

Review, 85, 412 (1985); and Turov's more positive comments about his legal education at Harvard Law School.

3. For a brief explanation of the format in academic debate, see Ronald Lee and Karen King Lee, *Arguing Persuasively* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1989), pp. 230-32. One need not be an expert in competitive debate to use this method in class. There are several good texts that summarize the general responsibilities of each speaker in a debate. In addition to the text cited above, one might look at

Russell Church and Charles Wilbanks, *Values and Policies in Controversy: An Introduction to Argumentation and Debate* (Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbrick, 1986); Don Fauls, Richard Rieke, and Jack Rhodes, *Directing Forensics* (Denver: Morton Publishing Company, 1972); George Ziegelmueller and Charles Dause, *Argumentation: Inquiry and Advocacy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975); and Douglas Reeves and Sandra Reeves, *The Constructive* (Cheyenne, WY, SPDR, 1980).

## The Original Washington

Roger Karz, Villanova University

George Washington's writings can be of use to the political scientist. I have included Washington in a two-week segment of a 13-week "Intro to American Government" course at Villanova to develop the following themes.

*Founding Crisis.* Nothing better brings home to students the meaning of the American founding than Washington. One can list the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, expanding on each in a precise and clear manner. But students don't really see the problem. Have the class read a handful of Washington's letters describing in elegant detail the whole range of disastrous consequences of these weaknesses, and students grasp immediately.

On another matter, the decisive impact of Shays's rebellion on public thinking and especially on that of a leading segment of the Framers is nowhere more powerfully illustrated than in Washington. More than once, as he witnesses events in Massachusetts, Washington describes himself to be in some horrible dream, so incredible had our fortunes become. He goes on to predict that without action America would become what we today would call "another Lebanon."

Students can study a founding crisis, but their experiences are limited, and they tend to see what is around them as necessary. Washington's eloquent fears persuade them

otherwise. Washington shows what a founding means—that a founder faces a real choice, a fork in the road, as it were. There is nothing necessary about one road being taken over the other. Washington sobers students.

*Civic Virtue.* Washington's concern for citizen morality and his per-

---

*Washington shows what a founding means—that a founder faces a real choice, a fork in the road, as it were.*

---

ception of its connection with our political happiness is surely the capstone theme of his role as "Father of his Country." Teddy Roosevelt perceived the presidency as a bully pulpit, but in this as in other things, he had Washington, the great preceptor to the nation, as predecessor. That honesty is the best policy, in private as well as public policy, Washington preached ceaselessly, and he meant it and practiced it. Honest citizens meant public happiness, but on a less lofty plane, it also ensured the security of popular government, especially in an age where it was a novelty. (Washington himself had been offered kingship by some of his

## About the Author

Frank Guliuzza III

Frank Guliuzza III is assistant professor of political science, Weber State University. He was formerly director of forensics at the University of Notre Dame. His recently completed manuscript is *Beyond Incoherence: Making Sense of the Church-State Debate*.



officers.)

Civic virtue was understood differently by Washington than it is today. Voting and participating in campaigns were not deemed to be of its essence. Instead, it encompassed chiefly industry, frugality, and law-abidingness. Its opposite entailed dissipation, luxury, and corruption. It was so bound up with related habits and manners as to constitute a way of life. Again, Washington insisted on its connection with our happiness as a nation. There is something Socratic about Washington's adamant insistence on the connection between virtue and happiness.

Be this as it may, civic virtue in Washington's sense has taken its lumps in modern America, especially in urban America. So, after having my class read excerpts from Washington on civic virtue, I have taken to asking, "Are we happy?" Blank stares. Their instinct is to say, "Of course we're happy. What a question!" After discussing drugs, crime, personality disorders, and offenses against children, and concluding that maybe we're not so happy, Washington begins to hit home to some. Naturally, the issue has not been so simply resolved, for poverty could yet account for certain ills, as some students, or else I myself, observe. Still, the issue is a living one and remains open.

*Political Morality.* The issue of idealism versus realism in political

life receives a good airing in Washington. The man who was said to have admitted as a child to chopping down the cherry tree set no mean example for public integrity. That said, and conceding that there are few places one can even think to fault Washington on this score, there are some. In one of these, Washington even admits to circulating a public lie, deliberately.

Since lying to the public is known, in our finger-pointing age, to be utterly wrong and proof of deep moral turpitude, examination of this instance of Washingtonian mendacity is perhaps instructive. Washington admits to deceiving the British *and his own army* as to the object of the offensive that ultimately fell at Yorktown. Washington did everything in his power to make the world believe the blow would fall at New York.

One of my students reacted to this by snorting that all politicians are liars, Washington is no different, and what do you expect anyhow? However, most of the class were not willing to leave it at that, thought that the realities of war ought to be taken into account as a mitigating circumstance, and maintained that perhaps a lie is not the absolute worst thing that could ever happen in politics.

*Precedents.* Washington knew that policies and practices established during the early years of the government under the Constitution would likely set a course followed far into the future. The role of precedents in political life is clearly seen through studying Washington's administration. The Constitution provided no limit to the number of terms a president could serve. Yet for 150 years Washington's two-term precedent held. More significantly, the "national character," as Washington phrased it, was fixed in fundamental ways during Washington's administration. Public faith and gratitude were chief among domestic qualities. This was a government to be counted on to pay *its* debts. It has remained

so. And this was a government to be counted on for generous remembrance of the sacrifices of those who served in the nation's wars. It has remained so. Towards foreign nations, justice and benevolence were the ideals and have remained so. All these qualities define American government in a way over and above any phrases in the Constitution. And they are so much taken for granted that they are hardly noticed. Reading Washington opens eyes.

It should be clear from all of the above that Washington was far from the intellectual light-weight he is often credited with being. What most struck me upon first reading his own words was his astonishing prescience and his eloquence. Also surprising was what can only be described as a charmingly impish sense of humor in

---

*Washington embodies the opposite extreme—the extraordinary, the politician of genuine political stature.*

---

some of Washington's more private letters. There are more sides to Washington than that visible in the portrait engraved on our dollar bills.

A word is required about Washington's slave ownership. We today know slavery to be wrong. Washington, too, knew that slavery was wrong. He stated so repeatedly. He also searched for a practical way of remedying the practice, without finding one for his day. But Washington did free all of his slaves in his will. It is tragic that more of his countrymen did not follow this precedent of Washington's as they did his precedents of administration.

On first reading Washington many students are perplexed. What a strange man! How "weird"! Yet most soon develop a certain wonder

at the man. This is salutary. Wonder is not understanding, but it is the beginning of understanding, especially where a remote and alien phenomenon is involved. Washington is surely that! He corresponds to nothing with which students are familiar. Washington was heroic, while they know only the ordinary. Today, the ordinary that they know has become so impossibly ordinary, that even they can perceive it as such. Washington embodies the opposite extreme—the extraordinary, the politician of genuine political stature.

Naturally, it is necessary for the political scientist to separate Washington, the man in American history, from Washington the myth. For this, one must strive to "get inside Washington's head" to the greatest degree possible. More than studying contemporary writings, this means studying the writings of Washington himself. An excellent recent compilation that I have used is *Washington: A Collection*, edited by W. B. Allen (Liberty Press, 1988). The depth of Washington's character shines through in this collection. So does its varied facets.

In summary, do you need to make the founding crisis live? Or need to shed light on issues of political morality and civic virtue? Or need to refer students to the origins of numerous fundamental aspects of national politics so taken for granted as often not to be noticed? Or more generally, do you need an illustration of political stature against which to measure contemporary mediocrity? Washington serves to teach all of these and, along the way, so captivates most students as to remove the drudgery from learning them.

---

**About the Author**

Roger Karz has taught at Willamette University and Portland State University and currently teaches at Villanova. His fields are American government, political philosophy, and politics and literature.