31 May 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>902</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:80. The selection of committee members and other decision-making depended on the preferences of delegates from various colonies “whose situation and Circumstances” were often very different from one another. The geographic as well as cultural remoteness among the provinces made many call their colony their country. The distinct perspectives of the delegates necessitated “much Canvassing” on the congressional floor before any motion would “pass with the unanimous approbation.” Nevertheless, “Unanimity is the Basis on which we mean to rise,” wrote one delegate from Connecticut. Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, 3 June 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1.

<sup>903</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:76-78.

commander in chief be guided by the awareness of the need for steady civil superiority.<sup>904</sup> In other words, the delegates hoped for a general who would obey them.

On June 14, after it was resolved that six companies of riflemen “be immediately raised” in Pennsylvania, two in Maryland, and two in Virginia and that they march directly to the forces now stationed near Boston to obey “the command of the chief Officer in that army,” a motion was proposed and at once approved for creating an important committee responsible for drafting “Rules and regulations for the government of the army.” It was agreed that the man to head the five-man committee would be Washington.<sup>905</sup>

Since Washington had been appointed to several key military committees by the time of the selection of the commander in chief, the delegates must have placed much trust in him and counted on him as one of the leaders among the patriot servicemen. However, years later, Adams recorded in his autobiography that the selection of the commander in chief was accompanied by a degree of regional strife in which some Southern delegates festered feelings of “jealousy” of the American armies consisting principally of men from the New England colonies and pushed for appointing Washington.<sup>906</sup> The American armies in Massachusetts had been for almost a month commanded by Artemas Ward of that province, but it was apparent that most delegates took issue with his assuming the chief command.<sup>907</sup>

As far as desires for preferment are concerned, Adams claimed to have discerned that President Hancock “had an Ambition” to be nominated to the chief command, to which post he allegedly could lay a claim based on “his Exertions, Sacrifices and general Merit in the Cause of his Country.” In fact, Hancock ranked among the most despised of American patriots in the eyes of General Gage, the commander in chief of the British forces, who issued

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<sup>904</sup> Ibid., 2:76-79, 81, 83-84.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 2:89-90.

<sup>906</sup> John Adams autobiography, part 1, “John Adams,” through 1776, sheet 20 of 53, in *Adams Family Papers*.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid.; Martyn, *Life of Artemas Ward*, 108 (*inset*).

a proclamation that week offering a pardon to all that are willing to “lay down their arms” with the exception of Hancock and Samuel Adams “whose offences are of too flagitious nature,” pinpointing the leaders of the Revolution.<sup>908</sup> However, with regard to his martial expertise, Hancock only served as a militia officer and had no experience in the army. By all accounts, he wished to have at least the honor of the respectful “refusal of the appointment,” for if he entertained any vain hopes of being complimented by the high office, he may have been the only one with such sentiments among the delegates in attendance.<sup>909</sup>

Adams’s autobiography, however, ought to be treated with some caution as some modern historians emphasize. Written some three decades after the events, Adams’s recollection of Washington’s standing among the delegates as a candidate for the chief command was probably more favorable than it appears from Adams’s words.<sup>910</sup> In any case, it is still likely that some delegates were “very cool about the Appointment of Washington.”<sup>911</sup>

Although Washington’s association with other congressional delegates only enhanced his credibility among them, there were continuous disputations over a number of issues concerning the staffing of the leadership of the army. On June 14, an unknown Virginia delegate recorded that “Col. Washington has been pressed to take the supreme command of the American troops” that were encamped in Boston. “I believe [he] will accept the appointment,” continued the delegate, “though with much reluctance, he being deeply impressed with the importance of that honourable trust, and diffident of his own (superiour) abilities.”<sup>912</sup>

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<sup>908</sup> John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 20, in *Adams*; Thomas Pownall, ed., *The Remembrancer, or Impartial Repository of Public Events; for 1775*, 17 vols. (London: J. Almon, 1775), 1:91, <http://books.google.com/books?id=zTkZAQAIAAJ>.

<sup>909</sup> John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 20, in *Adams*; Alden, *George Washington*, 110.

<sup>910</sup> Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 114; Longmore, *Invention*, 160; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 68.

<sup>911</sup> John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 20, in *Adams*.

<sup>912</sup> “Extract of a letter from one of the Virginia delegates, to his friend (now in this city) dated June 14, 1775,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), June 23, 1775, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>; Virginia Delegate to Unknown, 14 June 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1.

Washington now sensed that his nomination is unavoidable. His unassuming estimation and modest opinion of himself made his converts firmer in their advocating the propriety of his appointment. Among these were Adams who shortly beforehand confided only to his second cousin Samuel Adams that he would “make a direct Motion” in Congress to bring the matter of appointing the supreme commander to a conclusion.<sup>913</sup>

Although Adams knew that the selection of a general was not the current point of debate, he felt that it represented one of the most awaited and touchy matters to be settled. Adams did not hesitate to declare that he had only one gentleman on his mind “for that important command, and that was a Gentleman from Virginia who was among Us and very well known to all of Us, a Gentleman whose Skill and Experience as an Officer, whose independent fortune, great Talents and excellent universal Character, would command the Approbation of all America, and unite the cordial Exertions of all the Colonies better than any other Person in the Union.”<sup>914</sup>

Washington, who according to Adams sat by the door, must have understood the significance of that momentous occasion. Adams’s proposal could not point to anyone else than to him. Any other ambitious man would have basked in the grandiloquence of Adams’s enumeration of his merits but Washington, based on Adams’s records, “as soon as he heard me allude to him, from his Usual Modesty darted into the Library Room.”<sup>915</sup>

Evidently, the enormous burden of the chief command was felt by everyone, and the risk of being soundly defeated by the British and suffering the tragic consequences was an

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<sup>913</sup> William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Services of Samuel Adams*, 3 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1865), 1:1, <http://archive.org/details/lifeservsamadams01wellrich>; John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 20, in *Adams*. “Accordingly,” wrote Adams in a lofty manner, “when congress had assembled I rose in my place” and delivered a short oration on the current crisis, the insecurity and concerns of the American population, the weakness of the organization of the patriot troops, and the havoc the British army would cause if Congress did not act in a more expeditious manner. Adams concluded his speech on the prevailing conditions of Americans by a making a motion that Congress “Adopt the Army at Cambridge and appoint a General.” *Ibid.*

<sup>914</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>915</sup> *Ibid.* Hancock’s countenance was expressive of “mortification and resentment” from being denied, as Adams believed, at least the honor of the offer under discussion (*Ibid.*, sheet 21).

ominous possibility. Washington's withdrawing from the room was in harmony with his modesty and discreetness in such situations. Therefore, I believe that it would be unjust to ascribe faint-heartedness to the commander-to-be in this instance.

After Washington left the room, Adams recalled, not all congressmen were of one accord about his nomination. Some of them "declared themselves against the Appointment of Mr. Washington," not on the grounds of having "any personal Objection against him" but rather due to territorial reasons. They feared that the New England army would despise having a general from one of the southern colonies.<sup>916</sup>

Among those who were "very explicit in declaring this Opinion" was Edmund Pendleton. His opposition to Washington is a bit puzzling point to historians. He was Washington's fellow delegate from Virginia during the First and Second Continental Congress.<sup>917</sup> He had also been Washington's longtime colleague in the House of Burgesses and Washington typically deferred to him when in need of an advice on legal matters.<sup>918</sup> Yet, Pendleton dissuaded others from favoring Washington and was "very clear and full against" his appointment to the supreme command.<sup>919</sup>

Biographers of Washington have generally avoided an analysis of this point for lack of any material evidence. Freeman's comment on the issue consists of a supposition that since "personalities were weighty in the Congress and in the politics of the time," Pendleton, who was one of Washington's close associates, would probably not have voted against him without Washington's solicitation.<sup>920</sup> On the other hand, Ferling argues that Pendleton's opposition was a result of his own choice, which afterward prompted Washington to strengthen their affiliation by asking him for another legal assistance and "convert Pendleton

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<sup>916</sup> Ibid., sheet 21.

<sup>917</sup> Ibid.; *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 1:23, 2:19, 242.

<sup>918</sup> Edmund Pendleton to GW, 3 July 1769, GW to Edmund Pendleton, [ca. May 1770], Edmund Pendleton to GW, 31 August 1772, Edmund Pendleton to GW, 10 January 1775, Edmund Pendleton, 21 April 1775, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 2:30-31; Knollenberg, *George Washington*, 27.

<sup>919</sup> John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 20, in *Adams*.

<sup>920</sup> DSF 3:434n72.

into his staunch supporter.”<sup>921</sup> Undoubtedly, Washington’s entreaty of Pendleton not to vote in his favor would have stood as a persuasive evidence of his genuine disinclination to accept the chief command, yet no specific proof of this kind has been found.

Adams claimed that Pendleton had no “personal Objection against” Washington and that the minor opposition to his appointment was strictly political.<sup>922</sup> This view is supported by their later interaction. Within a day or two, Washington asked Pendleton to draft his acceptance speech as well as his will, and he readily complied with both wishes.<sup>923</sup> Pendleton’s subsequent correspondence with General Washington continued to be polite and amicable in every sense. About one month into Washington’s chief command, Pendleton sent him a note that he concluded thus: “You have my most cordial wishes for success in every undertaking, who [has] the Honr to be with great esteem Dr sr Yr mo. Obt humble Servt. Edmd Pendleton.”<sup>924</sup>

In sum, it appears that Pendleton did not harbor any inimical feelings toward Washington himself either immediately before or after his election. Although one may interpret this fact to be conducive to the support of Freeman’s argument that Pendleton would hardly vote against his associate unless prompted, it needs to be emphasized that Pendleton’s preference for a New England general appears to have arisen from strictly political motives. Considering that Washington’s sense of patriotism to offer his services to his country was inveterate, though expressing diffidence about his own abilities and about his suitability for the command, Ferling’s stance on the issue therefore can be credited with more plausibility.

We also need to keep in mind that Washington was hardly apathetic to troubles and dangers of his countrymen. Two decades earlier, Washington wrote to the governor of

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<sup>921</sup> Ferling, *First of Men*, 115; Ferling, *Ascent*, 76-77; DSF 3:437n84.

<sup>922</sup> John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 21, in *Adams*.

<sup>923</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:92n; DSF 3:437n84; GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>924</sup> Edmund Pendleton to GW, 12 July 1775, in *PGW*.

Virginia of his devotion, “I would be a willing offering to Savage Fury: and die by inches, to save a people!”<sup>925</sup> Washington’s conscientious involvement against injustice, be it in the military field or on the political floor, was based on his deep-rooted obligation to render patriotic service—a duty that required one to relinquish personal interests and instead offered the acquisition of honor and virtue. Moreover, since his early military career, Washington sought to place himself in the forefront of action, not for any self-seeking interests, but to convince others of his diligence and dedication to his office.

During the sitting of the Continental Congress, many delegates naturally observed Washington very closely and evaluated possible consequences of his likely nomination. Silas Deane was one of those privileged to spend the majority of the last twenty-four hours before Washington’s appointment. Remarking on his character, Deane wrote, “The more I am acquainted with, the more I esteem him.” Deane admitted that he wished to cultivate fellowship with Washington, not from the perspective of any military aspirations, “but from the great Esteem I have of his Virtues, which do not shine in the View of the World by reason of his great Modesty but when discovered by the discerning Eye, shine proportionably brighter.”<sup>926</sup>

Eliphalet Dyer, another delegate from Connecticut, also gave a highly insightful first-hand account of Washington’s deportment during his attendance of the Congress.<sup>927</sup> Writing to Joseph Trumbull, who was about to be called the commissary general of the army, Dyer regarded the choice of Washington at the head as very agreeable not only because it appeased territorial concerns, but also because “he is a Gent. highly Esteemed by those acquainted with him.” Dyer considered him “clever, & if any thing too modest.” Washington appeared to him to be “discret & Virtuous” and certainly “no harum Starum ranting Swearing fellow but

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<sup>925</sup> GW to Robert Dinwiddie, 22 April 1756, in *PGW*.

<sup>926</sup> Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, 16 June 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1.

<sup>927</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:15.

Sober, steady, & Calm. His modesty will Induce him,” Dyer prognosticated, to give ear to the counsel of his officers.<sup>928</sup>

Recorded observations of men who met Washington personally around the time of his appointment seem to concord in that there was a special mien of modesty about his person that only contributed to the elevation of his already dignified bearing. His unpretentious character, it seems, additionally encouraged his observers to emphasize his “sacrificing private Fortune independant Ease, and every domestic pleasure” for the sake of obligingly answering the call of his country. Deane regarded Washington as the fitting model of imitation for all the youth, for he “Unites the bravery of the Soldier, with the most consummate Modesty & Virtue.”<sup>929</sup> Adams likewise believed Washington accepted the supreme command from “duty, not interest nor glory, which I think has been strictly true with the General from the beginning, and I trust will continue to the end.”<sup>930</sup>

Such descriptions of Washington may be suspected of magnification, especially with respect to the cultural emphasis on virtue as opposed to corruption.<sup>931</sup> Indeed, “aspirations to virtue” were most devoutly entertained by a large number of the Revolutionary leaders, who like Washington, were first-generation gentlemen. But on the other hand, the unanimity of voices saluting Washington’s genteel, unpretentious behavior can hardly be ignored.<sup>932</sup>

As mentioned, the objections that were raised against Washington’s nomination were not really against his own person but were rather related to territorial concerns with respect to his acceptance by the Northern colonies and their officers. “Pains were taken out of doors” of the Congress “to obtain a Unanimity” on the question of Washington’s commission. The

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<sup>928</sup> Ibid., 2:190; Eliphalet Dyer to Joseph Trumbull, 17 June 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1.

<sup>929</sup> Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, 16 June 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1.

<sup>930</sup> John Adams to Robert R. Livingston, 16 June 1783, in Kaminski, *Founders on the Founders*, 485.

<sup>931</sup> Greene, “Concept of Virtue,” 31.

<sup>932</sup> Rozbicki, *Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 185.

majority “were generally so clearly in favour of Washington” that those “several Gentlemen” that had preferred a general from New England eventually “withdr[e]w their Opposition.”<sup>933</sup>

On June 15, the Congress passed a resolution “That a General be appointed to command all the continental forces, raised, or to be raised, for the defence of American liberty.” It was also agreed that the monthly salary of five hundred dollars was befitting this high station. Again, Washington’s sense of modesty and discretion dictated that he stay out of doors during this resolution. In harmony with the genteel code of restraint, Washington intentionally refrained from commenting on how he would measure up to the call—he preferred being adjured to accept. When Thomas Johnson Jr., a delegate from Maryland, proposed Washington’s name for the supreme command, no one else suggested another.<sup>934</sup> The voting took place by the casting of ballots “when George Washington, Esq. was *unanimously* elected.”<sup>935</sup> The delegates’ consensus gave the new general an added assurance that the chief command was, like twenty years earlier, “press’d upon me by the genl voice of the Country.”<sup>936</sup> Washington always tended to view his unanimous appointments almost in the vox populi vox Dei perspective.

Assisted by Pendleton, Washington’s acceptance speech, which had probably been contemplated for several weeks, is in and of itself a remarkable proclamation of public virtue.<sup>937</sup> After his due acknowledgement of “this distinguished testimony of their Approbation” (which approval of his conduct had always been most gratifying to him since

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<sup>933</sup> John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 21, in *Adams*.

<sup>934</sup> *Ibid.*; *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:18-19.

<sup>935</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:91 (my italics); DSF 3:436.

<sup>936</sup> GW to Mary Ball Washington, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

<sup>937</sup> DSF 3:437; *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:92n; Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), 6-7, [http://books.google.com/books?id=V-XP\\_riSQU8C](http://books.google.com/books?id=V-XP_riSQU8C). Pendleton was one of the most gifted of orators of his day.

his early military career) and expression of his modesty, Washington made a significant gesture of disinterestedness by requesting to serve without pay.<sup>938</sup>

Like once before during his early military career, he wished to enter the service as an unpaid volunteer to shield himself from possible accusations that mercenary considerations have enticed him to seek the office. “I do not wish to make any proffit from it: I will keep an exact Account of my expences; those I doubt not they will discharge & that is all I desire,” said he.<sup>939</sup> Washington’s official response contained the vital elements of the American Revolutionary understanding of the concept of a public virtue: a citizen’s virtuous character and sacrifice of his “interests to the greater needs of the whole.”<sup>940</sup>

*“It Is a Duty We Owe Our Country—a Claim Posterity Has on Us”*

It is not known on what day Washington began to wear his uniform to congressional meetings, but the mere fact that he chose to do so carries some underlying implications that cannot be ignored. Washington’s wearing his uniform during the Second Continental Congress is often interpreted as an evidence of his ambition to secure the chief command of the American armies. After all, why would Washington don his uniform in a congressional session (it was his own decision) that was expected to appoint the chief commander and he knew his name was likely to be considered for the post? Indeed, it is convenient to readily accept the most apparent interpretation as valid. However, it is still an assumption that merits further reflection on the historical context of events.

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<sup>938</sup> GW to John Hancock, 24 June 1775, Transcripts of Letters from George Washington, 1775-83, 9 vols., in *Papers of the Continental Congress*, 1:1, <http://www.fold3.com/image/#442748>; Address to the Continental Congress, [16 June 1775], in *PGW*; GW to Robert Dinwiddie, [10 June 1754], in *PGW*.

<sup>939</sup> Address to the Continental Congress, [16 June 1775], in *PGW*.

<sup>940</sup> Robert E. Shalhope, “Republicanism and Early American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (April 1982): 334-35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1918756>.

First, it is to be remembered that in late May 1775 (the date of Adams's letter informing us of Washington's wearing his uniform), Washington already was regarded as a military commander.<sup>941</sup> Five independent companies from Virginia looked to him for direction and, in general, he was an indisputable commander of his province and enjoyed a due recognition elsewhere. In Congress, his advice was earnestly sought on issues relative to the armies and was appointed to crucial military committees. As far as a certainty of an armed resistance was concerned, everyone knew that the die had been cast more than a month earlier at Lexington and Concord, marking the beginning of warfare.

Washington later repudiated having made any allusions or "insinuation" (his own word) of a desire for the chief command. In fact, he claimed to have even resisted the post.<sup>942</sup> Nevertheless, Washington must have been highly aware of what kind of impression he would make on other delegates that had never seen the hero of the Monongahela in his uniform. Washington knew that his physical constitution was particularly conspicuous and in some respects capable of striking others with awe.<sup>943</sup> Measuring at least 183 cm, Washington stood about a head higher than most of his fellow delegates in Congress and thus was naturally a figure difficult not to notice.

Second point worth reflecting upon is the way Washington comprehended his role in serving his country. He believed that his availability to serve his country's needs is something that is expected of him, both as a member of the gentry class and as a citizen.<sup>944</sup> Washington's thoughts often encompassed not only the immediate present but also the prospects of his place in history, especially with regard to his acquisition of honor and preservation of good reputation. For instance, in the early stages of the Revolutionary War, Washington

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<sup>941</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, 29 May 1775, in *Adams Family Papers*.

<sup>942</sup> GW to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>943</sup> In 1752, Robert Dinwiddie's first impression of GW was very favorable and it turned out to be a crucial moment in GW's early career. Another readily detectable good first impression was made upon GW's first meeting with William Shirley.

<sup>944</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 104.

commended his younger brother John Augustine for his involvement in the conflict for “it is a duty we owe our Country—a Claim posterity has on us.”<sup>945</sup>

Interestingly enough, despite his zeal in proving his military gallantry during the French and Indian War, Washington was particularly fond of leading an arcadian life on his Mount Vernon farms during the interwar period. Although he was at liberty to choose his path, Washington probably felt morally obliged to forgo his personal interests and preferences and respond to the call of the Providence bidding him to proffer his abilities and time to the cause at hand for the good of the nation.

This interpretation can present an explanation of Washington’s somewhat enigmatic personality and a seeming discrepancy between his correspondence and nonverbal communication. Washington did not blatantly lie to his wife when he wrote that “far from seeking this appointment I have used every endeavour in my power to avoid it.”<sup>946</sup> It is reasonable to argue that he, like anyone else would have, flinched at the prospect of being nominated to head the American armies. Many months before he attended the Second Continental Congress, he must have apprehended that, should a Continental Army be established, he would be considered for the chief command of troops from his colony at least, which would make him, by implication, a prospective candidate for the general of the armies.<sup>947</sup>

“I was apprehensive I could not avoid this appointment,” Washington promptly admitted to Martha after his appointment. By claiming to have attempted to avoid this high honor, Washington in all likelihood referred to his initial resistance to an acquiescence of his role “a kind of destiny” now placed before him. As much as he may have been loath to

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<sup>945</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 31 March 1776, in *PGW*. Some of GW’s words may be construed as a belief in the notion that the countries’ histories are not altogether contingent on the whims of individuals but that they are guided by a supernatural power. “At best, I have only been an instrument in the hands of Providence,” GW later summed up his role in the Revolution. GW to Lucretia Wilhelmina van Winter, 30 March 1785, in *PGW*.

<sup>946</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>947</sup> Alexander Spotswood to GW, 30 April 1775, in *PGW*.

comply with the daunting task, which he felt the Providence bade him to fulfill, Washington seems to have overcome his self-serving concerns for the sake of, what he termed, “some good purpose.”<sup>948</sup>

Although daunting and challenging, Washington’s subjection of his private concerns and subsequent assumption of public office substantiates Wood’s argument that the apparent “private” exploitation of “public” posts in colonial America was, in fact, rather “public” exploitation of “private” capacity. *Noblesse oblige* of the traditional social stratification of the pre-Revolutionary era prescribed that high public offices should be entrusted only to those who were capable of bearing such heavy responsibilities—the privileged few—who were to conduct themselves accordingly.<sup>949</sup>

In this respect, Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson further explained in 1755 that “Men of wealth . . . as they are exempted from the lower and less honourable employments . . . are rather more than others *obliged* to an active life in some service to mankind. The publick has this claim upon them: the divine providence calls them to extend their views of publick good . . . and employing all their weight and influence in society for some generous purposes.”<sup>950</sup> Washington long aspired to become a well-to-do and influential member of the colonial gentry class and he certainly was one by the time of the Revolution. I believe that his drive for recognition correlated with his deep-rooted sense of patriotic duty—it seems to have been one coordinated lifelong endeavor for “esteem and respect of [his] countrymen and . . . [his] place in history.”<sup>951</sup>

Washington’s acceptance of his “destiny” (at another time he called it “a kind of unavoidable necessity which has led me into this appointment”), which I suspect was not an

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<sup>948</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>949</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 83; *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1835), s.v. “noblesse oblige” is here defined as “quiconque prétend être noble, doit se conduire noblement.”

<sup>950</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: Sold by A. Millar, 1755), 2:113, <http://www.archive.org/details/systemmoralphilo02hutc> (my italics).

<sup>951</sup> Abbot, “Uncommon Awareness of Self,” 275-76.

instantaneous decision, did not necessarily have to challenge him to defy his conformity to the current genteel rules of etiquette which decried one's overt ambition for power but rather make him reevaluate how to make himself available modestly. The hopefuls were obliged to seek "support with such delicacy of phrase as to avoid the appearance of doing so" and even to "cloak aspiration in modesty."<sup>952</sup> Hence, Washington found himself in a situation that demanded that he make himself a serviceable "instrument in the hands of Providence" and yet to do so without breaching any of the genteel moral precepts that would impair his honor and repute.<sup>953</sup>

This course of action was widely believed to be meant to be so. Proper gentlemen and men of experience were expected to be placed (elected) by the "common Herd" to prominent offices where they could serve well their countrymen.<sup>954</sup> The social mores of the day were thus perfectly reconciled when it appeared that Washington exuded a laconic nonchalance and that he was actually "thrown . . . upon this Service" (his own words) by the surrounding circumstances rather than by any of his own deliberate efforts.<sup>955</sup>

Washington further informed his adoptive son John Parke (Jacky), who lived at Mount Vernon with his mother, that "it is an honour I neither sought after, or was by any means fond of accepting" due to lack of experience and ability to head such a momentous cause. Washington knew he could not pledge more than "close attention, and an upright Intention. for the rest I can say nothing."<sup>956</sup>

Altering his words a little, Washington again reiterated the true nature of his sentiments on the issue of accepting the chief command to his wife's brother-in-law, "It is an honour I by no means aspired to—It is an honour I wished to avoid." He sincerely hoped that

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<sup>952</sup> GW to John Parke Custis, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*; Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the Making*, 70; Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 41.

<sup>953</sup> GW to Lucretia Wilhelmina van Winter, 30 March 1785, in *PGW*.

<sup>954</sup> James Wood to GW, 7 July 1758; GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>955</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>956</sup> GW to John Parke Custis, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

history would remember him as entertaining “no desire” or making no “insinuation of mine” for the powerful position. The two major reasons for his reluctance, Washington said, consisted of his unwillingness to relinquish his domestic felicity and a lack of sufficient leadership skills. “But the partiality of the Congress added to some political motives, left me without a choice,” he concluded.<sup>957</sup>

The fourth family member (unless some letters were lost) that Washington notified about his reluctance to accept the supreme command was his younger brother John Augustine. It is “an honour I neither sought after, nor desired,” Washington said, pointing to his inadequate abilities “to conduct a business so extensive in its nature, and arduous in the execution.”<sup>958</sup>

The five Independent Companies of Virginia that Washington superintended were not left out either. In a joint letter bidding them adieu, Washington stated that it was “an honour I did not aspire to—an honor I was solicitous to avoid upon full conviction of my inadequacy to the importance of the service.”<sup>959</sup>

*“The World and Posterity Might Probably Accuse Me of Inconsistency and Ambition”*

Among the preserved relevant documents from 1775, I have hardly found any that would not commend Washington for his genteel character. By all accounts, his principles were meritorious and his demeanor mannerly. The congressmen in Philadelphia elected him to the supreme command *nemine contradicente*, an honor that evaded the subsequent election

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<sup>957</sup> DSF 4:24; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 2:181; GW to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*. By “partiality” and “political motives”, Washington probably refers to the much debated political expediency of appointing a General that would not misuse his authority and would be accepted by both the Northern and Southern colonies, see Longmore, *Invention*, 171-83.

<sup>958</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 20 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>959</sup> GW to the Officers of Five Virginia Independent Companies, 20 June 1775, in *PGW*.

of other key generals, such as Artemas Ward, Horatio Gates, Charles Lee, or Philip Schuyler.<sup>960</sup>

Yet, by today's standards, it may seem that Washington's modesty was a bit overdone and perhaps even too conspicuous. But in the Revolutionary era of politics, a charge that one openly sought an office for egoistic or aggrandizing reasons ranked among the cardinal offenses that literally ruined a gentleman's reputation. In 1775, Reverend David Griffith remarked in his sermon that "selfishness and ambition" was the most frequent error of man. Self-serving pursuits originated in one's "insatiable passion of . . . avarice" and a man's "fondness for Power [was] incontrollable."<sup>961</sup> Craving for power increased "like a dropsical thirst . . . the more they are indulged," wrote Landon Carter in his diary in 1770, the more elevated authority becomes the sole "object of . . . pursuit."<sup>962</sup>

Washington seems to have been keenly aware of the dangers of potential criticisms of his ambition for power, even if they were not based on truth. Jonathan Boucher, who had been a tutor of Washington's adoptive son until the Revolution (when Boucher denounced the patriot cause), warned the members of the Continental Congress that "ambition and Lust of Power above the Laws, are such predominant Passions in the Breasts of most Men, even of Men who escape the Infection of other Vices."<sup>963</sup> Boucher's remarks may have been directed against such statesmen whose beliefs accorded with James Wilson's point of view, for "he

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<sup>960</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 2:97, 99. One exception being Israel Putnam, the fourth major general, who was also elected unanimously.

<sup>961</sup> David Griffith, *Passive Obedience Considered: In a Sermon Preached at Williamsburg, December 31st, 1775* (Williamsburg, VA: A. Purdie, [1776]), 6-14, 18-19, 23, quoted in Greene, Bushman, Kammen, *Society, Freedom, and Conscience*, Jellison, 45.

<sup>962</sup> Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778*, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1965), 1:505, quoted in Greene, Bushman, Kammen, *Society, Freedom, and Conscience*, Jellison, 45.

<sup>963</sup> Jonathan Boucher to GW, 6 August 1775, in PGW; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 2:289-90; [Boucher], *Letter from a Virginian*, 7.

was far from thinking the ambition which aspired to Offices of dignity and trust, an ignoble or culpable one.”<sup>964</sup>

Amid deep dissatisfaction with the British ministers, American colonists naturally engaged in thoughtful discussions about what kind of leaders should occupy the colonial governmental positions. Corruption, depravity, and lust for power were decried as the most serious of contemporary sins and stood at the other end of the spectrum of attributes to a virtue and honor. Washington had sought honor and approbation of his conduct since his early military career and such respect still mattered to him more than his military expertise, which he knew was limited when compared to many of the distinguished British officers.

Many of Washington’s biographers have generally avoided or have addressed the topic of explaining the perplexing contrast of conduct between Washington’s early and later years only in a cursory manner. How could Washington who had from his adolescence actively curried favors from his superiors for various advantages and vied for recognition and prominence become a man of reserve preoccupied with modesty and diffidence since the time of the Revolution? Did his aspiration and fearlessness of the French and Indian War subside or did he learn to conceal them behind a mask of demureness?

Some may believe that Washington’s development during the interwar period passed through a nearly thorough behavioral metamorphosis that made him forsook or radically modify his early aspirations. Freeman, whose views seem to accord with this theory, postulates that “if ambition had been the dominant of his life” during his early military career, Washington matured sufficiently enough that he “was almost transformed” by the time of the

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<sup>964</sup> August 14, 1787, *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, ed. Max Farrand, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875, Library of Congress, vol. 2, image 287-88, <http://lcn.loc.gov/11005506>.

Revolution. Freeman also adds his defense of Washington's character by stating that the Founding Father "never defaced the virtue [of modesty] by professing himself humble."<sup>965</sup>

On the other hand, ambition for the chief command has been imputed to the American hero by some of his more modern biographers (Ellis and Ferling). Washington's modesty is therefore perceived to be a social necessity that safeguarded him from potential charges of ambition for power. Ellis, for example, suggests that Washington had "considerable trouble acknowledging his own ambitions" and that his chariness about accepting the chief command was "not so much a lie as an essential fabrication" that served to shield him from accusation of ambition.<sup>966</sup> In his latest biography of the Founding Father, Ferling likewise claims that the general "was not as disinterested as he wished others to believe."<sup>967</sup>

It will be remembered that Washington's acceptance of the command of the Continental Army was not the first to be accompanied by his diffidence. Twenty years earlier when Washington anticipated his commission to the chief command of the Virginia Regiment, he stated that he wished "to avoid going to the Ohio again" because, in part, he regarded himself "unequal to the Task." Moreover, he conditioned his assuming of the office by it being "press'd upon me by the genl voice of the Country." By deliberately eschewing solicitations and "proposals," Washington knew he would place himself in a better position for meriting "the esteem and notice the Country."<sup>968</sup>

His deportment was of course becoming more refined and manners polished as he matured and earned increasing recognition, but the general tenor of Washington's numerous letters evince that he never forsook his aspiration to render service to his country and to merit the approbation from his countrymen, two honorable objectives that seem to have converged early in Washington's mind.

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<sup>965</sup> DSF 3:448.

<sup>966</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 70.

<sup>967</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 256.

<sup>968</sup> GW to Mary Ball Washington, GW Charles Lewis, GW to Warner Lewis, 14 August 1755, in *PGW*.

Washington certainly was not the only one with such mindset. In his book on the American character during the Revolutionary War, Charles Royster puts forth a similar argument when he notes that “American officers compounded their sense of honor with constant awareness of their own patriotism.” Many of them believed that they actually “personified” the worthy goals of fighting for the nation’s freedom.<sup>969</sup>

One soldier recorded his ruminations during his coach ride to join the army: “Dreams of glory . . . sometimes crossed my imagination . . . I perceived the necessity of active duty, which should leave me no time for reflection.”<sup>970</sup> Another recalled, “My Patriotism was pure and irristable, including all the principles of social and Public virtue . . . offering up on the Altar of Public weal, the sacrifice of my private interest and social Felicity . . . the recital of dangers only increased my arder, thus wound up in the Political inthusiasm of the times, to be inactive was to me an intolerable burthen.” For many, the prospect of being honored with recognition and glory by fighting for the liberties of their countrymen was highly appealing.<sup>971</sup>

The word “honor” meant more than self-esteem of the individual, it had a strong communal connotation. A gentleman could hardly aspire to honor if his claim to respect was not seconded by public acknowledgment. “To have honor and to be honored were very close, if not the same.”<sup>972</sup> During the Revolutionary drama, “a Soldier’s honor is his life,” wrote one officer.<sup>973</sup> Another officer who professed to have enlisted in the Continental Army “from the

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<sup>969</sup> Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 88.

<sup>970</sup> Alexander Graydon, *Memoirs of His Own Time. With Reminiscences of the Men and Events of the Revolution*, ed. John Stockton Littell (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1846), 146-47, <http://www.archive.org/details/ofhisowntime00grayrich>.

<sup>971</sup> “Memoirs of Brigadier-General John Lacey, of Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 25, no. 1 (1901): 11, <http://www.archive.org/details/pennsylvaniamaga25histuoft>.

<sup>972</sup> Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 207.

<sup>973</sup> Second Soldier, letter to the editor, April 30, 1779, *Providence Gazette*, May 8, 1779, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>.

most disinterested motives” remarked that “honor” was “the only jewel worth contending for.”<sup>974</sup>

In an effort to establish an argument about whether Washington cloaked his ambitions or not, it needs to be said that his ambitions proved to be “laudable” in the sense that he intended to serve his country selflessly and he never actually blatantly misused his powers.<sup>975</sup> To Washington’s credit, historical retrospection of his use of authority, resignations and virtually all first-hand accounts attest that he was not lying when he wrote to Hancock (words that were expected to go public) during the first year of the Revolutionary War that “it will ever be my highest ambition to approve myself a faithful Servant of the Public.”<sup>976</sup>

Although Washington learned to be modest, his earlier gallant military service and a number of large-scale economic ventures indicate that he “was far from timid” in his pursuits.<sup>977</sup> Irrespective of whether he read Samuel Davies’s sermon of 1755, Washington likewise believed that the Providence had a hand in preserving his life perhaps “for some important Service to his Country.”<sup>978</sup> Allowing for these circumstances, it would be more precise to state that instead of feigning diffidence and modesty, which were becoming a second nature to him by 1775, Washington was not timid to wittingly face whatever Providence had in store for him.

In his later years, Washington apprehended that he would be accused of lusting for power either by his contemporaries or by future generations. Even after his resignation from the chief command and retirement to his home at Mount Vernon, he feared that “the world and Posterity might probably *accuse* me of *inconsistency* and *ambition*.” Despite often being

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<sup>974</sup> John Lamb to GW, 19 August 1779, in Isaac Q. Leake, *Memoir of the Life and Times of General John Lamb, an Officer of the Revolution, Who Commanded the Post at West Point at the Time of Arnold’s Defection, and His Correspondence with Washington, Clinton, Patrick Henry, and Other Distinguished Men of His Time* (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell, 1857), 226, <http://www.archive.org/details/memoirlife00leakrich>.

<sup>975</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>976</sup> GW to John Hancock, 18 April 1776, in *PGW*.

<sup>977</sup> Longmore, *Invention*, 175.

<sup>978</sup> Davies, *Religion and Patriotism*, 11-12n.

referred to as the general even after retirement, he considered “the character of *an honest man*” to be “most enviable of all titles.”<sup>979</sup>

To his contemporaries, the reins over his passions seemed to have a logical foundation. Gouverneur Morris recalled “that few men of such steady, persevering industry ever existed, and perhaps no one who so completely commanded himself . . . But the self-command to which I allude was of higher grade. He could, at the dictate of reason, control his will and command himself to act.”<sup>980</sup>

With this context in mind, it is easier to comprehend why Washington immediately after his appointment was so obsessed about repudiating any misconceptions or incriminations that he lusted for power. The fact that he wrote to his wife in length and “in the most solemn manner” about his not “seeking this appointment” deserves some analysis.<sup>981</sup> Several months before his departure for the Second Continental Congress, Washington spent a considerable amount of time at home with his family. There was no other person that had spent so ample time and certainly no one enjoyed so intimate relationship with Washington than his wife. She was unmistakably Washington’s closest and most confidential friend. That Washington was afraid that Martha could have suspected him guilty of selfish ambition is not very probable.

But being now officially commissioned the commander in chief of the Continental Army, there was hardly anyone else in the American colonies whose words attracted more notice and whose letters have aroused more curiosity. Later observers noted that Washington’s private letters “have frequently produced more effect on some states than the

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<sup>979</sup> GW to Alexander Hamilton, 28 August 1788, in *PGW*.

<sup>980</sup> Anne Cary Morris, ed., *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris, Minister of the United States to France; Member of the Constitutional Convention, etc.*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1888), 2:492, <http://www.archive.org/details/diarylettersofgo02morr>.

<sup>981</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, in *PGW*.

strongest exhortations of the Congress” and this letter probably did not constitute an exception.<sup>982</sup>

Moreover, the day after Washington wrote to Martha averring that he did not seek the chief command, he penned another letter to John Parke, his adoptive son, in which he mentioned his awareness of the public nature of personal communications. “As the publick Gazettes will convey every article of Intelligence that I could communicate in this Letter, I shall not repeat them,” he concluded.<sup>983</sup>

In view of Washington’s cognizance of the piqued public curiosity about his letters, it is not illogical to suppose that his explicit demarcation of his inclinations with respect to his acceptance of the chief command was written in anticipation of it being leaked out.<sup>984</sup> It is not known how many pair of eyes eventually read Washington’s letter to Martha, but logical reasoning suggests that he was at least mindful of its probability. Therefore, it can be claimed that Washington’s quest for public recognition (if not historical immortality) required him not only to merit honor by deeds but also by safeguarding the formation of authentic public opinion of him.

This ties with what has been identified as Washington’s “uncommon awareness of self: his strong sense that what he decided and what he did, and how others perceived his decisions and deeds, always mattered.” Although his careful preservation of his diaries and correspondence was not unique among the Founding Fathers, his “appetite for paperwork” was “unrivaled by any Virginian of his generation, perhaps including even Thomas Jefferson.”<sup>985</sup>

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<sup>982</sup> Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North-America, in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782*, 2 vols. (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), 1:122, <http://www.archive.org/details/travelsinnortha00griegoog>.

<sup>983</sup> GW to John Parke Custis, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>984</sup> See the Methodology section of the Introduction of this dissertation for a discussion of the private nature of personal correspondence.

<sup>985</sup> Abbot, “Uncommon Awareness of Self,” 277, 279.

But keeping his character unblemished necessitated not only freeing himself from the charges of seeking power but also indemnifying himself from probable future accusations, should he fail to fulfill the public expectations. Indeed, a sort of an insurance of his character is what Washington arranged also as is evident from his acceptance address to Congress, “But lest some unlucky event should happen unfavourable to my reputation,” Washington begged the gentlemen present to remember that he did not consider himself “equal to the Command” he had been commissioned to.<sup>986</sup>

To his kin Burwell Bassett, Washington wrote that he hoped that his direction of the armies would result in some public advantages “without Injury (from want of knowledge) to my own reputation.” But if the Revolutionary cause should result in a misfire, “more than probable my character” should suffer “along with it, as reputation derives its principal support from success.” Apprehensive of his possible shortcomings, Washington took pains to make sure his countrymen were familiar with the following disclaimer: “I shall not be deprived therefore of a comfort in the worst event if I retain a consciousness of having acted to the best of my judgment.”<sup>987</sup>

Again, with a slight variation, Washington wrote about the same subject to his younger brother John Augustine. “How far I may succeed is another point,” he cautioned. But he resolutely stated “that in the worse event” he had no misgivings about being held accountable for an undesirable outcome because “the blame ought to lodge upon the appointers, not the appointed” when the office “was by no means a thing of [his] own seeking” or attained by any schemes of his friends.<sup>988</sup>

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<sup>986</sup> GW to John Hancock, 24 June 1775, Transcripts of Letters from George Washington, 1775-83, 9 vols., in *Papers of the Continental Congress*, 1:1, <http://www.fold3.com/image/#442748>; Address to the Continental Congress, [16 June 1775], in *PGW*.

<sup>987</sup> GW to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>988</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 20 June 1775, in *PGW*.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

“WHEN WE ASSUMED THE SOLDIER, WE DID NOT <LAY ASIDE THE> CITIZEN”

Being “vested with full power and authority to act as you shall think for the good and Welfare of the service,” Washington’s ascent, which began in his adolescent years and continued more or less without interruption, culminated by reaching this apex. Although he was elected and commissioned by the Congress, whose occasional “orders and directions” he was to follow, there was no other elevated office (including the presidential chair in Congress) that commanded so much esteem and respect as the commander in chief of the Continental Army.<sup>989</sup>

Using a theatrical metaphor (and Washington’s lifelong enjoyment of theatrical plays makes it appropriate), Washington was inevitably the main actor in the theater of American rebellion against the British Empire. He was assigned to play the protagonist on a grand stage of action that immediately attracted masses of international audience. This great drama, Washington and others feared, would far surpass what he experienced during his early military career during the French and Indian War. After all, he now faced the greatest military power on earth that did not yet feel the bitter taste of a defeat.<sup>990</sup>

It was also a matter of record that it had been full sixteen years since Washington’s retirement from his active military duties. Since then he severed all connections with the army, not even drilling a militia company (until training the independent companies since early 1775). His experiences in the army consisted mainly of backwoods warfare on the Virginia frontier. The most notable military operation he served in—the Braddock’s campaign of 1755—ended in a debacle. “He was by no means an experienced commander. He had never

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<sup>989</sup> Commission from the Continental Congress, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>990</sup> David G. McCullough, *1776* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 47.

led an army in battle, never before commanded anything larger than a regiment. And never had he directed a siege.”<sup>991</sup>

With that in mind, Washington was keenly aware of the deficiency of his military expertise and therefore his reasons for fearing the loss of good reputation by facing the most formidable of all armies was not altogether groundless. His own limitations were not all that troubled him, for it was apparent that the American troops would be “outnumbered, outgunned, and outfinanced” by the superior British force.<sup>992</sup>

His willingness to accept the command and greatly risk being humiliated by the British army (and historians concur that it almost occurred were it not for the opportune weather conditions on the night of August 29, 1776, enabling a secret withdrawal of the American troops at the ill-fated Battle of Brooklyn) was undergirded by a deep-rooted sense of patriotism and love of his country.

If the American colonies hoped to ward off the malady of increasingly corrupted and liberty-restraining measures of the British governmental authorities, the patriots often referred to an antidote in the form of pure public virtue to save the American people from the debilitating disease. Having served in a number political capacities and having regularly conversed with learned men of his day, Washington of course was not in the dark about what ideals Americans envisioned. But not only did he understand the ideals, he propagated them by approaching the model of a disinterested citizen himself.

The approach of the Revolutionary crisis stirred public debates about corruption, in which Americans began, in a nostalgic manner, to evoke the blissful “Times of Simplicity and Innocence” of their forefathers devoid of lusts for wealth and opulence.<sup>993</sup> The spirit of ’76 called for public virtue, which term was in the eighteenth century understood as

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<sup>991</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>992</sup> Johnson, *George Washington*, 62.

<sup>993</sup> Draft of a Newspaper Communication, August? 1770, in *Adams Family Papers*; Wood, *Creation*, 110.

“willingness of the individual to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community” or as “a thorough disinterestedness in the procuring of” a “country’s welfare.”<sup>994</sup> Such “endearing and benevolent passion is the noblest which can be displayed,” Washington read in the Virginia Gazette several months before being commissioned to the high honor.<sup>995</sup> The “public Spirit, or in other Words, the Love of Country,” proclaimed the Anglican cleric James Sterling before the Maryland legislature, was “the Sovereign of social Virtues.”<sup>996</sup>

When thirteen new republics were established in 1776, Virginia was the only one that placed the goddess *Virtus* on its state seal, claiming virtue “as the genius of the commonwealth.” Jack P. Greene writes that the virtue Virginians (and I may add Washington) aspired to, was “the public virtue of self-control and moral rectitude that was itself the product of the private virtue of the individuals who composed the public.”<sup>997</sup>

In such socio-cultural milieu, Washington’s refusal to accept a salary for his chief command was a vital decision that signified his aspiration to put popularly upheld virtuous ideals into practice. His resolution not to receive “a farthing” or making “any proffit from” his chief command of the armies, but only to have his expenses discharged by the Congress sent out an unmistakable signal that his hitherto modesty was not faked for the sake of genteel propriety but constituted a vital element of his effort to merit the approbation of the people.<sup>998</sup>

Congress consented to his request and Washington indeed served without pay, a fact that stands unique among the noted generals of modern history.<sup>999</sup> When writing about

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<sup>994</sup> Wood, *Creation*, 68; Thomas Pollen, *The Principal Marks of True Patriotism* (Newport, RI: J. Franklin, 1758), 3, quoted in Greene, *Concept of Virtue*, 42.

<sup>995</sup> P., “To the Printer. On Love of Country,” Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg), February 16, 1775, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>.

<sup>996</sup> James Sterling, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency the Govenor [sic] of Maryland and Both Houses of Assembly at Annapolis, December 13, 1754* (Annapolis, MD: Jonas Green, 1755), 20, quoted in Greene, *Concept of Virtue*, 42.

<sup>997</sup> Greene, *Concept of Virtue*, 48.

<sup>998</sup> GW to Lund Washington, 26 November 1775, Address to the Continental Congress, [16 June 1775], in *PGW*. In a way, GW’s decision to decline a fixed salary for the chief command was prudent because Continental currency greatly depreciated during the war, see *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 19:399-400, 523-26; 22:406-07.

<sup>999</sup> Johnson, *George Washington*, 61.

Washington in the context of enlightenment ideals of his time, Garry Wills noted that the American hero possessed the “disinterested virtue” his soldiers “died for. He served for no pay, no power; only for praise.”<sup>1000</sup>

The association of money and wealth with corruption was one of the prevalent topics of discussion in the Revolutionary America. Excess of wealth was decried by advocates of classic republicanism and since Cromwell’s army was still not yet in distant history the fear of eventual transformation of the American ragtag soldiery into a permanent professional army was instilled in the colonists’ hearts.<sup>1001</sup>

Throughout the American provinces, men heard clergy preach that the moral decay of past kingdoms arose from “an insatiable lust” of prominent and able leaders. Such men are “voracious like the grave, they can never have enough, i.e. of power and wealth,” warned one minister in 1775. The accumulation of these was lucrative to the “false, designing, and detestable patriots” but highly destructive to the liberties of their country and an unrestrained revelry of such was only a precursory step to the “mortal distemper” of establishing a standing army.<sup>1002</sup>

Washington was doubtless pleased by a congratulatory letter from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, which expressed their admiration of his “disinterested Virtue and distinguish’d Patriotism” manifested by his leaving his domestic felicity and risking his life for the sake of the nation’s weal.<sup>1003</sup> “I only emulate the Virtue & publick Spirit,” Washington replied, that the Bay State exhibited by sacrificing “all the Comforts of social & political Life, in Support of the Rights of Mankind, & the Welfare of our common Country.”<sup>1004</sup>

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<sup>1000</sup> Wills, *Cincinnatus*, 194.

<sup>1001</sup> Greene, “Concept of Virtue,” 31; J. G. A. Pocock, “Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 129; Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 34.

<sup>1002</sup> Oliver Noble, *Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther . . .* (Newburyport, MA: E. Lunt and H. W. Tinges, 1775), 5, 30, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/43>.

<sup>1003</sup> Address from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, [3 July 1775], in *PGW*.

<sup>1004</sup> Address to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, [ca. 4 July 1775], in *PGW*.

Washington's character was spoken of favorably, if a bit begrudgingly, in contemporary British accounts as well.<sup>1005</sup> The following excerpt of a poem composed shortly after Washington's acceptance of the chief command contrasts his virtuous character—represented here by the Cincinnatus-like rurality—to the vain splendor of former British exploits:

The lustre of your former deeds, whole ages of renown,  
 Lost in a moment, or transferr'd to US and WASHINGTON!  
 .....  
 'Tis heav'n-born FREEDOM fires us all, and strengthens each brave son,  
 From him who humbly guides the plough, to godlike WASHINGTON.<sup>1006</sup>

It is not true that Washington's resignation from the chief command of the Continental Army was largely unanticipated. Ten days after Washington's acceptance of the chief command, the New York Provincial Congress (signed by its President Philip Livingston) expressed his "fullest Assurances" to the new general that after an accommodation of the differences with the Mother Country, "You will chearfully resign the important Deposit committed into Your Hands, and reassume the Character of our worthiest Citizen."<sup>1007</sup> Washington's reply was immediate and to the point, "When we assumed the Soldier," he said, "we did not <lay aside the> Citizen." We "shall . . . rejoice," Washington continued, in the "happy Hour" when the establishment of freedom on the American Continent will enable himself and his colleagues "to return to our private Stations."<sup>1008</sup> His indubitable avowal of his intention to willingly return his powers, if victorious, to the civil authorities built up the public virtuous model of the American general.

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<sup>1005</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 24.

<sup>1006</sup> "War & Washington," in Sewall, *Miscellaneous Poems*, 53.

<sup>1007</sup> Address from the New York Provincial Congress, 26 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>1008</sup> Address to the New York Provincial Congress, 26 June 1775, in *PGW*.

It was as if Washington's pledge to John Blair, president of the governor's council, almost two decades earlier when in command of the Virginia Regiment that he "shall make a prudent use of the Power" he was honored with was somehow perceived and believed by the men of the Second Continental Congress.<sup>1009</sup> Washington's military record and advocacy of disinterested patriotic service made him more trustworthy in the sense that "the confidence" that was placed in him "shall never be wilfully abused."<sup>1010</sup>

The commander in chief respected his congressional authority and even deferred to this constitutional body in matters that could justifiably be handled by himself. Shortly after the Declaration of Independence when hints of a possible peace offer were made by the emissaries of General Howe, Washington refused to receive the British general's letter addressed to "George Washington Esqr.," despite the British emissary's expression of regrets over the failure of delivery, for he claimed the enclosed communication was of civil rather than military nature.<sup>1011</sup> In the second attempt to deliver the letter, the addressee was changed "To George Washington Esq. &c. &c. &c." The letter was turned down again. Only when a proper recognition of his title "his Excellency General Washington" was inscribed on the envelope did Washington agree receive the communication.<sup>1012</sup>

A superficial view of this episode tempts one to inculcate Washington for "self-conscious vanity" and hyperbolic insistence on "punctilio" but, as Glenn A. Phelps argues, there were other less apparent issues to be concerned about. General Howe's overtures to negotiate with Washington directly bypassed the Congress, in fact, the only constitutional body to discuss such peace offers. By declining these British offers addressed to him

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<sup>1009</sup> GW to John Blair, 4-10 May 1758, in *PGW*; Tyler, *Virginia Biography*, 1:66-67.

<sup>1010</sup> GW to Francis Fauquier, 30 October 1758, in *PGW*.

<sup>1011</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 36, GW to John Hancock, 14 July 1776, in *PGW*.

<sup>1012</sup> GW to John Hancock, 17 July 1776, in *PGW*. Worthington Chauncey Ford, comp. and ed., *Correspondence and journals of Samuel Blachley Webb*, 3 vols. (New York: [Lancaster, PA: Wickersham Press], 1893), 1:156, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b4349553>.

personally, Washington demonstrated his reluctance to make any backroom deals and thus to disrespect congressional prerogatives.<sup>1013</sup>

Consequently, on July 17, 1776, the Congress officially endorsed Washington's conduct by passing a resolution that he "acted with a dignity becoming his station; and, therefore, this Congress do highly approve the same; and do direct that" all the commanders of the Continental Army receive only communication addressed to them "in the characters they respectively sustain."<sup>1014</sup>

#### *The Cautious Use of (Dictatorial) Powers*

While the congressional commission granted Washington "full power and authority" to conduct the war, he was nevertheless obliged to follow all "the rules and discipline of war" as well as occasional congressional "orders and directions."<sup>1015</sup> By the original congressional instructions, for instance, Washington was not permitted to "disband any of the men" that already were in service without further direction from Congress, nor was he empowered to fill up vacancies of officers of higher rank than a colonel without authorization of the respective provincial assemblies.<sup>1016</sup>

The congressional delegation of powers to the commander in chief called for a number of adjustments during the war and Washington was occasionally uncertain about what permissions had been granted to other officers or how to prudently wield his own authority.<sup>1017</sup> Washington's conservative exercise of his authority was put to perhaps the most crucial test twice in 1776 and once more in 1777 when he was granted semi-dictatorial

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<sup>1013</sup> GW to John Hancock, 14 July 1776, in *PGW*; Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 36.

<sup>1014</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 5:567.

<sup>1015</sup> Commission from the Continental Congress, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>1016</sup> Instructions from the Continental Congress, 22 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>1017</sup> Questions for the Committee, [ca. 18 October 1775], Minutes of the Conference, [18-24 October 1775], GW to The Board of War, 29 July 1776, John Hancock to GW, 2[-ca. 6] August 1776, in *PGW*.

powers. In both of these years, the advancing enemy troops approached Philadelphia close enough to necessitate a removal of members of the Congress from the capital for a safer venue. In order to prevent a total suspension of congressional management of the war effort, it was resolved that the commander in chief be delegated extraordinarily broad powers during the exigency.<sup>1018</sup>

On December 12, 1776, it was resolved that, “until the Congress shall otherwise order, General Washington be possessed of full power to order and direct all things relative to the department, and to the operations of war.”<sup>1019</sup> This delegation of power to Washington was both open-ended (Congress set no time constraints) and plenary. Not only was he granted authority to deal with the executive, but legislative and judicial matters as well.<sup>1020</sup>

Two weeks later, the endowment of magisterial powers was delineated in a greater detail. A resolution was passed, “That General Washington shall be, and he is hereby, vested with full, ample, and complete powers to raise and collect together, in the most speedy and effectual manner, from any or all of these United States” additional infantry, light horse, artillery, and engineers, and at his discretion to name officers, “. . . to take, wherever he may be, whatever he may want for the use of the army . . .”<sup>1021</sup>

During this period, Washington’s authority was akin to the powers granted to ancient Roman dictators.<sup>1022</sup> In the eighteenth century, the office of a Roman dictator was in many respects admired, for the term “had not yet acquired an evil modern resonance.” Washington considered the disinterested and patriotic virtues of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus and Fabius Cunctator worthy of emulation and, in a way, strove to become their latter-day

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<sup>1018</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 6:1027; Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 38, 203n38.

<sup>1019</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 6:1027.

<sup>1020</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 38, 203n38.

<sup>1021</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 6:1045-46.

<sup>1022</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 38, 203n38. In the Roman Republic, dictators were appointed only in times of an extraordinary exigency and their full plenary and dateless powers were expected to be relinquished after an alleviation of the crisis. Thus, classical republicanism regarded a dictatorship to be nothing more than a *pro tempore* measure “to preserve the fabric of civil society.” *Ibid.*, 38.

reincarnation.<sup>1023</sup> While the former was praised for returning his dictatorial powers to civil authorities and retiring to his farm (something Washington would later take pride in as well), the latter was applauded for liberating his country by conquering a superior Carthaginian army by his delaying military strategy (which Washington adopted for most of the Revolutionary War).<sup>1024</sup>

Yet, despite its advantages, the specter of tyranny and the potential abrogation of republican liberties would have loomed behind any man vested with such authority, which misgivings were not unfamiliar to the hearts of most Revolutionary statesmen.<sup>1025</sup> A similar foreboding led James Burgh, a London's schoolmaster and political dissident, one year before the outbreak of the war to caution that "all men possessed of power may be expected to endeavour to prolong it beyond the due time, and to increase it beyond the due bounds."<sup>1026</sup> But somehow any apprehensions of the congressmen, most of whom knew Washington personally, were assuaged by a conviction of the honest nature of the commander in chief's words that they were able to place a "perfect reliance" (their choice of words) on his not misusing the dictatorial powers.<sup>1027</sup>

A week after the forced evacuation of Congress from Philadelphia in December 1776, Washington cautioned Hancock that the exigency of the situation "will not admit of delay either in Council or the Field," for in case of General Howe's decision to invade the capital, he would face no obstruction "as ten days more will put an end to the existence of our Army."

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<sup>1023</sup> Wills, *Cincinnatus*, 20.

<sup>1024</sup> Lewis, *Inquiry into the Credibility*, 2:176; Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives. The Translation Called Dryden's*, cor. and rev. by A. H. Clough (Boston: Little, Brown, 1885), 1:377, <http://www.archive.org/details/plutarchslives01drydgoog>. Since the account of Cincinnatus has not been reliably verified, historians typically refer to it in terms of a semi-legend.

<sup>1025</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 38, 203n38.

<sup>1026</sup> Isaac Kramnick, "Republicanism Revisited: The Case of James Burgh," in *The Republican Synthesis Revisited: Essays in Honor of George Athan Billias*, ed. Milton M. Klein, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), 19; James Burgh, *Political Disquisitions: Or, an Enquiry into Public Erros, Defects, and Abuses. Illustrated by, and Established upon Facts and Remarks Extracted from a Variety of Authors, Ancient and Modern . . .*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for E. and C. Dilly, 1774), 1:106-07, <http://www.archive.org/details/politicaldisquis01burg>.

<sup>1027</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 6:1045.

As if laying out his arguments for justifying the concession of summary powers, Washington explained to the president of Congress that deferring to the legislative body, which was over a hundred sixty kilometers away, “every matter that in its nature is self evident” was greatly retarding the progress of the army.<sup>1028</sup>

Washington admitted that the privileges he was applying for might be too extensive to be bestowed on any individual, but using a medical language, he said, “desperate diseases, require desperate remedies.” Washington did not fail to add his customary assurance that he had “no lust after power but wish with as much fervency as any man upon this wide extended Continent for an Opportunity of turning the Sword into a ploughshare.”<sup>1029</sup> It appears that Washington developed a great trust in his self-restraint, which induced him not to shrink from such ambitious opportunities.

The fact that the spirit-raising American successes at the battles of Trenton and Princeton occurred during the time of Washington’s dictatorial period helped assure the congressmen that the resolution would have none but strictly salutary effects on the Revolutionary cause. When the news from Trenton reached Hancock, he congratulated the general and wished him further acquisition of “Glory” mainly because his “disinterested and magnanimous Behaviour . . . so highly merit[ed]” it.<sup>1030</sup> These words would have been highly commending for any gentleman, but before Washington received the letter, he dispatched his own missive to Hancock in which he emphasized his disinterestedness as well. Pledging that he would strive to the utmost of his abilities to “direct properly the powers” he had been vested with, Washington also promised that he would “advance those Objects and only those” that gave occasion to the issuance of the high honor.<sup>1031</sup>

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<sup>1028</sup> GW to John Hancock, 20 December 1776, in *PGW*.

<sup>1029</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1030</sup> John Hancock to GW, 1 January 1777, in *PGW*.

<sup>1031</sup> GW to John Hancock, 1 January 1777, in *PGW*.

It is worthy to note that even immediately following his victory at Trenton, Washington seems to have been more concerned about his moral standing than any acknowledgment of his military tactics. But that was in keeping with his aspirations, for he hoped that the contingent shortcomings would be imputed to the right causes rather than to his “want of zeal for my Country and the closest attention to her interests, to promote which has ever been my study.”<sup>1032</sup> The American general aspired less to become a brilliant commander and more to receive an approbation of his moral virtues.

In his official acknowledgment of the receipt of the congressional resolution that granted him “powers . . . of the highest Nature and al<most> unlimited in extent,” Washington centered on the correctitude of relinquishing his authority, “I shall constantly bear in Mind, that as the Sword was the last Resort for the preservation of our Liberties,” perhaps intentionally paraphrasing his own words to George Mason about eight years earlier, “so it ought to be the first thing laid aside, when those Liberties are firmly established.”<sup>1033</sup>

For the most part, Washington continued his military duties during his dictatorship as usual, deferring to civil authorities even in times when he could have acted on his own. For instance, in late January 1777, he forbore from acceding to a plan of William Shippen Jr., a superintendent of a New Jersey army hospital, for the establishment of general hospitals because he preferred to first obtain congressional “concurrence” for carrying out this proposed project that appeared both extensive and costly.<sup>1034</sup>

Another congressional resolution granting Washington extraordinary powers was passed on September 17, 1777. Although this proclamation had time and geographic limitations, Washington’s prerogatives within his jurisdiction were still of dictatorial nature:

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<sup>1032</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1033</sup> GW to George Mason, 5 April 1769, GW to the Executive Committee of the Continental Congress, 1 January 1777, in *PGW*.

<sup>1034</sup> GW to William Shippen Jr., 27 January 1777, in *PGW; Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 6:857.

*Resolved*, That General Washington be authorized and directed to suspend all officers who shall misbehave, and to fill up all vacancies in the American army, under the rank of brigadiers . . . ; to take, wherever he may be, all such provisions and other articles as may be necessary for the comfortable subsistence of the army under his command . . . provided, that the powers hereby vested shall be exercised only in such parts of these states as may be within the circumference of 70 miles [113 km] of the head quarters of the American army, and shall continue in force for the space of 60 days, unless sooner revoked by Congress.<sup>1035</sup>

With the approaching onset of cold weather in late 1777, the strength of the Continental Army was becoming increasingly reduced due to soldiers' insufficient clothing. In his letter to Hancock, Washington estimated that as much as "two thirds of the Army" would soon be "incapable of acting" for lack of shoes.<sup>1036</sup> Yet, the American "dictator" determined to exercise his newly granted prerogative to procure "provisions and other articles" cautiously, insisting that "delicacy and a strict adherence to the ordinary modes of application" be used.<sup>1037</sup> Officers who overextended the delegated authority to impress property were severely reprimanded by the general, for Washington regarded it as "an abuse that cannot be tolerated" because he knew it would disaffect his countrymen who were hardly likely to "relish such an exercise of power."<sup>1038</sup>

Washington's maxims of disinterested leadership made him defer to the state during the war whenever he believed certain issues could be adequately handled by the civil rather than military authorities. For instance, during the encampment at Valley Forge, Washington

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<sup>1035</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 6:1045-46, 8:751-52. Moreover, on October 8, 1777, GW was by Congress "empowered to order" any persons in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Delaware assisting the enemy forces "to be tried by a court martial." *Ibid.*, 9:784.

<sup>1036</sup> GW to John Hancock, 24 October 1777, in *PGW*.

<sup>1037</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 8:752; GW to Alexander Hamilton, 22 September 1777, in *PGW*.

<sup>1038</sup> Circular Casimir Pulaski and the Colonels of the Continental Light Dragoon Regiments, 25 October 1777, GW to Elbridge Gerry, 26 September 1777, in *PGW*. Despite the army being in dire need of clothing, GW exercised his dictatorial power only "in a few instances," preferring to delegate that responsibility to the civil authorities. GW to George Read, 8 November 1777, in *PGW*. See also Authority to Collect Clothing, ca. 1 November 1777, GW to William Livingston, 1 November 1777, GW to Thomas Johnson, 6 November 1777, Orders to Peter Adams, 7 November 1777, GW to Charles Pope, 8 November 1777, GW to Henry Laurens, 11 November 1777, in *PGW*.

notified the governor of New Jersey that a soldier of that state had been “taken in Arms on the side of the Enemy” by an American party. Although Washington was empowered to have the soldier tried on his own, he deferred the case to the state of New Jersey because he knew “they had laws fully competent to the punishmt of offenders of such a nature.”<sup>1039</sup>

After the judicature found the soldier guilty, Washington was still reluctant to sanction the conviction for reasons of being “not fully satisfied of the legality of trying an inhabitant of any State by military law” if that state had passed a provision to try such a case. The commander in chief believed the authority granted him by a congressional resolution to handle such cases was passed principally with the intent of its being applied in Pennsylvania where the civil government was highly inefficient at that time.<sup>1040</sup>

Robert Frost’s historic comment on Washington’s unfeigned modesty and self-control claims that he “was one of the few in the whole history of the world who was not carried away by power.”<sup>1041</sup> Although such a conjecture is beyond the scope of this paper’s research, it bespeaks Washington’s exercise of “constant self-restraint . . . , consistent deference to civilian supremacy,” and the way his legacy of disinterested use of power has continued to be perceived by many Americans and non-Americans alike long after his death. But it is to be reminded that in some instances Washington’s use of power can be viewed somewhat controversially as well.<sup>1042</sup>

In reaction to the intimidations of the enemy, “Dictator” Washington issued a proclamation bidding those that have taken sides with the British to swear allegiance to the American States in the presence of a general officer or militia commander. Those failing to do so within thirty days, were to be treated as “common enemies.”<sup>1043</sup> Later that year during the

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<sup>1039</sup> GW to William Livingston, 15 April 1778, in *PGW*.

<sup>1040</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1041</sup> Quoted in Smith, *Patriarch*, 359.

<sup>1042</sup> Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 259.

<sup>1043</sup> Proclamation concerning Persons Swearing British Allegiance, 25 January 1777, in *PGW*.

Valley Forge encampment, Washington issued another proclamation wherein he ordered all freeholders residing within the radius of 113 km (a range of his dictatorial authority as set by Congress) to thresh and give up all of their stored grain to commissaries of the Continental Army. Those refusing to comply had their grain seized by force and their loss only poorly remunerated.<sup>1044</sup>

Phelps argues that both of these actions leveled charges of the commander in chief's "supposed insensitivity to personal liberty." Since public approbation of his conduct constituted the *sine qua non* of his aspirations, Washington was always thin-skinned to any animadversion, especially one that shed a negative light on his professed virtue of disinterested use of power. The misinterpretations and contestations that followed the oath of allegiance proclamation resulted in Washington's decision not to enforce the edict. On the other hand, American leaders generally understood that the circumstances were dire enough for such decisive actions. "In the end," adds Phelps, "nothing came of the criticism."<sup>1045</sup>

Altogether, Washington's wielding of his powers during the times when Congress could not convene because of imminent danger posed by the enemy appears to have been cautious rather than venturesome. But even beyond these dictatorial periods, the general's wariness about unscrupulous exercise of his powers is apparent in his answer to Gouverneur Morris's suggestion to have the Continental troops march from Valley Forge into Philadelphia and under penalty of death confiscate food and articles from the stores and levy £100,000 on the inhabitants for the sake of the army. Not only was such a proposal incompatible with Washington's idea of a disinterested leadership, it would be regarded, he said, "as an arbitrary

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<sup>1044</sup> Proclamation on Threshing Grain, 20 December 1777, in *PGW*.

<sup>1045</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 39-40.

stretch of Military power—inflame the Country, as well as City, and lay the foundation of much evil.”<sup>1046</sup>

To Washington’s benefit, periods of unlimited power further increased his trustworthiness among American leaders and cemented their belief that the rebel troops were led a by a general that would never employ his authority against the civil government. In his eulogy, Gouverneur Morris attested that the American general “was fond of fame . . . He loved glory, but still more he loved his country. That was [his] master passion.”<sup>1047</sup>

*“This is the Seventh Year that He Has Commanded the Army, and that He Has Obeyed the Congress; More Need Not Be Said”*

Washington welcomed the high esteem given him by his countrymen, but wartime popular adulation lifted him to heights that took European visitors by surprise. One of these Europeans was Baron de Kalp, a distinguished German officer who in 1777 sailed to America to serve in the Continental Army as major general.<sup>1048</sup> The following year, he recorded that the American acclamation of their general eclipsed “all heroes ancient and modern; Alexander, Condé, Broglie, Ferdinand and the King of Prussia are not to be compared to him.” General Kalb noticed that “it is not only the lower classes” who admired him, “clever people, or those passing for such, have the same opinion, and this is said so often, that Washington believes it himself.”<sup>1049</sup>

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<sup>1046</sup> Ibid., 40; Gouverneur Morris to GW, 27-28 May 1778, GW to Gouverneur Morris 29 May 1778, in PGW.

<sup>1047</sup> Gouverneur Morris, *An Oration, upon the Death of General Washington* (New York: John Furman, 1800), 9, <http://www.archive.org/details/orationupondeath00morrriich>.

<sup>1048</sup> The Deane Papers, in *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1886*, 5 vols. (New York: Printed for the Society, 1887), 1:342-45, <http://www.archive.org/details/deanepapers04deangoog>; *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 8:638; Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers*, 9, 192.

<sup>1049</sup> Kalb to Broglie, 7 November 1778, in Benjamin Franklin Stevens, *B.F. Stevens's Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America, 1773-1783*... (London: Malby and Sons, 1889-95), no.

Although Washington was not prone to take personal credit for his military victories, the widespread acclamation of the American general was, in large measure, incited by his standing as a conspicuous “national symbol of the struggle for independence” from British oppression.<sup>1050</sup> Washington’s world was still “a world of kings” and voices that called for the elevation of the commander in chief to the royal pedestal resulted from this conceptual framework.<sup>1051</sup> It appears that they have mostly arisen from arguments propounded by Colonel Lewis Nicola in his letter to the commander in chief on May 22, 1782 and the reverberations that brought about the Newburgh conspiracy that threatened the use of force against Congress the following year.

Born in Ireland, Nicola achieved the rank of major in the British army by the time he sailed to the New World in 1766, a time when the colonies were still filled with sincere admiration for the British monarchy. Nicola eventually enlisted in the American army and during the war exchanged several letters with the commander in chief who “put great dependance” in him by garrisoning him at an important post at Fort Mifflin in Pennsylvania.<sup>1052</sup>

Nicola commanded a corps of invalids that consisted of eight companies of soldiers who despite being disabled for active service due to an injury or chronic illness, could render valuable service in garrisons, as guards, or as schoolteachers.<sup>1053</sup> Nicola had actually solicited the Congress for commissioning him to that capacity, contending that discharging such soldiers from service “without some provision would be inhuman to them & disadvantageous

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1987, quoted in Louise Burnham Dunbar, “A Study of ‘Monarchical’ Tendencies in the United States, from 1776 to 1801,” *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (March 1922): 35.

<sup>1050</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 24.

<sup>1051</sup> Brendan McConville, “A World of Kings,” in *Recent Themes in Early American History*, ed. Donald A. Yerxa (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 121.

<sup>1052</sup> *Ibid.*, 123; Dunbar, “A Study of ‘Monarchical’ Tendencies,” 41; GW to Lewis Nicola, 29 September 1777, in *PGW*.

<sup>1053</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 8:485.

to the publick.”<sup>1054</sup> To recompense the soldiers for their service, Nicola proposed to the commander in chief that Congress grant sufficient tracts of land “to the west of our frontiers” that would be placed under such a form of government as should be agreed by the new owners. He also provided a sketchy outline of a manner in which the government should be able to fully cover the differences caused by the depreciation of currency during the war.<sup>1055</sup>

Referring to the pecuniary distresses of the soldiery and the inability of Congress to satisfy their demands, Nicola feared that there was a danger of “a new scene of blood & confusion.” He was not a “violent admirer of a republican form of government” for its ineffectiveness in enforcing vigorous measures for the benefit of the society. The British form of monarchical government had its imperfections also, Nicola said, but with some legal restrictions imposed on the king, the constitution would reach the flawless quality “to which sublunary things are limited.”<sup>1056</sup> He contended that the war had manifested, especially to those in the army, “the weakness of republicks,” thus opening a way for a thoughtful discussion of the advantages of “a mixed government.” But due to the contemporaneous negative connotations of a monarchy per se, Nicola considered it necessary to institute a “more moderate” appellation. With certain legislative adjustments, he posited, there was a reasonable ground for “admitting the title of *king*, which I conceive would be attended with some material advantages.”<sup>1057</sup>

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<sup>1054</sup> Nicola to [Congress], March 1777, *Life in Letters (American Autograph Shop)* 2 (4) July 1939:149–51, quoted in Robert F. Haggard, “The Nicola Affair: Lewis Nicola, George Washington, and American Military Discontent during the Revolutionary War,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 146, no. 2 (June 2002): 148, <http://www.amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/201.pdf>. Nicola witnessed first-hand the indignity and privations of soldiers during much of the war. Many men in the army “were continually barefoot or wrapped rawhide around their feet,” they were in dire need of blankets, and their coats were torn, if they had one. Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington’s War: The Forging of a Revolutionary Leader and the American Presidency* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2004), 156, <http://books.google.com/books?id=JrN95xjXKC0C>.

<sup>1055</sup> Lewis Nicola to GW, [22] May 1782, with Observations, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697–1799, in *GWPLC*, images 264–65. Allegedly, it was GW’s “favourable reception” of Nicola that led the colonel to propound his thoughts to the general in full. Nicola prefaced his proposals by stating that the events he was writing about might never occur but since they were of considerable consequence, they required immediate and “mature deliberation.” *Ibid.*, image 258.

<sup>1056</sup> *Ibid.*, images 261–63.

<sup>1057</sup> *Ibid.*, image 265 (my italics).

Since Nicola apprehended that the substance of the letter might incense staunch republicans, he had hitherto kept it to himself and asked Washington, in case of his reprobation, to do likewise in order to avoid it “ever being disclosed to my prejudice.”<sup>1058</sup> Despite his plea that the general “suspend [his] opinion” until the whole letter is read, suggesting careful deliberation of the subject, Washington obviously needed no additional time for consideration because he sent his reply the same day.<sup>1059</sup> Nicola’s suggestions were well intentioned, courteous, and did not explicitly mention that Washington himself ought to be the next America’s sovereign, but the very submitting of convictions sympathetic to a monarchical form of government to a victorious general at the close of the war suggested implications that conflicted with Washington’s disinterested patriotism and his commitment to a virtuous exercise of power.

No other topic was probably more heatedly debated during the Revolutionary period than the proper disposition of power. American patriots “dwelt on it endlessly, almost compulsively.”<sup>1060</sup> During the War of Independence, William Tudor, former judge advocate of the Continental Army, delivered a public oration in Boston in which he apprised the gathered residents of the dangers of a “bondage [that] is ever to be apprehended at the close of a successful struggle for liberty, when a triumphant army, elated with victories, and headed by a popular general, may become more formidable than the tyrant that has been expelled. Witness the last century in the English history! witness the aspiring CROMWELL!”<sup>1061</sup>

During the Revolution, the figure of Oliver Cromwell was recalled frequently as a deterrence because American patriots recognized that his ascent and use of power was

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<sup>1058</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1059</sup> Ibid., image 258; GW to Lewis Nicola, 22 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 267.

<sup>1060</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 56.

<sup>1061</sup> General Orders, 10 April 1777, in *PGW*; William Tudor, “Oration Delivered at Boston, March 5, 1779,” in *Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America: Or, an Attempt to Collect and Preserve Some of the Speeches, Orations & Proceedings...*, ed. H. Niles (Baltimore: William Ogden Niles, 1822), 37, <http://www.archive.org/details/principlesactsof00nileuoft>.

incompatible with either classical or republican notions of leadership. Gouverneur Morris described him as “crafty” for dismissing “a tedious Wrangling Parliament” and establishing “a military Despotism.”<sup>1062</sup> Congressional delegates sincerely hoped the patriot officers would not resort to a similar coup since the army’s *esprit de corps* continued to plummet due to inadequate economic support. It is not known how much Washington read in his own copy of Cromwell’s biography, but his only preserved estimation of Cromwell, expressed in 1787 when he was sent a piece of antiquity allegedly possessed by the very Lord Protector, refers to him as one “of so remarkable a character.” However, it can be assumed that the selection of the adjective reflected the nature of the acknowledgment of the gift and the secular fame of the historic “character” rather than Washington’s admiration of his personality.<sup>1063</sup> Washington’s use of the word “remarkable” probably approximated Henry’s succinct description of Cromwell as “a great, but not a good man.”<sup>1064</sup>

In any case, great military leaders always impressed Washington. Perhaps one of the first books he purchased in his teens was a panegyric to the duke of Schomberg, seventeenth-century general who served in six European armies.<sup>1065</sup> Following his retirement from service in the French and Indian War, Washington ordered busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, Duke of Marlborough, Prince Eugene, and King of Prussia to bedeck the interiors of his estate.<sup>1066</sup> However, models that increasingly approximated his aspirations were found in classical antiquity, Cincinnatus and Cato, in particular.

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<sup>1062</sup> Gouverneur Morris to GW, 26 October 1778, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 11.

<sup>1063</sup> GW owned a copy of John Banks’s *A Short Critical Review of the Political Life of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1739), see “Settlement of the Daniel Parke Custis Estate, Appendix D: Inventory of the Books in the Estate, c. 1759”, in *PGW*, and Nash, “Inventory and Appraisalment,” in *Fairfax County Will Book J, 1801-1806, fol. 326*; GW to John Henry, 23 January 1787, Series 2: Letterbooks, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 13, images 326-27. “Remarkable” was defined in GW’s day as “observable, worthy of note,” see *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), s.v. “remarkable.”

<sup>1064</sup> John Henry to GW, 25 October 1786, in *PGW*.

<sup>1065</sup> “Washington’s Memorandum Cash Account,” *Smith*; Glozier, *Marshal Schomberg*, vii-viii; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. “Schomberg, Friedrich Hermann.”

<sup>1066</sup> Invoice to Robert Cary & Company, 20 September 1759, Invoice from Robert Cary & Company, 15 March 1760, in *PGW*. The requested busts were not available so nothing came of this order, see Robert Cary & Company, 10 August 1760, 28 September 1760, in *PGW*.

Amid the Revolutionary period's "whiggish obsession about abuse of power," Washington perused Nicola's suggestions "with a mixture of great surprise and astonishment" especially because he believed his hitherto personal conduct was a sufficient evidence of his opposition to such schemes.<sup>1067</sup> No single event in the war gave Washington "more painful sensations" than this notification of such persuasions being in existence among the soldiery, which he could not but view "with abhorrence, and reprehend with severity." While Washington, too, hoped for a full recompense of soldiers for their service, he regarded Nicola's schemes highly "disagreeable" and constituted "the greatest mischiefs that can befall" a liberated nation. Washington vowed to continue to plead the cause of the army but only "as far as my powers and influence, in a constitutional way extend," refusing to exert any vigorous measures Nicola had intimated.<sup>1068</sup> "Banish these thoughts from your Mind," Washington rebuked the colonel, "and never communicate, as from yourself, or any one else, a sentiment of the like Nature."<sup>1069</sup>

Apparently in a well-meaning way, Nicola wished to identify "the true cause" of the unfulfilled congressional promises to provide the veterans with adequate financial support and suspected that the cause lay in the weakness of the Union's governmental system.<sup>1070</sup> Ironically, Washington likewise preferred a national government with a sufficient "energy" rather than a weak union of republics.<sup>1071</sup> After all, the Cincinnati, a society of veterans

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<sup>1067</sup> Barry Schwartz, "George Washington and the Whig Conception of Heroic Leadership," *American Sociological Review* 48 (February 1983): 26; GW to Lewis Nicola, 22 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 267.

<sup>1068</sup> GW to Lewis Nicola, 22 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 267-68.

<sup>1069</sup> *Ibid.*, image 268. "Greatly oppressed in mind and distressed" by the general's rejoinder, Nicola wrote three more letters to GW within a few days, assuring that he was neither a "broacher" nor "encourager" of the designs he had submitted but that he merely echoed what he had heard "mentioned either directly or by hints." Lewis Nicola to GW, 23 May 1782, 24 May 1782, 28 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 290, 318 (quote), 406.

<sup>1070</sup> Lewis Nicola to GW, 28 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 407. Nicola "was astonished" that after declaring independence, none of the thirteen states adopted the monarchical constitution of the mother country "purged of its defects." *Ibid.*

<sup>1071</sup> Lewis Nicola to GW, 22 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 258.

among which Washington would later be the most distinguished member, typically toasted on the Fourth of July to “an increase of energy” in the national government.<sup>1072</sup> Given his presiding role in the nascent country, Washington was considered by many to be apolitical, but with regard to the American developing political spectrum he might as well be categorized among “dual Federalists” for supporting the ratification of the Constitution and endorsing Hamilton’s policies.<sup>1073</sup> Although Washington tended to be a less ardent advocate of vigorous federal government than Hamilton was, yet he did not escape invectives of some republicans that discerned in his presidency a reverberation of regal overtones, which criticism was painful for him to withstand.<sup>1074</sup>

Despite Nicola’s subsequent three penitent glosses, Washington is not known to have replied to any of them.<sup>1075</sup> Washington may have thought it a breach of his modest use of power to expatiate on the subject which could actuate, even if indirectly, a more widespread speculation about the possibility of demanding justice for the veterans by the use of force. Moreover, he was probably fully satisfied with his one answer (dated May 22), of which he made his own “exact copy” and had two of his aides, David Humphreys and Jonathan Trumbull, attest to it by subscribing their names—presumably for the purpose of having two witnesses testifying of his stance on the matter in case the subject resurfaced.<sup>1076</sup>

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<sup>1072</sup> Wallace Evan Davies, “The Society of the Cincinnati in New England 1783-1800,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (January 1948): 3-4, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1920944>; *Extract from the Proceedings of the New-York State Society, of the Cincinnati, Convened on the 4th of July, 1786 . . .* (New York: [s.n.], 1786), quoted in David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 69.

<sup>1073</sup> Jack N. Rakove, “The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George Washington,” in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, eds. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 279n40.

<sup>1074</sup> Smith, *Patriarch*, 120-21; Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 126-28.

<sup>1075</sup> Haggard, “Nicola Affair,” 160. Apprehending the general might further accuse him of suggesting coup d’état, Nicola tried to vindicate himself by arguing that he was “neither an ediot or crazed . . . which must have been the case had I singled out your Excellency for the purpose of countenancing mutiny or treason.” Lewis Nicola to GW, 28 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 406.

<sup>1076</sup> Haggard, “Nicola Affair,” 158; GW to Lewis Nicola, 22 May 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 268.

The Nicola's affair demonstrates how much ideas about the disinterested use power and virtuous leadership mattered to Washington who as commander in chief stood as the symbol of the nation's struggle for liberty. His foursquare reaction to Nicola's proposals was based on his cognizance of the precarious nature of the army's dissatisfaction with the Congress and his determination to keep military powers subordinate to civil authority.

Challenges to Washington's aspiration to embrace the self-disciplined "heroic archetype" of the Anglo-American whig tradition kept arising, for only a month after Nicola's proposals, the commander in chief received another like-minded letter. James Mitchell Varnum, former brigadier general and congressional delegate from Rhode Island, complained to Washington about the feebleness of "that baseless Fabric" (the Articles of Confederation that were ratified by the American colonies during the war) which he hoped to replace with some kind of magisterial authority that would correspond with "the Tone of the Passions" of the citizens. Varnum specified, "*absolute Monarchy, or a military State, can alone rescue them from all the Horrors of Subjugation.*"<sup>1077</sup>

If Nicola's fairly courteous political contemplations necessitated Washington's sharp reply than one would expect Varnum's blunter message to meet the same if not a more forceful rejoinder.<sup>1078</sup> But in comparison with his previous reply, Washington's rescript to Varnum was mild. After acknowledging the detrimental fact that the states were not obliged to comply with the recommendations of Congress "in Matters of Finance," he at least gave "some credit" to Varnum's home state for those measures that had been implemented.

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<sup>1077</sup> Schwartz, "George Washington and the Whig Conception of Heroic Leadership," 27; James Mitchell Varnum, *A Sketch of the Life and Public Services of James Mitchell Varnum of Rhode Island, Brigadier-General of the Continental Army; Member of the Continental Congress; Judge U. S. Supreme Court, N. W. Territory; Major-General Rhode Island Volunteer Militia* (Boston: David Clapp and Son, 1906), 19, 25, <http://www.archive.org/details/sketchoflifepubl00varn>; Articles of Confederation, *Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, Library of Congress, images 4-9, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsl.html>; James M. Varnum to GW, 23 June 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 1053 (my italics).

<sup>1078</sup> GW to James M. Varnum, 10 July 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 355.

Washington concurred that the demeanor of the people in general was “alarming,” but he could not agree to view the imbroglio “in that distress light” Varnum set forth. The commander in chief did not add any particulars about what could be done to alleviate the tension, but merely hoped “that some fortunate Crisis will arrive” that would transmute the pervasive soldiers’ recalcitrance into “that love of Freedom which first animated us in this contest.”<sup>1079</sup>

It is not difficult to perceive the grounds for such frustrations in the concluding years of the war. A year after the Revolutionary army succeeded in the decisive Siege of Yorktown, there were no more battles to fight in the colonies, affording the soldiers ample time to contemplate what could follow the conclusion of the war. Many of the soldiers risked their lives, sustained injuries, endured untold suffering, incurred debts by spending their fortunes, and now faced a gloomy prospect of returning to their distressed and impoverished families and enduring years of prolonged penury in a postwar country. Passions ran high and they considered taking the law into their own hands.<sup>1080</sup>

Ironically, Washington’s example of self-restraint and forbearance turned against him. If there was anything Washington aspired to at this time it was to check growing agitation that held sway within virtually all the ranks of the army and secure justice for the many who had fought and served to enable the establishment of liberty in the colonies. Letter after letter, Washington pleaded with the Congress not to postpone serious deliberations on how to support the veterans financially.<sup>1081</sup>

In a letter to Secretary at War Benjamin Lincoln (a letter he preferred to keep private because of its candor), Washington outlined the pestiferous problems that prevailed in the

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<sup>1079</sup> Ibid.; James M. Varnum to GW, 23 June 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 1052;

<sup>1080</sup> GW to Benjamin Lincoln, 2 October 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 110-114.

<sup>1081</sup> Ibid.

army and endangered its peaceful dissolution. “It is vain, Sir,” cautioned the general, “to suppose that Military Men will acquiesce *contentedly* with bare rations” while men occupying civil offices, “unacquainted with half the hardships [the soldiers] endure,” are paid their salaries regularly.<sup>1082</sup>

Washington could not “help fearing” the consequences of collectively discharging battalions of military men that are afflicted with painful memories and tribulations of war, having “suffered every thing human Nature is capable of enduring on this side of death,” weighed down by pessimistic expectations of their future, and “without one farthing of Money to carry them home.” Shortly before the soldiers were ordered to retire into winter quarters in 1782, it was obvious to Washington that distrust of the governmental promises was spreading, mostly because “the patience & long sufferance of this Army are almost exhausted.” The crisis was real and the general apprehended “that a train of Evils” would ensue and that “of a very serious & distressing Nature.”<sup>1083</sup>

Back in 1763 and 1764, following the cessation of hostilities of the French and Indian War, primarily economic worries represented the key issue in causing a widespread insurrection of British regulars throughout the American colonies who, despite being victorious, “took up arms to fight” for fairer working conditions. In 1782, “the threat of collective violence” from an exasperated army was looming again.<sup>1084</sup> But Lincoln’s private answer did nothing to lift Washington’s spirit, for the secretary at war prognosticated that the expectations of soldiery would “end in Chagrin and disappointment if they look for half pay from Congress.” Lincoln made no pretense about his seeing “little probability” of the

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<sup>1082</sup> Ibid., image 110.

<sup>1083</sup> Ibid., image 111.

<sup>1084</sup> Peter Way, “Rebellion of the Regulars: Working Soldiers and the Mutiny of 1763-1764,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (October 2000): 777, 761-62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2674155>.

Congress ever succeeding in appropriating the requested sum under the present system of government.<sup>1085</sup>

The pressure on Washington to take advantage of his office was enormous. In late December 1782, Major General Alexander McDougall and Lieutenant Colonel Commandant John Brooks and Colonel Matthias Ogden, selected as a three-man deputation of the army, marched from upstate New York to Philadelphia to deliver an address and petition to Congress.<sup>1086</sup> Some viewed it as an ultimatum, for one officer stationed at West Point stated that the objective of the delegation “*must* be agreeable to the line, or I dread the Consequences.”<sup>1087</sup> To Samuel Shaw, aide-de-camp to Henry Knox, the address also appeared to be a final demand, “*point d’argent, point de Suisse*,” therefore he “devoutly . . . wished” it to be accepted, because “if it does not —,” intentionally leaving the conclusion of the sentence blank.<sup>1088</sup>

On January 13, 1783, McDougall, Brooks, and Ogden appeared before a special grand committee of Congress, a panel of delegates from each state, to elaborate on the officers’ memorial presented two weeks earlier. According to the notes taken by James Madison, McDougall enumerated the distresses of the army “in very high-colored expressions” and

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<sup>1085</sup> Benjamin Lincoln to GW, 14 October 1782, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 344-45.

<sup>1086</sup> Robert Morris, *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781-1784*, eds. E. James Ferguson et al., 9 vols. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 7:412, <http://books.google.com/books?id=4DyrmgCxJrMC>.

<sup>1087</sup> Ebenezer Huntington to Andrew Huntington, 9 December 1782, in Ebenezer Huntington, *Letters Written by Ebenezer Huntington during the American Revolution* (New York: Printed for C. F. Heartman, [1915]), 102, <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924088026327>.

<sup>1088</sup> Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers*, 492; Samuel Shaw to Rev. Mr. Eliot, 22 December 1782, in Samuel Shaw, *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw: The First American Consul at Canton* (Boston: W. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1847), 99-100, <http://www.archive.org/details/journalsofmajors00shawiala>. Although the delivered petition, to which were affixed the signatures of fourteen officers headed by Knox, addressed the supreme body “with all proper deference and respect,” it also candidly declared that “our distresses are now brought to a point” and it was requested that the long-awaited arrearages be granted “as soon as possible,” for additional moratoria might lead to “fatal effects.” “The Address and Petition of the Officers of the Army of the United States” in *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 24:291.

warned that “the most serious consequences were to be apprehended” if he should return to the cantonment with bad tidings.<sup>1089</sup>

When the deputies were queried about what particular steps they thought were likely to be taken if they returned with unsatisfactory answer, they stated that they were not aware of “any premeditated plan” but that it can be presumed that “at least a mutiny would ensue,” against which there would hardly be any opposition even within the lower ranks.<sup>1090</sup>

McDougall declared that many sensible officers were disaffected by “the debility and defects in the federal Govt” and should Congress face “its *dissolution*, the benefits expected from the Revolution wd be greatly impaired.”<sup>1091</sup>

The pressure on Washington to intervene more forcefully in the internal crisis continued to build up. In February 1783, Alexander Hamilton, Washington’s former principal aide-de-camp and a member of the grand committee of Congress, recognized that “The State of our finances was perhaps never more critical,” and forewarned the general of events likely to occur in the near future. “If the war continues,” surmised Hamilton, “it would seem that the army must in June subsist itself *to defend the [country?]*, if peace should take place, it *will* subsist itself *to pro[cure?] justice to itself*.”<sup>1092</sup>

The speculations about the army’s contemplated mutiny acquired graphic contours in the early months of 1783. It was believed that a portion of the army conspired under the direction of one of the leading commanders who countenanced a more vigorous measure and

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<sup>1089</sup> Richard H. Kohn, “The Inside History of the Newburgh Conspiracy: America and the Coup d’Etat,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 27 no. 2 (April 1970): 193-94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1918650>; Gaillard Hunt, ed. *The Writings of James Madison: Comprising His Public Papers and His Private Correspondence, Including Numerous Letters and Documents Now for the First Time Printed*, 9 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1900), 1:310 (January 13, 1783), <http://www.archive.org/details/writings01madiuoft>.

<sup>1090</sup> Hunt, *Writings of James Madison*, 1:311.

<sup>1091</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:312 (my italics).

<sup>1092</sup> Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers*, 269; *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 23:750-51, 24:93; Alexander Hamilton to GW, 7 February 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 327. Since it was believed that Washington was lacking “sufficient warmth” in pressing for the redress of the army, Hamilton advised him to countenance their appeals for justice by means of “confidential and prudent persons” so that he would be able “to guide the torrent” should the nation plunge in dire straits. Alexander Hamilton to GW, 7 February 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 328.

“not to lay down their arms” until the question of arrearages and pay is settled to their satisfaction.<sup>1093</sup> This internal crisis discloses much about the nature of Washington’s aspirations. Washington longed for admiration and acceptance from his officers, but his concern for the welfare of his country took precedence, even if it “contributed to the decline of his popularity.” Because of Washington’s “extreme reserve,” Hamilton could reassure congressional delegates in February 1783 that the general’s “virtue his patriotism & his firmness would it might be depended upon never yield to any dishonorable or disloyal plans into which he might be called that he would sooner suffer himself to be cut to pieces.”<sup>1094</sup>

During the eighteenth century, Washington’s moderate exercise of his power and his readiness to give it up after the war was viewed with admiration by many in the London Court. In the final stages of the war when the official termination of hostilities was only a matter of time, Benjamin West, American-born painter who later became president of the Royal Academy, was privileged to converse one day with the British monarch on the subject of America’s prospects in the years to come.<sup>1095</sup> The king was inquisitive about what Washington’s plans were if America were to win its full sovereignty. West answered that he believed that the general would return “to a private station.” To which the king is said to have replied, “if He did He would be the greatest man in the world.” West’s depiction of Washington’s intentions to retire to his home was followed by his supposition that the general and other Revolutionary leaders would, after the termination of war, not harbor ill feelings for

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<sup>1093</sup> Hunt, *Writings of James Madison*, 1:379; Charles R. King, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King; Comprising His Letters, Private and Official, His Public Documents, and His Speeches*, 6 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894), 1:622, <http://www.archive.org/details/lifecorrrufus01kingrich>. King’s records indicate that during the first few months of 1783, the army’s faction conspired to make Horatio Gates the leader in procuring their financial justice, see also Kohn, “Inside History of the Newburgh Conspiracy,” 199-201, 205-06.

<sup>1094</sup> Hunt, *Writings of James Madison*, 1:379.

<sup>1095</sup> John Galt, *The Life, Studies, and Works of Benjamin West, Esq.: President of the Royal Academy of London, Composed from Materials Furnished by Himself*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, Strand, 1820), 2:1, 76, <http://www.archive.org/details/lifestudiesandw00galtgoog>; Joseph Farington, *The Farington Diary*, ed. James Greig, 8 vols. (London: Hutchinson, [1922?]), 1:278, <http://www.archive.org/details/faringtondiary01fariuoft>.

long and desire to renew amicable ties with the mother country. This impressed the queen, who was also present, insomuch that she “was much affected, & shed tears.”<sup>1096</sup>

The argument that Washington’s determination to obey civil authorities was scrupulous is supported by another European’s observations. Marquis de Chastellux, having served as major-general under General Rochambeau in the crucial Siege of Yorktown, recorded near the end of the war that “this is the seventh year that he has commanded the army, and that he has *obeyed* the Congress; more need not be said, especially in America, where they know how to appreciate all the merit contained in this simple fact.”<sup>1097</sup>

His conscientious deference to the will of civil authorities and reserve in acting on his own is especially remarkable in view of how unacquainted he was of the deliberations conducted on the floor of Congress. Washington gleaned some general intelligence from public gazettes but still knew “nothing of the business which is before Congress.” Despite these periods of nescience, he continued to place great confidence in the congressional members. The federal legislature, Washington wrote, needed to “have powers competent to all *general purposes*,” including securing sufficient funds for the veterans.<sup>1098</sup>

Washington was of course apprised of the increasing number of soldiers who grew disgruntled with his moderate steps and forbearing from buttonholing the delegates in behalf of the army. Ominous signs that an unspecified number of officers were inclined to favor an insurgency, if necessary, began to surface. The present “forebodings of evil,” the general wrote to Hamilton, might be more easily “deprecatated than prevented” and in case of the soldiers becoming their own purveyors, the plight would “end in blood.” Notwithstanding the precariousness of the situation, Washington rigidly clung to his principles of forbearance and hoped for the best. “I shall pursue the same steady line of conduct which has governed me

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<sup>1096</sup> Farington, *Farington Diary*, Greig, 1:278.

<sup>1097</sup> Chastellux, *Travels in North-America*, 1:138 (my italics).

<sup>1098</sup> GW to Alexander Hamilton, 4 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 818, 820.

hitherto,” he stated resolutely. It can also be assumed that Washington’s conviction in the rectitude of his conduct, which was inspired by classical ideals, was strengthened by the yield of fruits he had already witnessed in numerous instances in his hitherto quest for honor.<sup>1099</sup>

It appeared that Washington’s virtues were set to determine this internal crisis. On March 10 and 12, 1783, three anonymous notifications that circulated among the officers were intercepted and delivered to Washington’s hands.<sup>1100</sup> The scope of these letters was clear, it called for replacing the present “Milk & Water stile” with a more daring approach and by suspecting “the Man, who would advise to more Moderation, & longer forbearance.”<sup>1101</sup> Arguably, the threat of a coup was used as leverage for passing a revenue bill (the impost) and possibly for extending congressional powers over the state legislatures, but the possibility of an armed revolt seemed real nonetheless.<sup>1102</sup>

Ingeniously, Washington decided to summon alike meeting of general and field officers for March 15 to deliberate on the very same views and asked the highest-ranking officer that would be present to “be pleased to preside” and then to give an account of the result of the proceedings to him.<sup>1103</sup> The wording of the summon was perhaps intentionally such that it would appear that Washington would absent himself from the debate.<sup>1104</sup>

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<sup>1099</sup> Ibid., image 819.

<sup>1100</sup> Continental Army Officers, 10 March 1783, Anonymous to Continental Army Officers, 10 March 1783, Anonymous to Continental Army Officers, 12 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 886, 889, 932.

<sup>1101</sup> Anonymous to Continental Army Officers, 10 March 1783, Meeting, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 889; Haggard, “Nicola Affair,” 164. The second anonymous letter was written by John Armstrong, copied by Christopher Richmond, and circulated by William Barber. The first two served as aides and the third as adjutant-general under Horatio Gates. Gates’s later communication to Armstrong indicates that the rumor “to offer the crown to Caesar, was without any foundation.” Horatio Gates to John Armstrong Jr., 22 June 1788, in George Bancroft, *History of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States of America*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1882), 1:318, <http://www.archive.org/details/historyofformati01banc>.

<sup>1102</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 141.

<sup>1103</sup> GW, 11 March 1783, General Orders, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 929.

<sup>1104</sup> Meanwhile, “actuated with the greatest zeal in their Service,” GW urged Hamilton to press the delegates to comply with the officers’ requests, for many had “no better prospect before them than a jail” after their discharge and in case of failure, “they must be answerable to God & their Country for the ineffable horrors which may be occasioned thereby.” GW to Continental Congress, 12 March 1783, Series 4: General

On the symbolically laden ides of March, the general and field officers gathered at the multipurpose “new building” constructed near Newburgh (New York). Major-General Horatio Gates, being the highest-ranking officer present (something Washington undoubtedly anticipated), followed the prescribed protocol and was seated in the presiding chair.<sup>1105</sup> The tension was high and the officers understood it was a prime opportunity to resolve on measures that would be more vigorous in order to press the civil authorities to satisfy the army’s claims. Unannounced, Washington shrewdly timed his entering for some time after Gates opened the proceedings. Presumably, when the first proposals were being presented, the room was abruptly hushed when General Washington suddenly appeared at the door. Taking the officers by surprise and diverting the attention of the audience to himself, he asked the presiding Gates to be given the floor, which request could hardly have been denied him.<sup>1106</sup>

“Sensibly agitated,” Washington first apologized for his unannounced appearance at the assembly but the occasion, he stated, afforded him an unparalleled opportunity to present his views candidly on the subject.<sup>1107</sup> Washington did not extemporize but drew out of his pocket a paper on which he had committed his thoughts so that he could deliver them with greater “perspicuity and connection.”<sup>1108</sup> The anonymous letters circulating in the camp, he began, were “addressed more to the feelings & passions, than to the reason & judgment of the Army.” Recognizing the innuendo of the anonymous author (provoking suspicion in “the

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Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 944-45; GW to Alexander Hamilton, 12 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 946-48.

<sup>1105</sup> GW, 11 March 1783, General Orders, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 929; Continental Army, 15 March, 1783, Proceedings of Officers’ Meeting at Newburgh, New York Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 987; William Heath, *Heath’s Memoirs of the American War, Reprinted from the Original Edition of 1798. With introduction and notes by Rufus Rockwell Wilson* (New York: A. Wessels, 1904), 374, <http://www.archive.org/details/heathsmemoirs00willrich>.

<sup>1106</sup> Continental Army, 15 March, 1783, Proceedings of Officers’ Meeting at Newburgh, New York Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 987.

<sup>1107</sup> J. A. Wright to Samuel Blachley Webb, 16 March 1783, in Worthington Chauncey Ford, comp. and ed., *Correspondence and Journals of Samuel Blachley Webb*, 3 vols. (New York: [Lancaster, PA: Wickersham Press], 1894), 3:6, <http://www.archive.org/details/corrjournalssam03webbrich>; Samuel Shaw to Rev. Mr. Eliot, April 1783, in Shaw, *Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, 103.

<sup>1108</sup> Timothy Pickering to Mr. Hodgdon, 16 March 1783, in Octavius Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, 4 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1867), 1:438, <http://www.archive.org/details/lifetimothypick01pickrich>.

Man, who would advise to more Moderation, & longer forbearance”) was aimed against his person, Washington did not strike back but only wished his critic “had more Charity.”<sup>1109</sup>

The commander in chief denounced the furtive plans that undermined unreserved allegiance to the nation’s “Sovereign power” as void of any “Regard to Justice, & love of Country.”<sup>1110</sup> Notably, he then drew the officers’ attention to his patriotic character—an anchor Washington was prompt to rely on throughout his public career. “If my Conduct heretofore, has not evinced to you” enduring loyalty to the army’s welfare, he said, it would be futile to assert it now. “But as I was among the first” to have enlisted in the country’s service, and “as I have never left your side one Moment,” and having accompanied the troops through their distresses, and considering his “military reputation” united with the army, Washington wondered how he could be suspected to be “indifferent to its Interests.”<sup>1111</sup>

The intimated plot that circulated in the anonymous letters, Washington continued, was reprehensible for being at variance with a true loyalty worthy of a soldier. Using rhetorical questions, Washington asked whether the innominate can “be a friend to the Army? Can he be a friend to this Country?”<sup>1112</sup> Consistent with “the great duty I owe my country,” the commander in chief then pledged to render his services for the army’s sake “to the utmost extent of my abilities.”<sup>1113</sup> Having adjured the officers to view the contemplated events through the lenses of “calm light of reason,” Washington promised that by despising the specious overtures of the man in concealment, they would furnish the world with another evidence of their “unexampled patriotism & patient Virtue.” “The Dignity of your Conduct,”

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<sup>1109</sup> Anonymous to Continental Army Officers, 10 March 1783, Meeting, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 889; GW to Continental Army Officers, 15 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 990.

<sup>1110</sup> GW to Continental Army Officers, 15 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 990-91.

<sup>1111</sup> *Ibid.*, image 991.

<sup>1112</sup> *Ibid.*, image 992.

<sup>1113</sup> *Ibid.*, image 995.

he believed would enable their posterity to proclaim, ““had this Day been wanting, the World had never seen the last Stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining.””<sup>1114</sup>

Before the officers now stood a man who held more power than any other man on the vast continent and despite being victorious in war he had to face the inclination of a faction that contemplated to have him pushed from the helm for being too moderate in exercising his authority. Washington’s loyalty to the civil authorities and his sense of commitment to the duties he was entrusted with could hardly be doubted.

During the eight-year long command of the armies, while it was not uncommon for many of his fellow officers to take “extensive furloughs to look after private business, to recuperate from injuries and fatigue,” or for other reasons, “Washington never furloughed himself,” not even during winter encampments or in the final phase of the war following the decisive Siege of Yorktown.<sup>1115</sup> Most of all, Washington’s personal conduct, which seems to have been under the constant scrutiny of his conscience, had been a convincing proof that his greatest ambition by no means consisted of cumulating military or political power for himself.

It was a “most excellent address” noted one officer who heard Washington deliver his speech on that occasion.<sup>1116</sup> But the crowning touch of Washington’s act came when, as “a corroborating testimony” of the federal government’s obliging disposition toward the army’s needs, he communicated to the gathered officers a letter he had received from one of the congressional delegates whose name he did not disclose. In essence, the purported letter elucidated the reasons behind the slow deliberations of the Congress, expressed concern about

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<sup>1114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1115</sup> Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, 23.

<sup>1116</sup> J. A. Wright to Samuel Blachley Webb, 16 March 1783, in Ford, *Correspondence and Journals of Samuel Blachley Webb*, 3:6.

attempts “to lessen your [the general’s] popularity in the Army,” and pleaded for the army’s “patient forbearance,” for once “the Rubicon is passed . . . to retreat will be very difficult.”<sup>1117</sup>

Major Samuel Shaw recorded that more than the content itself, one indelible moment made even greater impression on the gathered officers. Having read several lines of the delegate’s letter, His Excellency suddenly paused and perceptibly strained his eyes to decipher a particular word. He then reached into his pocket, took out his spectacles, and begged the officers’ pardon for using them, “observing at the same time, that he had grown gray in their service, and now found himself growing blind.”<sup>1118</sup>

Washington’s developing presbyopia was not feigned, for among his correspondence is found an order for new glasses written more than two months earlier.<sup>1119</sup> The deterioration of his visual sense, of course, had nothing to do with his steadfast patriotic service, neither was the ailment anyhow uncommon, but by all accounts, there was something implicit in the timing and manner of this gesture that rendered Washington’s modesty and disinterestedness more conspicuous to the officers’ eyes than ever before. The disgruntled officers’ sensibilities seem to have yielded to the delicacy of the moment. Many were perceptibly moved by the general’s presence, some of the officers’ eyes moistened.<sup>1120</sup>

Having finished his address, Washington retired. Following a reevaluation of the officers’ views, Henry Knox moved that a vote of thanks be given to the commander in chief

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<sup>1117</sup> Samuel Shaw to Rev. Mr. Eliot, April 1783, in Shaw, *Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, 103; Timothy Pickering to Mr. Hodgdon, 16 March 1783, in Pickering, *Life of Timothy Pickering*, 1:438. Timothy Pickering presumed the letter GW read on this crucial occasion was from Joseph Jones, a delegate from Virginia, see Joseph Jones to GW, 27 February 1783, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 19. Jones’s letter provides a valuable insight into the federal financial situation and the necessity of the army’s forbearance before any rash measures are undertaken.

<sup>1118</sup> Samuel Shaw to Rev. Mr. Eliot, April 1783, in Shaw, *Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, 104.

<sup>1119</sup> GW to Tench Tilghman, 10 January 1783, GW to David Rittenhouse, 16 February, 1783, Series 3h Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 3, images 13, 39.

<sup>1120</sup> Samuel Shaw to Rev. Mr. Eliot, April 1783, in Shaw, *Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, 104. Another supporting testimony of this event, though less reliable for being written forty-two years later, is recorded in David Cobb to Timothy Pickering, 9 November 1825, in Pickering, *Life of Timothy Pickering*, 1:431, see also DSF 5:435n39.

for “his excellent speech,” which was carried *nemine contradicente*.<sup>1121</sup> Shaw concludes his remarks on Washington’s pivotal address with the following observation:

On other occasions he has been supported by the exertions of an army and the countenance of his friends; but in this he stood single and alone. There was no saying where the passions of an army, which were not a little inflamed, might lead; but it was generally allowed that longer forbearance was dangerous, and *moderation had ceased to be a virtue*. Under these circumstances he appeared, not at the head of his troops, but as it were in opposition to them; and for a dreadful moment the interests of the army and its General seemed to be in competition!<sup>1122</sup>

When communicating the results of the proceedings of this meeting to the president of Congress, Washington flattered himself that the resolutions adopted thereat would be construed in no other light than “as the last glorious proof of patriotism” of those that aspired to belong to the American army. Irrespective of how much the outcome of the meeting was brought about by Washington’s premeditated acts, the denouement of the Newburgh conspiracy fully corresponded with what he intended to achieve.<sup>1123</sup>

When the army was similarly on the brink of dissolution several years earlier during the Valley Forge encampment, Washington submitted to the army committee of Congress an insightful description of the nature of selfless patriotic service as he witnessed it during the war. “Motives of public virtue,” he wrote, may occasionally “actuate men to the observance of a conduct purely disinterested.” However, such inducements are typically of short duration

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<sup>1121</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 24:310-11. Five more resolutions were then adopted, including one that the army would under no circumstances “sully the reputation and glory which they have acquired.” Ibid. Timothy Pickering is the only one known not to have raised his hand in support of the officers’ resolution to “view with abhorrence, and reject with disdain, the infamous propositions contained in a late anonymous address to the officers of the army.” Timothy Pickering to Mr. Hodgdon, 16 March 1783, in Pickering, *Life of Timothy Pickering*, 1:438-39.

<sup>1122</sup> Samuel Shaw to Rev. Mr. Eliot, April 1783, in Shaw, *Journals of Major Samuel Shaw*, 104 (my italics).

<sup>1123</sup> GW to Continental Congress, 18 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 1054.

because “few men are capable of making a continual sacrifice” without a profitable gain or benefit in return.<sup>1124</sup>

If these observations are truly valid for the human character at large, then it can be said that Washington ought to be numbered among those “few” who were willing to assume a public responsibility with expectation of no other reward than public approval of the virtuous-minded. Washington was evidently aware, and his papers lend support to this proposition, that such disinterestedness could not be simply imposed on others, however virtuous the principle may appear. Such “refined dictates and obligations of social duty” to promote “the common good” were attributes traditionally cultivated among the colonial elite, a genteel society in which Washington became a full-fledged member during the decade preceding the War of Independence.<sup>1125</sup>

Washington believed that remuneration and “a farther compensation” of the soldiers was nothing more than a “debt of gratitude.”<sup>1126</sup> The general attributed his ardor in pleading their cause “to the Effusion of an honest zeal” in the noblest of ventures, by which he alluded to the Revolutionary cause of fighting for adequate personal rights and liberties to the American subjects. If the common soldier deserved, in Washington’s view, sufficient financial compensation that would preclude the risk of pauperism as a manifestation of the nation’s gratitude for the wartime service, it is worth noting that Washington argued his case to be somewhat peculiar of itself. He sincerely hoped that his hitherto personal conduct and caution not to misuse his authority required no additional “protestations of personal disinterestedness,” reminding the president of the Congress that as far as financial compensations were concerned, he “ever renounced for [himself] the idea of pecuniary

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<sup>1124</sup> GW to Continental Congress Army Committee, 29 January 1778, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 71.

<sup>1125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1126</sup> GW to Continental Congress, 18 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 1058.

reward.” For Washington, the greatest reward did not consist of material but rather of psychological and social benefits. “The consciousness of having attempted faithfully to discharge my duty, & the approbation of my Country will be a sufficient recompence for my Services,” he said.<sup>1127</sup>

Before long, many facts of the Newburgh conspiracy and the impact of Washington’s address at the pivotal meeting became publicly known as gazettes across the United States published the anonymous as well as the general’s letters in full.<sup>1128</sup> In consequence, Washington’s popularity rose to new heights by having his “reputation for honesty and unshakable devotion to the government and to the Revolution” confirmed again.<sup>1129</sup> Many men readily perceived that Washington’s moral qualities rather than his mere authority ought to receive credit for stemming the rising tide of the officers’ passionate designs against the civil authorities. To Jefferson, it also appeared “that the *moderation & virtue* of a single character has probably prevented this revolution from being closed as most others have been by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish.”<sup>1130</sup>

It is worth noting that the grievances attending the Newburgh conspiracy resurfaced in the Philadelphia mutiny of June 1783. Led by a few hundred exasperated soldiers who threatened the government with the use of arms to receive their remunerations, the mutiny forced the Congress to flee to neighboring New Jersey for safety. The incident induced Washington to interpose again by evoking the ideal of virtue. Condemning the misuse of military power by the insurgents, Washington, in contrast, praised those army veterans that had endured a myriad of hardships “without the settlement of their Accounts or a farthing of

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<sup>1127</sup> Ibid., image 1059.

<sup>1128</sup> *Boston Gazette*, April 21, 28, 1783; *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), April 15, 1783; *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), April 25, 1783; *Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia), April 2, 1783; *Virginia Gazette* (Richmond), July 12, 19, 26, 1783; *Gazette of the State of Georgia* (Savannah), June 5, 12, 19, July 10, 1783.

<sup>1129</sup> Kohn, “Inside History of the Newburgh Conspiracy,” 215.

<sup>1130</sup> Thomas Jefferson to GW, 16 April 1784, in *PGW* (my italics); Continental Congress, 24 June 1783, Printed Proclamation on Mutiny Measures, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 413.

money in their pockets” for the sake of their country. The Americans, Washington declared, shall be “astonished at the virtues of the latter, as we are struck with horror and detestation at the proceedings of the former.” “After Congress left Philadelphia, the mutiny quickly subsided.”<sup>1131</sup>

With the favorable prospects of signing the final peace treaty by the end of the year, Washington prefaced his last “Circular to States” with thoughts of his approaching resignation and retirement.<sup>1132</sup> “The great object . . . being accomplished,” referring to his military service during the war, “I am now preparing to resign it into the hands of Congress” and to resume a pastoral way of life, “which, it is well known, I left with the greatest reluctance.” But Washington not only expressed his anticipation to resign his commission by the means of this official circular, which was expected to be copied throughout the colonies, but also to publicly disavow any plans for retaining power at the helm of the political leadership of the newly liberated nation.<sup>1133</sup>

If the Roman Dictator Cincinnatus truly voluntarily abdicated from all of “his high functions,” refused “all reward,” and returned to his “farm,” Washington intended to follow the same pattern.<sup>1134</sup> Lest his countrymen missed what he hoped to evidence by his disinterested conduct during the late war, the American Cincinnatus wished to reassure them

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<sup>1131</sup> Kenneth R. Bowling, “New Light on the Philadelphia Mutiny of 1783: Federal-State Confrontation at the Close of the War for Independence,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 4 (October 1977): 420-21, 425, 442-43, 449, <http://dpubs.libraries.psu.edu/>; Mary A. Y. Gallagher, “Reinterpreting the ‘Very Trifling Mutiny’ at Philadelphia in June 1783,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 119, no. 1/2 (January/April 1995): 4, <http://dpubs.libraries.psu.edu/>; GW to the President of Congress, 24 June 1783, Series 3h Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, image 105.

<sup>1132</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 24:210-11, 241-51; GW, 8 June 1783, Circular to States on Farewell to the Army, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 142. Disbanding the army was considered imprudent without the assurance of a definitive peace treaty being signed. Provisional peace articles were signed in Paris on November 30, 1782, but their legality was still contingent on the French establishing peace with the British Crown. The good news of the French cessation of hostilities with the British arrived the following March, which filled GW’s “mind with inexpressible Satisfaction.” On April 15, the congressmen, at length, ratified the provisional peace articles from the previous year. GW to Anne Cesare, Chevalier la Luzerne, 29 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 142.

<sup>1133</sup> GW, 8 June 1783, Circular to States on Farewell to the Army, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 142.

<sup>1134</sup> Lewis, *Inquiry into the Credibility*, 2:176, 177n32.

that mere lionization and popular acclaim were not congenial to the quiet and arcadian virtue he intended to emulate. Clearly, the ultimate proof of his disinterestedness could have only been effected by actually voluntarily giving up his authority for the good of his country—which meant resigning all of his military powers and taking advantage of no other benefits than what arises from spending “the remainder of life in a state of undisturbed repose.”<sup>1135</sup>

Washington’s reputation of a modest use of his powers was hardly echoed by Napoleon Bonaparte, who at the end of his campaign in Italy in 1797 indulged himself in his military authority. “I can no longer obey,” he admitted, “I have tasted command, and I cannot give it up.”<sup>1136</sup> Bonaparte’s failure to imitate Washington’s unswerving allegiance to civilian supremacy led to his being “calumniated as a Caesar or a Cromwell.”<sup>1137</sup> While in exile in 1815, the ex-emperor recalled that from the commencement of his reign “it was wished that I might become a Washington.”<sup>1138</sup> However, Bonaparte maintained that Washington’s exemplification of the Cincinnatus model was practicable only in the unique sociopolitical environment that prevailed among the American colonies at that time and due to the turbulence of the French revolutionary vying for power, “I could only have been a *crowned Washington*.”<sup>1139</sup>

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<sup>1135</sup> GW, 8 June 1783, Circular to States on Farewell to the Army, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 162.

<sup>1136</sup> André François Miot de Melito, *Memoirs of Count Miot de Melito: Minister, Ambassador, Councillor of State and Member of the Institute of France, between the years 1788 and 1815*, ed. [W. A.] Fleischmann, trans. Cashel Hoey and John Lillie (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), 113, <http://www.archive.org/details/memoirscountmio00meligoog>. “Je ne puis plus obéir; j’ai goûté du commandement et je ne saurais y renoncer.” André François Miot de Melito, *Mémoires du comte Miot de Melito: Ancien ministre, ambassadeur, conseiller d’état et membre de l’institut*, ed. [W. A.] Fleischmann, 3 vols. (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1858), 1:196, <http://books.google.fr/books?id=ddhX3ExaGUMC>.

<sup>1137</sup> Geoffrey Ellis, *Napoleon: Profiles in Power* (Essex, UK: Pearson Education, 1997), 32, <http://books.google.com/books?id=Wk6yelXxaVoC>.

<sup>1138</sup> Count de las Cases, *Journal of the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena; two vols. in one* (Lexington, KY: Thomas Smith, 1823), 200-01, <http://www.archive.org/details/memorialdesainte00lasc>. “On eût voulu que j’eusse été un Washington.” Le Comte de las Cases, *Journal de la vie privée et des conversations de l’empereur Napoléon, à Sainte Hélène*, 4 vols. (Londres: Henri Colburn, M. Bossange, 1823), 1:404, <http://www.archive.org/details/memorialdesaint01lasc>. Bonaparte’s remarks on GW were recorded (journal entry for November 29-30, 1815) by Count de las Cases who accompanied the ex-emperor for eighteen months during his exile on Saint Helena.

<sup>1139</sup> Las Cases, *Journal of the Private Life and Conversations*, 200-01. “Je ne pouvais être qu’un Washington couronné.” Las Cases, *Journal de la vie privée et des conversations*, 1:405. Bonaparte supposed that

While Washington could not know to what extent his *exemplum virtutis* would inspire future commanders in chief of European nations, he fully intended to provide a fitting model at least for the sake of his countrymen. “The destiny of unborn Millions” of Americans was on his mind when he contemplated the signal stage of history he was acting on. His was the conviction that “this is the moment to establish or ruin [America’s] national Character forever.”<sup>1140</sup>

Although Washington struggled with a degree of diffidence when occupying an important office practically throughout his whole life, he felt consistently upheld by his conscience, which assured him of the rectitude of his personal conduct. So certain was he that his deportment during his military leadership was conducive “to the real interests of my country” (therefore worthy of public approbation) that he admitted that he intentionally wished not “to conceal any instance of my official conduct from the eyes of the World.”<sup>1141</sup>

At the end of the war, Washington was fifty-one years old, and considering the shortness of life of his immediate forefathers and his older half brothers, he had sound reasons for not expecting to live much longer.<sup>1142</sup> Supposing to never return to any public office on principle and because of his advanced age, the commander in chief bade his “last farewell to the cares of Office, and all the employments of public life.” Washington terminated his adieu with yet another recurrence to proper deportment. His concluding words associated virtues he recommended to the American citizens with perceptibly Christian terminology. Washington

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he could imitate GW’s “moderation, disinterestedness, and wisdom” only in a “*universal Dictatorship*. To this I aspired; can that be thought a crime? Can it be believed, that to resign this authority would have been beyond the power of human nature?” Las Cases, *Journal of the Private Life and Conversations*, 201. For the French original, see Las Cases, *Journal de la vie privée et des conversations*, 1:405. Despite the perceptible hagiographic nature of Las Cases’s recorded conversations with Bonaparte, they raise the question as to what extent are the ex-emperor’s words capsulized or faithfully transcribed in the journal, but I believe a considerable weight can be attached to the fact that such sentiments were truly held by the exiled ruler.

<sup>1140</sup> GW, 8 June 1783, Circular to States on Farewell to the Army, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 165-66.

<sup>1141</sup> *Ibid.*, image 172.

<sup>1142</sup> DSF 1:31, 527-29. By reaching his fifty-second birthday, GW lived longer than any ancestor of his direct paternal line in the previous five generations; both of his older half brothers likewise died when middle-aged. As to GW’s awareness of being of a “short lived family,” see GW to Marquis de Lafayette, 8 December 1784, Series 2: Letterbooks, in *GWPLC*, image 313.

prayed that God “would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all . . . to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind,” which attributes were exemplified by the divine founder of their religion. Without inculcating such pious characteristics, Washington believed, “we can never hope to be a happy Nation.”<sup>1143</sup>

Having dispatched what he believed was his parting official communication to the states, Washington anxiously awaited the signing of the definitive peace treaty—that news from Paris reached the American soil in late October 1783, and Washington could finally prepare for his long-awaited official resignation.<sup>1144</sup> But since Washington’s renunciation of his authority was unprecedented in the modern era and only paralleled generals of classical antiquity like Cincinnatus, congressional delegates wondered how a victorious commander in chief should return his powers to the government.<sup>1145</sup>

In December 1783, when the general arrived in Annapolis where the peripatetic governmental body resided at that time, he submitted to its newly elected President Thomas Mifflin a letter with his questions regarding “what manner it will be most proper to offer my resignation, whether in writing, or at an audience.”<sup>1146</sup> It was immediately resolved that Washington’s resignation be a public ceremonial event, for which a detailed agenda was created.<sup>1147</sup>

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<sup>1143</sup> GW, 8 June 1783, Circular to States on Farewell to the Army, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 178.

<sup>1144</sup> GW to Continental Congress, 16 July 1783, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, image 113; Elias Boudinot to the Ministers Plenipotentiary, 1 November 1783, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 21.

<sup>1145</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1959), 4:435, 453, 455, <http://www.archive.org/details/plutarchslives04plutuoft>; Las Cases, *Journal of the Private Life and Conversations*, 201. Roman General Sulla also voluntarily laid down his powers (79 BC), but his reputation was marred by debased morals. Sulla’s resignation was scorned by Julius Caesar, claiming that “Sulla did not know his A. B. C. when he laid down his dictatorship.” Bonaparte questioned the point of Sulla’s resignation in light of public denunciation that pursued him nonetheless. Suetonius, *Suetonius*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 1:101, <http://www.archive.org/details/suetonius01suet>.

<sup>1146</sup> GW to Continental Congress, 21 December 1783, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, image 154.

<sup>1147</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Ford, 25:799; Continental Congress, 22 December 1783, George Washington’s Public Audience, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, images 158-59.

The arrival of the general, who was accompanied by his aides, before the Hall of Congress was officially announced by a messenger to the secretary of Congress, whereupon the guest of honor was invited to enter. President Mifflin then addressed the general, “Sir, the United States in Congress assembled are prepared to receive your communications.” Washington then rose from his chair, bowed to the delegates, and read his resignation address, expressing his “sincere congratulations” to the federal government for the happy culmination of the war.<sup>1148</sup>

With national independence and sovereignty secured, Washington could now “resign with satisfaction the appointment I accepted with diffidence; a diffidence in my abilities to accomplish so arduous a task, which however was superceded by a confidence in the rectitude of our cause,” and auspicious countenance of the heavens. James McHenry, the general’s former secretary, recorded later that day that Washington’s hands were perceptibly shaking as he read his address, which only added a pathetic touch to the already very emotional occasion.<sup>1149</sup> McHenry further observed that following Washington’s acknowledgment of the merits of those officers that remained in service with him until the very end of the war and commending his countrymen to the guardianship of the omnipotent God, “his voice faltered and sunk, and the whole house felt his agitations.” After a brief pause to settle his feelings, the general concluded his valediction with “bidding an affectionate farewell to this August Body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my Commission & take my leave of all the employments of public life.”<sup>1150</sup>

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<sup>1148</sup> Continental Congress, 22 December 1783, George Washington’s Public Audience, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, images 158-59; GW, 23 December 1783, Resignation Address, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, images 160-61.

<sup>1149</sup> James McHenry to Miss Caldwell, 23 December 1783, in Bernard C. Steiner, *The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry: Secretary of War under Washington and Adams* (Cleveland, OH: Burrows Brothers, 1907), 19, 69-70, <http://www.archive.org/details/lifecorresponden00steiuoft>; GW, 23 December 1783, Resignation Address, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, images 160-61.

<sup>1150</sup> James McHenry to Miss Caldwell, 23 December 1783, in Steiner, *Life and Correspondence of James McHenry*, 69-70; GW, 23 December 1783, Resignation Address, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, images 160-61.

In return, Washington was pleased to hear the president's recognition of his high regard for "the rights of the Civil Power" and an assurance that his virtues would resound to the "remotest ages." The significance of this solemn occasion was sensed not only by the bystanders but also by the congressional representatives themselves, a number of whom were seen shedding tears. Once the president concluded his address, the American Cincinnatus bowed to the delegates once more and then finally withdrew.<sup>1151</sup> By Washington's leaving the Hall of Congress in Annapolis, an eventful chapter of America's history came to an end—a chapter that in a significant way tried the genuineness of one man's loyalty to disinterested virtues for the welfare of a nascent nation.

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<sup>1151</sup> Continental Congress to GW, 23 December 1783, Answer to George Washington's Resignation Address, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, images 162-64; Continental Congress, 22 December 1783, George Washington's Public Audience, Series 3a Varick Transcripts, in *GWPLC*, letterbook 7, image 159; James McHenry to Miss Caldwell, 23 December 1783, in Steiner, *Life and Correspondence of James McHenry*, 69-70.

## CONCLUSION

In retrospection, one may discern that the setting as well as timing of historical events were propitiously on Washington's side. His early exploration and surveying of the unsettled regions of Virginia only briefly preceded the time when the territorial boundaries of the same colony became a bone of contention between the British and French colonizers. Washington was twenty-one when, Robert Dinwiddie, a dynamic Virginia's governor himself, needed a messenger, familiar with the backcountry and of a good constitution, to deliver a warning letter to a French commandant in the upper Ohio valley.<sup>1152</sup> Washington was in his early twenties when the French and Indian War began. He was forty-three when Continental Congress moved to appoint a commander in chief, and he was fifty-seven when the first inauguration of the United States president was held. For these reasons, it is essential that Washington's aspirations are evaluated in the context of his times, including his awareness of the historical significance of these shaping events.

In his eulogy, Gouverneur Morris refused to indict Washington with being ambitious, but he admitted that "he was fond of fame . . . He loved glory, but still more he loved his country. That was [his] master passion."<sup>1153</sup> Morris's careful wording bespeaks the uneasiness of defining Washington's ambition, quest for fame and glory, and his patriotic inclinations. As explained, these terms were in frequent use during Washington's lifetime and constituted fundamental concepts to any aspiring colonial gentleman who intended to contribute his talents and skills to the society he lived in.

The historical context of the eighteenth-century American colonies, and especially that of Virginia, assists the researcher in viewing Washington's aspirations and actions in light of contemporary conventions. Based on the understanding of traditions and customs of

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<sup>1152</sup> Brock, *Robert Dinwiddie*, 1:xi.

<sup>1153</sup> Morris, *Oration*, 9.

Washington's day, his ascent from respectable yet inconspicuous background to the upper echelons of Virginia society becomes more lucid.

George's purchase of Luzancy's *A Panegyrick to the Memory of His Grace Frederick Late Duke of Schonberg* . . . bears credible witness of his interest, if not admiration of, in the lives of eminent military commanders.<sup>1154</sup> It is less important to ascertain to what extent Schomberg truly embodied such traits than to evaluate the degree of influence this book may have had on the formation of aspirations of a teenage boy. The potential impact of the panegyric on the young George can be considered especially significant when a number of the duke's alleged virtues were later ascribed to Washington himself. Schomberg's chivalrous prowess, obedience to the "Rules of Civility," "ample a Catalogue of his Vertues," and "duty" being "his greatest Passion" are phrases that seem to almost literally quote from descriptions found in many biographies of Washington himself.<sup>1155</sup> The number of strikingly analogous attributes ascribed to both the European and later to the American military leader evidence that the panegyric deserves further attention from Washington's scholars.

It is worth noting that for the fatherless and meagerly educated George, his eldest half brother Lawrence acted not only much like his surrogate father but as role model as well during George's highly formative teenage years. Lawrence's marriage with Anne Fairfax, who was of one of the wealthiest and most influential families in the province, literally opened for the young George new vistas for making valuable connections with the educated and well-bred society.

In fact, it was through the benign influence of the Fairfaxes, with whom George immediately began to cultivate close kinship ties, that he determined to take up land surveyorship, a provident occupation that would later give him access to extensive landed property holdings as the colonies continued to be explored and settled in their western

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<sup>1154</sup> "Washington's Memorandum Cash Account," *Smith*.

<sup>1155</sup> Luzancy, *Panegyrick*, 30, 27, 29.

frontiers. Without these influential neighbors, young Washington probably would not have secured the prestigious position of the Culpeper County surveyor when most surveyors of his age served as mere apprentices. My findings from researching the data of other county surveyors attest that Washington was one of the youngest men who actually qualified for this position in the mid-eighteenth century Virginia.

In my view, two significant factors can be positively identified that facilitated young Washington's rapid ascent to a more prominent status among his contemporaries. First, the condescending disposition of his patrons, particularly his eldest half brother Lawrence, the Fairfaxes, and Governor Dinwiddie. Second, the attention he received was merited by both his inner qualities his contemporaries quickly recognized. Concurring with Ferling, I believe "his patrons had not gone to bat for him solely because of family ties and kindness."<sup>1156</sup> Young Washington was especially adroit in knowing how and when to ask for a favor from his superiors. He was willing to volunteer to provide service that was demanding, venturesome, and risky. His early correspondence and diary records reveal a highly ambitious young man who actively sought opportunities to prove himself worthy of meriting the approbation of his betters.

Moreover, Washington's personality traits matched his outward appearance, for he was blessed with a soldier-like frame. He rose to an unusual height, towering almost a head above an average man of his day. In his late twenties, Washington was described as "straight as an Indian" with a muscular build, large hands and feet, "wide shouldered," of "a pleasing, benevolent, though a commanding countenance . . . his walk majestic, and he is a splendid horseman."<sup>1157</sup> Considering the combination of his appetite for enterprise and his formidable stature, I believe it is only rational that his superiors were impressed by and readily welcomed service from the energetic Virginian.

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<sup>1156</sup> Ferling, *Ascent*, 13.

<sup>1157</sup> Quoted in Toner, *George Washington*, 20.

Not many of Washington's contemporaries got such a taste of international fame at the age of twenty as he did. His adventurous yet particular account of his journey to the French commandant in 1754 as well as his first military clash with Jumonville's men later that year did not escape the notice of a number of attentive printers on both sides of the Atlantic. It is important to remember that at his early age, Washington's name was introduced to a number of concerned British diplomats both in America and in the Great Britain, including George II.

Overall, Washington took his assigned duties responsibly during the French and Indian War, but his heroic performance in the ill-fated Battle of the Monongahela of 1755, in particular, gave rise to additional plaudits of his valor as well as his devotion to his duty. Following the battle, his distinguished military action was recognized by diverse gazettes and magazines not only in Virginia but in other provinces as well.

That Washington continued to yearn for further recognition is evidenced near the end of his early military service. Vexed by undue delays in carrying out a planned military action against the French in 1758, Washington lamented to the speaker of the House of Burgesses, "That appearance of Glory once in view—that hope—that *laudable Ambition* of Serving Our Country, and meriting its applause, is now no more!"<sup>1158</sup>

I have demonstrated that Washington's pursuit of "laudable ambition" was not oxymoronic, for the modifier and the noun were frequently paired in Washington's day to emphasize the rectitude of one's objectives. For instance, a Philadelphia Weekly Magazine article later explained that "*ambition may be rational and laudable . . . when it seeks and aims at the peace and happiness of human society, and the good of our fellow-creatures.*"<sup>1159</sup> The

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<sup>1158</sup> GW to John Robinson, 1 September 1758, in *PGW* (my italics).

<sup>1159</sup> "On Ambition," *Weekly Magazine* (Philadelphia), February 3, 1798, <http://books.google.com/books?id=mJ0wAAAAAYAAJ> (my italics).

urge “to excel, to have precedence” in a virtuous sense was at the core of Washington’s aspirations.<sup>1160</sup>

Washington’s longing for recognition and admiration of gentry lifestyle contributed to a suspicion among Washington historians of his marriage de convenance with one of the wealthiest widows in the province. While such unions were not uncommon in Washington’s day, they were already on their decline by the mid-eighteenth century. However, the obvious convenience of their marriage, which can hardly be doubted, may have been an overdrawn factor in postulating that practical considerations were the main reasons of their union. While conclusive evidence is missing, my research indicates that practicality seems to have been merely a positive stimulus rather than *raison d’être* of his proposal.

Washington’s industriousness in his various pursuits during the interwar period evidences that his drive for success did not terminate with his resignation from the army. His interests included farming projects in which he constantly experimented with new methods in crossbreeding, planting seeds or raising livestock in hopes of increasing the productivity of his farms. Perhaps no other single crop consumed as much of Washington’s exertion and time than the cultivation of tobacco, the most prestigious and earning plant among well-off Virginian planters of his day. So seriously did Washington apply himself in the cultivation and sale of tobacco overseas that he once wrote to one mercantile firm in London that he was certain that he “no Person in Virginia takes more pains to make their Tobo fine than I do.”<sup>1161</sup>

Besides farming, Washington’s interwar pursuits included the most assiduous and methodical chase for new lands. Records indicate that he had been consistently engaged himself in purchasing tracts of land in his home colony and beyond with the intent of renting them to settlers for a fee or selling them later at a higher price. Dinwiddie’s Proclamation of 1754 promised him and other officers some 80,000 hectares in the Ohio Valley, and

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<sup>1160</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, 39.

<sup>1161</sup> GW to Robert Cary & Company, 3 April 1761, in *PGW*.

Washington spent years pushing for the surveying and granting procedure to obtain his due share. He was also one of the founding “Adventurers” of the ambitious Mississippi Land Company as well as one of the “Adventurers for Draining the Dismal Swamp” on the Virginia and North Carolina border.<sup>1162</sup> In short, his vigorous exertions in his transatlantic farming business and his involvement in a number of highly ambitious projects beyond his province illustrate Washington’s continued activity and inclination for significant achievements.

The unwritten rules of *noblesse oblige* of the day prescribed that able members of the gentry class sacrifice their personal inclinations for domestic lifestyle for the sake of offering their talents in public offices of responsibility. In Munford’s contemporaneous theatrical play idealizing one Virginia burgess election, Worthy is reminded by another gentleman, “But, sir, it surely is the *duty* of every man who has abilities to serve his country, to take up the burden, and bear it with patience.”<sup>1163</sup> With Washington’s prominence being steadily on the rise since his adolescence, it was only a matter of time before he joined the ranks of the colonial elite.

Washington’s entry into the world of politics was carefully thought out after discreetly sounding the “Pulse” of influential gentlemen first to ascertain that his chances were sufficiently high.<sup>1164</sup> Washington’s circumspection in this respect suggests that he wished to avoid a defeat not only in the army but in the politics also. Had it not been for the backing of Lord Fairfax, James Wood, and other influential men, Washington would have hardly succeeded in winning a burgess election at age of twenty-six without having first served in the parish vestry or county court, as was the norm for most gentlemen.

It was in the lower house of the General Assembly of Virginia where Washington became better acquainted with future delegates to Continental Congress (namely Edmund Pendleton, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and Richard Henry Lee) and they with him. As

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<sup>1162</sup> Mississippi Land Company Articles of Agreement, 3 June 1763, in *PGW*.

<sup>1163</sup> “Candidates,” in Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 42 (my italics).

<sup>1164</sup> GW to John Augustine Washington, 28 May 1755, in *PGW*.

the Revolutionary crisis kept approaching, Washington discussed the strained political situation with hosts of notable men at length. If Washington in 1769 believed that “A—ms [Arms] . . . should be the last resource; the de[r]nier resort,” then his order in 1771 of holsters for a “pair of pistols,” “a Fash[ionabl]e and handsome small Sword wt. Belt Swivels,” and “a Neat Sword Belt with Swivels” may be indicative of his foresight of the probability of his military involvement in the conflict.<sup>1165</sup>

Washington’s wearing of his uniform during the May and June sittings of Continental Congress in 1775 has often been used as an evidence of his longing for the chief command of the armies. To better comprehend the rationale of Washington’s donning of his military attire, it is important to remember that well before the Congress convened in May, there already was a general expectation that Washington would play a significant military role in the army. For about half a year, he had been a military leader for the independent companies of Fairfax and Prince William counties, and for several months a commander of Richmond, Spotsylvania, and Albemarle counties as well. Therefore, it is presumable that in the months prior to the opening of the Continental Congress in 1775, Washington was already wearing his military uniform whenever he rode to muster or train the several companies throughout Virginia.<sup>1166</sup> One member of the Spotsylvania Independent Company wrote Washington before he set out for Philadelphia that there “is not the least doubt But youl have the Command of the Whole forces in this Collony.”<sup>1167</sup> A similar expectation was noted by Edmund Randolph who said

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<sup>1165</sup> GW to George Mason, 5 April 1769, GW to Robert Cary & Company, 12 August 1771, in *PGW*.

<sup>1166</sup> *DGW* 3:291n, 303, 309, 313, 321-325; Extracts from the Minutes, 11 November 1774, in Hamilton, *Letters to Washington*, 5:68-69; Richmond County Independent Company to GW, 17 March 1775, GW to John Augustine Washington, 25 March 1775, Prince William Independent Company to GW, 26 April 1775, Spotsylvania Independent Company to GW, 26 April 1775, Albemarle Independent Company to GW, 29 April 1775, in *PGW*; From the Fairfax Independent Company, in Hamilton, *Letters to Washington*, 5:56n.

<sup>1167</sup> Alexander Spotswood to GW, 30 April 1775, Spotsylvania Independent Company to GW, 26 April 1775, in *PGW*.

Washington was elected to the Congress with the likely prospect of “command[ing] the army, if an army should be raised.”<sup>1168</sup>

While Washington did not know how soon the momentous decision of appointing a general would be made in Congress, I believe he was not timid to wittingly face whatever Providence had prepared for him. He may not have read Samuel Davies’s sermon of 1755, but he conducted himself as if he were convinced that he had been preserved “for some important Service to his Country.”<sup>1169</sup> It was as if this awareness reminded him to be and act the part he was “meant” to. Many genteel virtues were part of his second nature by this time, but his apprehension that “unavoidable necessity” would call him to the helm probably made him all the more attentive to the uprightness of his deportment.<sup>1170</sup>

After all, it was most likely the cumulative effect of his large stature, erect posture, military bearing, and personal charisma that magnetized the congressional delegates. His personality was described as “diffident,” virtuous, “clever, & if any thing too modest,” and was apparently endowed with gravitas that may have eclipsed even the bearing of monarchs of his day. In 1775, Benjamin Rush said that Washington had “so much martial dignity in his deportment that you would distinguish him to be a general and a soldier from among ten thousand people. There is not a king in Europe that would not look like a valet de chamber by his side.”<sup>1171</sup>

During the War of Independence, Washington was perhaps more concerned about the public estimation of his character than about his personal military achievements, though one, of course, impacted the other. Washington’s care for his public image is demonstrated in his acceptance of the chief command of the American armies when he explicitly hoped to

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<sup>1168</sup> *DGW* 3:268n; “Williamsburg, August 5,” *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg), August 4 [5], 1774, NewsBank, <http://www.genealogybank.com/>; Van Schreeven, *Revolutionary Virginia*, 1:227.

<sup>1169</sup> Davies, *Religion and Patriotism*, 11-12n.

<sup>1170</sup> GW to Martha Washington, 18 June 1775, GW to John Parke Custis, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>1171</sup> Silas Deane to Elizabeth Deane, 16 June 1775, Eliphalet Dyer to Joseph Trumbull, 17 June 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, vol. 1; John Adams autobiography, part 1, sheet 20, in *Adams*; Benjamin Rush to Thomas Ruston, 29 October 1775, in Kaminski, *Founders on the Founders*, 474.

safeguard his “reputation” in case of “some unlucky event . . .”<sup>1172</sup> He sincerely hoped to contribute to American victory, but “without Injury . . . to my own reputation.”<sup>1173</sup> Far from hauteur, it was a genteel regard for honor and esteem.

After his appointment, Washington became the main actor in the transatlantic theater of American rebellion against the British Empire. He was aware that the eyes of the world audience focused on him and that his moves would be evaluated for good or bad in the annals of history. Since the sociocultural milieu of the American Revolution had less to do with the economic burdens (e.g., the size of imposed taxes) than with the conviction that the American subjects were being increasingly oppressed by inherently corrupted and liberty-restraining British governmental authorities, Washington’s leadership also symbolized a much sought antidote by standing for the ideals of public virtue Americans increasingly studied and admired, particularly those of the ancient world.

The virtue Washington and others aspired to was “the public virtue of self-control and moral rectitude that was itself the product of the private virtue of the individuals who composed the public.”<sup>1174</sup> Washington’s ethical code, inspired by the then popular classical ideals, led him to serve in the chief command without a salary, an act that intended to prove his willingness “to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community.”<sup>1175</sup>

While it is true that Washington was willing to sacrifice much to earn recognition for his services, he also liked to acquaint others with what sacrifices he was making. Such professions had the inevitable effect of making others believe that “Washington lived not for

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<sup>1172</sup> GW to John Hancock, 24 June 1775, Transcripts of Letters from George Washington, 1775-83, 9 vols., in *Papers of the Continental Congress*, 1:1, <http://www.fold3.com/image/#442748>; Address to the Continental Congress, [16 June 1775], in *PGW*.

<sup>1173</sup> GW to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775, in *PGW*.

<sup>1174</sup> Greene, *Concept of Virtue*, 48.

<sup>1175</sup> Wood, *Creation*, 68.

himself.”<sup>1176</sup> His deep-seated sense of patriotic duty was much like his personal pole star that helped him exercise his almost unlimited military powers with great caution in order to preserve a virtuous public image.

The granting of dictatorial powers to Washington during the war evoked several popular analogies between ancient Roman dictators and the American general. Like many others, Washington found Cincinnatus and Fabius Cunctator worthy of emulation (the term dictator “had not yet acquired an evil modern resonance”) and, in a way, strove to become their latter-day reincarnation.<sup>1177</sup> The former was praised for returning his dictatorial powers to civil authorities and retiring to his farm (something Washington would later take pride in as well), the latter for liberating his country by conquering a superior Carthaginian army by his delaying military strategy (which Washington adopted, though reluctantly, for most of the Revolutionary War).

Washington’s steadfast resolve not to abuse the power he was vested with played a key role in saving the army from its potential dissolution or coup d’état during the trying times of the Valley Forge encampment and the Newburgh conspiracy. I selected these periods for analysis because they can be regarded as moments of truth in determining Washington’s true ambitions. While it is generally known that he was uncommonly sensitive about his reputation, it needs to be emphasized that his concern for the welfare of his country took precedence when the two interests were in conflict. In a number of instances during his public service, he stated that his greatest rewards were not material, for “the consciousness of having attempted faithfully to discharge my duty, & the approbation of my Country,” he wrote to

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<sup>1176</sup> Oliver Everett, *An Eulogy on General George Washington, Who Died on the 14th of Dec. 1799. Pronounced at Dorchester, Feb. 22, 1800. It Being the Day Recommended by Congress, for the National Lamentation of His Death* (Charlestown, [MA]: Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 15, <http://www.archive.org/details/eulogyongeneralg00ever>.

<sup>1177</sup> Wills, *Cincinnatus*, 20.

Congress, “will be a sufficient recompence for my Services.”<sup>1178</sup> Significantly enough, these words were not a mere rhetoric to gratify the congressional delegates but were continually accompanied by deeds that supported such an assertion.

While it is not true that Washington’s resignation from the chief command of the Revolutionary army was largely unanticipated, the act itself was admired and viewed as unprecedented in a world still dominated by kings. George III is said to have deemed Washington’s intended voluntary abdication despite being victorious so remarkable that he said, “if He did He would be the greatest man in the world.”<sup>1179</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte, too, reflected on the historical significance of Washington’s restoration of the Cincinnatus model, but admitted that, “I could only have been a *crowned Washington*.”<sup>1180</sup> Washington’s retirement to a civil life “forced a world more accustomed to Caesars than Cincinnatus to revise its definition of greatness.”<sup>1181</sup>

In one of the many poetic eulogies composed shortly after his death, Washington’s aspirations were recapitulated in a manner he would have endorsed:

Ambition never was his leading aim,  
 But patriotism inspir’d his great emprise:  
 He sought by noble actions in her service,  
 To merit well of his beloved country,  
 No higher did his thoughts affect to rise.<sup>1182</sup>

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<sup>1178</sup> GW to Continental Congress, 18 March 1783, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, image 1059.

<sup>1179</sup> Farington, *Farington Diary*, Greig, 1:278.

<sup>1180</sup> Las Cases, *Journal of the Private Life and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon at Saint Helena*, 200-01.

<sup>1181</sup> Smith, *Patriarch*, 358.

<sup>1182</sup> Thaddeus Mason Harris, *A Discourse Delivered at Dorchester, Dec. 29, 1799. Being the Lord’s Day after Hearing the Distressing Intelligence of the Death of General George Washington, Late President of the United States, and Commander in Chief of the American Armies* (Charlestown, [MA]: Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 10, <http://www.archive.org/details/eulogyongeneralg00ever>.

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- DSF Freeman, Douglas Southall. *George Washington: A Biography*. 7 vols. Vol. 7 completed by John A. Carroll and Mary W. Ashworth. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948-57.
- GW George Washington
- GWPLC *George Washington Papers, 1592-1943 (bulk 1748-1799)*. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress 1741-1799*. Archival Manuscript Material (Collection). Library of Congress. Washington, DC. <http://lccn.loc.gov/mm78044693/>.
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## RESUMÉ

Ve svých studiích o charakteru George Washingtona, Paul K. Longmore (*The Invention of George Washington*, 1999) a John Ferling (*The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon*, 2009) do značné míry opouští tradiční interpretace ambicí a společenského vzestupu tohoto amerického otce zakladatele tvrzením, že jeho obdivovaná zdrženlivost vůči velitelské hodnosti americké revoluční armády byla spíše vyhověním tehdejších společenských konvencí, nežli jeho skutečné charakterové atributy. Předkládaná disertační práce do značné míry na toto klíčové téma navazuje a vykládá hodnotu touhy po uznání a vnímání vlastenecké povinnosti Washingtona v kontextu sociokulturního prostředí britských kolonií v Severní Americe.

Napříč tomu, že se “otec vlasti” nenarodil v distingované rodině, pozbyl svého otce ve svém raném věku a nedostalo se mu výsady šlechtického vzdělání, Washingtonova kariéra a věhlas nabyly akcelerovaného vzestupu díky dvěma hlavním faktorům. Zaprvé, sousedská a příbuzenská vazba s Fairfaxovými, jednou z nejvlivnějších rodin v kolonii, a důvěra guvernéra Dinwiddieho poskytovala mladému Washingtonovi patřičné příležitosti ke službě, které mu výhodně zajistily perspektivní vyhlídky v budování jeho kariéry. Zadruhé, impozantní vojácká postava a obdivuhodně ctižádostivý charakter dopomohli Washingtonovi k odvážným, ne-li hrdinským, počínům a následnému získání slov uznání od svých nadřazených.

Práce rovněž neopomíjí problematiku otázky sňatku z rozumu manželů Washingtonových a v kontrastu se zvyklostmi tehdejších šlechtických plantážníků dokumentuje Washingtonovo úsilí o finanční prosperitu, zejména ambiciózním vykupováním neosídlených pozemků v periferních oblastech kolonie a transatlantickým obchodováním, založeným na své objemné tabákové úrodě. Jak je v práci uvedeno, Washingtonův

společenský vzestup do vrchních sfér koloniální společnosti se v některých ohledech vymykal konvenčním kariérám obdobných zbohatlíků. Jeho vojenská reputace a politická podpora vlivných šlechtických rodin mu zajistila úspěšnou kandidaturu do zákonodárného sněmu kolonie, která, napříč zvyklostem, předcházela jeho službě na okresní úrovni.

Patřičná pozornost je věnována dobovým významům klíčových termínů (zejména „ctnost“ a „ambice“) a způsobům, jakým tyto pojmy mohly ovlivňovat Washingtonovo vnímání svých vlasteneckých závazků či *noblesse oblige*. Interpretace vnímání své ambice jako „chvályhodné“ následně logicky vysvětluje záměry a cíle, se kterými se tento americký generál ztotožňoval a o které usiloval. Přestože se zdaleka nezdráhal obeznamenovat veřejnost se svými obětmi za blaho vlasti (např. jeho odmítnutí mzdy za velitelství kontinentální armády), jeho osobní oběti byly nemalé a skutečné a americký lid postupně nabýval přesvědčení, že „Washington nežil pro sebe.“<sup>1183</sup>

Jeho vlastenectví ho podněcovalo k tomu, aby formujícímu se národu poskytnul vhodné *exemplum virtutis*, neboť si uvědomoval, že revoluční období je právě oním momentem, kdy se natrvalo pokládají základní kameny amerického národního charakteru.<sup>1184</sup> V době, kdy byl svět stále navyklý spíše na Césary, nežli Cincinnaty, neobvyklost Washingtonového vzdání se prakticky všech svých zodpovědností na konci vítězné války a uchýlení se do civilního života, představovalo naplnění aspirací, které tento „otec vlasti“ pokládal ve své roli za nejžádoucnější.<sup>1185</sup>

<sup>1183</sup> Everett, *Eulogy on General George Washington*, 15.

<sup>1184</sup> GW, 8 June 1783, Circular to States on Farewell to the Army, Series 4: General Correspondence, 1697-1799, in *GWPLC*, images 165-66.

<sup>1185</sup> Smith, *Patriarch*, 358.