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# First in the Hearts of His Countrymen: The Extraordinary Leadership of George Washington

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## **Abstract**

Few names are as synonymous with United States history and American leadership as George Washington. The act of leading can be carried out via a multitude of titles and offices, and perhaps no other leader in American history embodied this to the extent of Washington. As the leader of the Continental Army and later the unanimously elected first President of the United States, he was both thrust into and accepting of various leadership roles and responsibilities throughout his storied career. Much has been written through biographies, analytical leadership essays, and Washington's own words as to how he became and was an icon of leadership both throughout his life and for posterity. This research probes that breadth of literature on the legacy of George Washington with the goal of gaining further insight into his life and personality to ultimately discover what made him the leader he was. Specifically, this is accomplished through the application to that record of ideas set forth by several leadership theorists in the work *Political Leadership: A Source Book*, edited by esteemed Harvard University professor of public leadership, Barbara Kellerman.

*Keywords:* George Washington, Leadership Theory, Barbara Kellerman, Transformational Leadership, Event-Making Leadership

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Great leaders come in all shapes and sizes. Some seem to be destined for greatness from their birth considering the affluent statuses of their families or their genetic luck that ensures their eventual rise to the throne. However, some possess no obvious mark for greatness at all. Leaders are born both rich and poor, known and unknown, with lifetimes of varying lengths to prove themselves. Augustine and Mary Ball Washington welcomed one of their ten children, George, into the world on February 22, 1732. As historian Robert F. Jones puts it, “there was no reason to suspect that anyone who noticed it realized it was the start of a life that would help to revolutionize the English-speaking world.”<sup>1</sup>

Few names are as synonymous with the United States of America and American leadership as George Washington. As Washington stated in a September 14, 1775, letter to then colleague Benedict Arnold, “every post is honorable in which a man can serve his country” — leadership can be carried out via a multitude of titles and offices.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps no other leader in American history knew this as well as, and to the extent of, George Washington. As the appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army and later the unanimously elected first President of the United States, Washington was both thrust into and accepting of various leadership roles and responsibilities throughout his storied career.

Much has been gleaned through biographies, analytical leadership essays, and Washington’s own conduct as to how he became and was an icon of leadership both throughout his life and for posterity. This research examines a breadth of literature on George

Washington, with the goal of gaining insight into his life and personality to discover what made him the leader he was. This will be accomplished through the application to that record of ideas set forth by several prominent leadership theorists in the work *Political Leadership: A Source Book*, edited by noted Harvard University professor of public leadership, Barbara Kellerman.

The theories offered by political scientists Harold D. Lasswell and E. Victor Wolfenstein are used to examine Washington's early years from his childhood into adolescence, which proved vital in his developing into a man who later led a revolution against the most powerful nation in the world at the time. Highlighting Washington's war involvement, a discussion of the leader in action versus leader in thought concept of Woodrow Wilson is used to expound on Washington's actions while in the military. Washington's political career posed a new set of challenges and opportunities as he was put into a position to create the institution of the presidency. The study of this period in his life primarily incorporates the typologies of philosopher Sidney Hook, namely regarding the eventful versus the event-making man. Finally, an elaboration on his time as president and immediately upon stepping down utilizes the ideas of leadership authority James MacGregor Burns on transactional versus transformational leadership.

It seems there exists an inherent fascination on the part of followers to determine why those who are so revered and looked upon as beacons of strength amid times of doubt do what they do. Psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and others have argued that the propensity to act in any way is likely rooted in a deeply subconscious yearning to fulfill a private motive.<sup>3</sup> Barbara Kellerman explores this psychoanalytic tradition, offering the theories of authors Harold D.

Lasswell and E. Victor Wolfenstein to stress the significance of the individual actor and the power of private urges, often rooted in childhood.

Washington's life as a boy and a young man remains clouded. Given the period of his birth and his falling into a respectable, but otherwise typical family, this is not surprising. However, according to Pulitzer Prize-winning author Joseph J. Ellis, these sparsely documented early years of Washington's life have been littered over time with legends and lore, designed to align his childhood with either the dramatic achievements of his later career or the "mythological imperatives of America's preeminent national hero."<sup>4</sup> Little is known about Washington's familial relationships aside from the fact that his paternal connection ended with his father's death when Washington was eleven years old and that his relationship with his mother was mysteriously estranged. As was the case throughout the still infant colonies at that time, the Virginian world into which George Washington was born was a decidedly precarious place where neither domestic stability nor life itself could be taken for granted. This harsh reality was driven home in April 1743 with the death of his father.<sup>5</sup>

Washington spent his adolescent years exclusively with his mother, where he had access to only basic scholastic resources. He received an education no more advanced than that of grade school, and he was never given the opportunity to attend college. This deficiency haunted him throughout his later career among American statesmen with more robust educational credentials. As he entered young adulthood, his half-brother Lawrence and the noble Virginian Fairfax family greatly influenced him. Lawrence acted as a father-figure for Washington, and the Fairfax family provided him with his first job as a land surveyor.<sup>6</sup> These experiences proved critical to his later success as a soldier and a leader.

Washington's early life undoubtedly affected how he developed into a leader. Just as Harold D. Lasswell described the "political man" as one who turns to public life, as a power seeker, to realize his private motives of rejecting deprivation, E. Victor Wolfenstein expanded to examine the "revolutionary personality," describing the revolutionary leader as someone whose actions are greatly influenced by their relationship with their parents.<sup>7</sup> Wolfenstein opined that all political revolutionaries seem to share somewhat similar childhood and adolescent experiences. Attempting to ascertain why a person becomes a revolutionary type of leader, he conducted a comparative analysis of three markedly different revolutionary leaders: Mahatma Gandhi, Vladimir Lenin, and Leon Trotsky. In these case studies, he found that their lives contained no discernable similarities until the point of adolescence. At this phase of development, all three shared the distinct similarity of having poor, or non-existent, relationships with their fathers. This occurring in adolescence is even more critical. As Wolfenstein suggested, in all three cases, contact with the father was cut off when the emotional involvement with him was still extremely high. Therefore, the psychological void that accompanied this break with paternal authority was kept alive and remained unresolved. In such a case, "it is extremely likely that the individual will be responsive to occupations, of which revolutionary activity is one, which allow him to work through his conflicts and hopefully resolve them."<sup>8</sup>

George Washington fits Lasswell's and Wolfenstein's descriptions in two distinct ways. For one, while Washington may not have single-handedly led a revolution, and not nearly with the same degree of political aggressiveness and lust for peer elimination as Wolfenstein's examples, he was a major player in one of the most impactful overthrows in world history.

Second, Washington had extremely poor, if not non-existent relations with both parents at a critical time of his life. Between his estrangement from his mother and the separation from his father during adolescence, Lasswell and Wolfenstein would argue that this undoubtedly created a subconscious void which later influenced his actions as a power seeker to throw off feelings of deprivation. Particularly with respect to losing his relationship with his father, Washington was deprived of a traditional paternal influence at an exceedingly hyperemotional moment, and the effect was a lasting and obviously unresolvable conflict which he attempted to express with gross positions of masculinity in the military and later political arenas.

After establishing the characteristics of the revolutionary personality, Wolfenstein then studied why a revolutionary becomes a leader by analyzing their attitudes toward fellow revolutionaries and toward authority. Wolfenstein argued that once the person becomes a leader, they must bear the responsibility of having followers. This relationship is complex, as the revolutionary personality views their followers as their “children” and works to ensure that their followers have a more stable fatherly figure under the leader’s rule.<sup>9</sup> This likely played into Washington’s later advocacy for education and guarantee of responsible leadership for the country after his departure, as well as how he led his troops.

George Washington’s introduction to military life came primarily by falling into a favorable situation. In 1752, at the behest of his dying half-brother Lawrence and with the influential backing of the Fairfax family, Washington was appointed to a leadership post in the Virginia militia by Governor Dinwiddie. Until 1759, he spent most of his time in the Ohio Country, where he was exposed to the art of soldiering and leading. He received his first formal assignment in spring 1754, where he was dispatched, with command over one hundred troops,

to protect settlers in the Ohio Country from the mounting French attack.<sup>10</sup> This led to Washington's involvement with commanding over numerous military disasters throughout the French and Indian War. However, his charisma helped him deflect total blame, and he managed to maintain his reputation as a military man. This led to the cessation of his military activities until, amid both his and the colonists' growing frustrations over British taxation, he assumed command of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775.<sup>11</sup> This appointment came largely due to his widely recognized ability to rally troops and the hope that his prominent status in Virginia could unite the other colonies.

His command strategy was marked by quick action and continual adjustment, rooted in bold maneuvering and a deeply ingrained urge to act.<sup>12</sup> Washington's leadership style also began to materialize, as his military life was defined by a propensity to recognize tactical deficiencies and work to create solutions. Above all, historian Edward G. Lengel argues that Washington's service during the French and Indian War gave him the opportunity to see that he was capable of being extremely adept and could learn how to manipulate unwieldy subordinates and superiors alike to incite progress.<sup>13</sup> This was achieved primarily through his ability to influence troops to pressure those who disagreed with decisions into submission.

This manifested itself in Washington's keen sense of awareness that he must take care of his troops and respond efficiently to their needs above all else. There was popular belief at the onset of the war that the sheer spirit of the fight would propel the rebels to a degree of success. However, Washington was one of the first to recognize that a poorly organized ragtag army of temporary volunteers, no matter how dedicated to the cause, could not win the war.<sup>14</sup> This flawed thinking contributed detrimentally to early losses, and made Washington realize

that, regardless of how unwavering and steadfast his outward excitement remained, popular support for the war quickly began to fade from those soldiers on whom it depended. This loss of enthusiasm was due to men being unpaid, a smallpox epidemic that was systematically ravaging Continental camps, and the fact that soldiers were fighting a seemingly lost cause.<sup>15</sup>

The brilliance in Washington's military leadership was in how he responded to all three of these concerns. He felt great sympathy for the plight of his unpaid men, and, while counseling them against rash measures, urged Congress to recognize the services of the army by making provisions for the payment of money due to soldiers.<sup>16</sup> Given that they were not being paid, the gripes of his men were understandable in that they also had no defense other than to sit by and watch as much of the army was being wiped out by a smallpox epidemic. Recognizing this, Washington went against many of his colleagues and advocated for inoculation. With this single act, argues Ellis, "a compelling case can be made that his swift response...was the most important strategic decision of his military career."<sup>17</sup>

War weariness was largely rooted in the perceived lack of viable outside resource support. Much of the Continental army's earliest struggles were due to poor command structure and failing logistical support. However, Washington refused to relent in the face of adversity. Rather, he worked for a solution and convinced troops to reenlist. Recognizing the fight could not be won unilaterally, he also pushed for what later became the crucial alliance with France. Furthermore, he wrote to Congress to recommend the creation of different departments within the army and to request funding for additional supplies. Congress complied and awarded him a two-million-dollar line of credit.<sup>18</sup>

In an extraordinary way with his military leadership, Washington had the ability to read his soldiers and deliver what they needed at the perfect time. For instance, one of his riskier schemes during the war was to authorize the surprise attack at the Battle of Trenton on Christmas night 1776. While an important military victory for the otherwise struggling Continental Army, Washington knew that this battle came at a critical juncture psychologically. As former Executive Director of the Mount Vernon Historical Site James Rees wrote, “not only did Washington’s victory prove to be a turning point in the war, but it also persuaded many of his men...who held in their hearts dreams of heading home — to renew their enlistments.”<sup>19</sup> Washington could not have expected a huge, tide-turning struggle at Trenton, but he was aware of the lasting effect. This battle was not about a decisive, tactically critical military victory as much as it was about Washington’s recognition that something needed to be done to boost morale.

George Washington’s military life shows his tendency toward action, as he was never the type of person to passively stand by and hope for a change of fortune. Woodrow Wilson defined leadership in terms of what it meant to be a leader in thought versus a leader in action. This refers to the tendency of the leader being slow to act in contrast to a leader who is prone to quickness. Furthermore, he strictly asserted that “only those are ‘leaders of men,’ in the general eye, who lead in action.”<sup>20</sup> For Wilson, leaders in action, who often prove to be more practical, far outperform their counterpart leaders in thought, who tend to overanalyze situations for fear of criticism. Washington, while concerned with maintaining his reputation at times and therefore cautious of inciting criticism, was a leader in action. He continually resorted to activity rather than becoming overwhelmed by the odds against the rebellion. In a situation

where people were trying to overthrow the oppressive power of a far greater force, a reasonable leader could ill afford to consider the odds.

Equally important, Washington was constantly attuned to the practicality of the situation, knowing the degree of difficulty but also striving to work with it rather than allow it to condemn the cause. For instance, his early insight to see that mere fighting spirit could not win the war, his response to build up the military, his forcing the issue with Congress to obtain the financial and foreign aid resources necessary to have a fighting chance, and his working to alleviate the effects of disease is markedly characteristic of a leader in action.

Wilson also wrote that the leader in action must have the ability to shape, influence, and mold their followers, while remaining keenly attuned to how far they can realistically lead. Wilson said, “the ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people,” meaning they must have a sense of what their followers need and at what time they need it.<sup>21</sup> The voices and attitudes of the people must trump all when trying to create change or promote action. Furthermore, a superior leader renders their followers in such a way that “men are as clay in the hands of the consummate leader.”<sup>22</sup> Washington knew exactly what to say and what to do to mold his soldiers back into the followers he wanted them to be. His initiation of the Battle of Trenton was done with full knowledge of the risk, but he also knew its potential to provide a much-needed psychological boost for his men. Moreover, he recognized the threat of impending desertion and swiftly responded with his appeal to Congress for financial assistance. It is reasonable to question whether someone else who lacked Washington’s active approach would have secured these necessary provisions vital to the cause.

George Washington's military efforts in the realm of leadership were defined by his genius in balancing both an appropriate amount of analysis with deliberate action. Again, Barbara Kellerman highlights the words of Woodrow Wilson, who stated that great statesmen "direct and rule by a sort of power to put themselves in the place of the nation...at the same time that they display the courser sense and the more vulgar sagacity of practical men of business."<sup>23</sup> This reinforces Wilson's belief that leaders should be thinkers and simultaneously individuals of action. George Washington was keenly aware of the formidable foe he faced and a battle that overwhelmingly disfavored the smaller adversary. However, his military leadership, as a clear leader in action, is defined by how he refused to sit idly by and accept seemingly inevitable defeat.

The office of President of the United States is one with a rich history and a position where some have left more lasting impacts than others. It is hard to consider a more daunting legacy to outdo regarding the presidency than that which George Washington carved in creating it. Scholars often recognize an important distinction of leadership lying in whether a person simply arrives at the circumstances around them, or they prove vital in creating something that lasts beyond their years. Barbara Kellerman discusses the typologies of the eventful versus the event-making man, as proposed by philosopher Sidney Hook.

As the infant United States began to advance beyond the overwhelming fact that it had successfully beaten all odds and overcome the mightiest power in the world, there was serious work to be done. Laying the foundation for the creation of a new country presented an extraordinarily difficult task. What Congress had ahead of it was, as Robert F. Jones puts it, "something that no one before them had tried and few after them would accomplish so

successfully: the self-conscious formation of a new government based on popular consent.”<sup>24</sup>

The Founders knew they needed to determine how to best achieve balance between a government that lacked authoritarianism yet could still be effective. It was imperative to install some type of person in power for success to be achieved, but the longstanding fear of a lone executive made such a decision difficult to conceive.<sup>25</sup> However, Washington was likely the only member of the established leadership base to whom Americans would willingly give political power. As political scientists Ethan Fishman, William D. Pederson, and Mark J. Rozell argue, “the courage, honesty, diligence, and acumen with which he had fought the Revolution dispelled fear on the part of his countrymen that he would abuse their trust.”<sup>26</sup> While there are contemporary scholars today who argue that perhaps this fanatic adoration of Washington represented a dangerous overstep of power, an overwhelming majority of people at the time were enamored by their leader and could not fathom the thought of him acting maliciously.

In February 1789, George Washington was unanimously chosen by the Electoral College to debut the presidency. Fully aware that everything he did would serve as the model for those to come as they built the country, he took on this unimaginable responsibility. Moreover, Washington and the other members of the young government were going to be held solely responsible for the initial success or failure of the American experiment. Not only was the freedom of the American people at stake, but the entire rest of the world looked to America to see if the young republic built on freedom and democracy could survive.<sup>27</sup>

From the beginning of Washington’s presidency in April 1789, he was forced to develop a clear short- and long-term plan to best run the country and build a prosperous nation. He entered office with a vision for what he believed the country could become, and he carried this

vision throughout his presidency. Above all, he sought to ensure a government based on both law and reason, believing that various viewpoints could be considered to help citizens determine proper laws and policies to ensure peace, prosperity, and happiness for all.<sup>28</sup> While his stated goal in taking the Oath of Office was to defend the Constitution, his primary efforts were often rooted in establishing the organization and effectiveness of both the presidency and federal government.

The first major action George Washington took involved establishing his team of advisors. Washington was entrusted to determine many organizational details since the Constitution made no specific provisions regarding the creation of a cabinet. Furthermore, whether what was defined as “the heads of the great departments” were to be under the jurisdiction of the president was not stated — he was only empowered to require their opinions.<sup>29</sup> Not only did he set the first precedent by establishing the presidential right to appoint cabinet members, but he also took it seriously to seek out the best minds available to fill key positions. Washington believed men of reason and capability would produce quality government, which would translate into national longevity.<sup>30</sup> The men whom he confided in were constantly called upon as critical advisors for decision-making on both the domestic and foreign policy fronts. In the spirit of making the best decisions possible, Joseph J. Ellis argues that “Washington surrounded himself with the most intellectually sophisticated collection of statesmen in American presidential history.”<sup>31</sup> At this time, “intellectual sophistication” would have included elite, classically educated men.

Washington also took an active role in legislative action, while remaining a champion for the responsible use of the executive powers afforded him by the Constitution. He was highly

conscientious of his duty to abide by the Constitution, particularly in his right to advise on legislation. Therefore, he took advantage of this power in his first annual address in January 1790. Pushing for the establishment of tangible policies, he offered Congress a sizeable list of recommended improvements for the Army, support of manufacturers, roads, and especially the promotion of education.<sup>32</sup>

One of the greatest tools Washington had in shaping and promoting impactful legislation was the executive veto power. He believed he could overrule on grounds of policy disagreement as well as unconstitutionality. However, in the interest of working cooperatively with legislators for the greater good of the country, he exercised considerable restraint. Granting the legislative branch freedom to perform its constitutional duties became a theme throughout Washington's presidency. While he remained fully aware of the powers granted to him as executive, he also valued allowing the other branches of government to operate without excessive overreach.<sup>33</sup>

Washington's time as president can also be remembered for his hard stance on matters of domestic policy. While Congress achieved moderate success early in passing legislative measures, the president and his cabinet soon had to contend with a new threat to the peace. In Washington's efforts to raise the appropriate funds needed to fulfill many of the recommendations he made, taxation became a necessity. Therefore, an excise tax was placed on whiskey in 1791, causing outrage among many Western Pennsylvania settlers. Considering this measure to be an infringement upon their rights, opposition and threats of rebellion arose. In response, leery of civil unrest and when other measures proved futile, Washington rode to the backcountry, with a federalized militia, and put down the unrest. His mere presence calmed

the threat of the Whiskey Rebellion with no spilled blood.<sup>34</sup> In consequence, Washington personally eliminated the threat to the central government, ensuring the legitimacy of both the Constitution and the country.<sup>35</sup>

Washington can also be studied through the philosophy of Sidney Hook, who distinguished between the eventful and the event-making man. Hook characterized the eventful man as less important than the objective circumstances surrounding him. Therefore, the possibility of dramatic action is already prepared, and the success awaits to be easily achieved. In contrast, the event-making man is forced to seek out and create circumstances himself.<sup>36</sup> Hook expounded on the typology of the event-making man, describing him as one who “finds a fork in the historical road and also helps, so to speak, to create it.”<sup>37</sup> Washington’s “fork in the historical road” was the presidency, which he used to create the United States of America.

Hook further suggested that the mark of a true event-making leader is in how the person operates in relation to his “machine.” He argued that “the event-making figure in history obviously can achieve nothing by himself alone. He is dependent upon a narrow group of lieutenants or assistants who constitute a ‘machine.’”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, a leader’s ability is often dependent upon how effectively they interact with and use their surrounding people. Hook argued that the best leaders must find the balance between total control of the machine while also genuinely relying on them for counsel when necessary for the good of their organization. Washington put painstaking thought into the establishment of his own political machine in the form of his cabinet. He did not have the luxury of future presidents who often arrived with the fortunate circumstances of being surrounded by brilliant political minds already in place.

Rather, Washington had the foresight as a leader to recognize that he needed to put both himself and the country into the best position possible with a collaborative approach to governing.

Washington's legislative work cemented his legacy as an event-making man. While always hesitant to use his executive power, since he knew political harmony was essential early on, the first veto in U.S. history made a clear statement. As the Congressional measure of reconfiguring population numbers to determine the number of state representatives came to Washington, he moved swiftly to correct a perceived injustice. He knew Congress was trying to systematically take power from southern states, which he considered unconstitutional. Therefore, he saw no choice but to issue the first veto. The eventful man would have failed to act, only later moving to right the wrongs in the face of circumstances that presented themselves. However, Washington's initiative ultimately contributed to the establishment of precedent that cemented the real power and overseeing authority of the presidency.

Domestically, Washington's presidency was influenced by his impact in handling the Whiskey Rebellion. Sidney Hook spoke to the great importance of the event-making leader being both indispensable and willing to perhaps push the limits of what could be done by other, ordinary people. Hook felt that "the event-making man is an eventful man whose actions are the consequences of understanding capacities of intelligence, will, and character."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, there appears to be great value in being capable of both event-making, by influencing later developments that otherwise would not have occurred, as well as being eventful in having the prudence to carry out actions.

Washington's initial orders to deploy troops in what amounted to a show of force in Pennsylvania to quell the rebellion was a risk. It was assumed at the time that using troops for intimidation was criminal in the democratic United States. However, as Pulitzer Prize-winning author James Thomas Flexner opined, "Washington had been so worried by the Whiskey Rebellion that he committed the most indiscreet act of his entire presidential career."<sup>40</sup> When a show of force alone proved unsuccessful, it became clear that the necessary solution was something that only Washington could have provided. However, his personal act to calm Pennsylvanians was done in a calculated way that the event-making man alone could have successfully achieved. He could have been a mere pawn in the bureaucratic system and still been famous for being the first president, but instead his character and the fact that he garnered such respect was critical in putting down the rebellion himself. This provided an essential presence of legitimate authority that would not have otherwise been shown.

George Washington's position as the first President of the United States was always going to make him at least partially eventful for arriving at the circumstances which caused him to act. However, what ultimately mattered more was what he did with it. He had to be put into the eventful situation of being able to exercise authority, but the genius of his leadership was in his ability to recognize his duty to be event-making by laying the groundwork for a successful country. His actions defined the institution of the presidency and what it meant to emulate the person of the president for the future of both the office and the country. His presidency was impactful, the policies of his administration proved creative and successful, and his country was prosperous because of his leadership.<sup>41</sup>

Given that George Washington was unanimously elected as president for his first term and chosen to maintain the office during his second, he clearly earned the trust and support of the American people. One of the best indicators of strong leadership lies in a person's ability to empower and elevate their followers, instilling in them the drive to act with a strong desire to thrive on their own. This sentiment is a stark contrast to the alternative, wherein a leader gains their following due to the mutual exchange of goods or services. Barbara Kellerman explains this concept by highlighting the ideas of acclaimed historian and political scientist James MacGregor Burns, who famously distinguished between the transformational versus transactional leadership types.

Washington considered the production of a satisfied citizenry as the key to national progress and achievement of national prosperity. As Burns stated in his book, *Washington*, with Susan Dunn, Washington's formula for instilling happiness was rooted in the development of "virtuous and reasonable citizens...fulfilling their responsibilities to their nation and to others, understanding that the interests of their fellow citizens were inseparable from their own...to balance their own 'advantage' with the common good."<sup>42</sup> For Burns, the transactional leader is one who seeks personal gain rather than the empowerment for their followers. Furthermore, Burns says that such transactional leadership occurs when "one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things."<sup>43</sup> Such leadership is defined primarily by striking deals with followers, such as pledging lower taxes or support for special interests in exchange for a vote. However, given that Washington neither needed to barter for support nor sought to be elected, transactional dealings were not his focus.

Washington's leadership can be examined according to the overall impact of his presidency. As historian Richard Brookhiser puts it, "leadership is more than plugging leaks...a leader must believe that there is some best to be brought out...if men are machines, you have to find the right 'power' switches to get them going."<sup>44</sup> Washington appealed to a distinct bond shared with his followers that only he could tap and offered himself as a model for both the presidency and the country. Therefore, the man who used his mastery of commanding attention and respect brilliantly turned the attention back on his followers. He strove to show the American people their own potential and instilled in them their own sense of responsibility. James MacGregor Burns would explain this method by proposing George Washington as a transformational leader, where such leadership occurs when a person can "engage with others in such a way that the leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality...their purposes...become fused."<sup>45</sup>

Washington took an approach to leadership far more in line with that of Burns' transformational style. He recognized that such a method was going to be far more impactful and beneficial for the long-term success of the country, particularly when he decided to step down. Such a style was emphasized in Washington's constant attempts to elevate his followers and inspire them to enact responsible change and sacrifice for the greater good. Aside from the fact that Washington pushed his followers to succeed, he was overwhelmingly confident in the potential of the American people, possessing faith that his countrymen were "rational beings" who could shape their own social and political destiny.<sup>46</sup>

With this philosophy, Washington offered the people ample opportunities to better themselves. For example, perhaps in part due to his own menial schooling, he remained a

devout proponent throughout his life of the value of education, insisting that it be known how critical it was to the success of the republic. Moreover, he often lobbied for his grand vision of a national university where students might have the opportunity to engage in intellectual studies that would ultimately benefit both themselves and the society that the government and people were collectively looking to build. In this pursuit of an educated citizenry, he routinely suggested that newspapers be more easily accessible, laws be made understandable for the average citizen, and post roads be improved so that information about government affairs could circulate faster and more reliably.<sup>47</sup> All this Washington did to give his followers the opportunities they needed to become engaged and to take an active role themselves in the formulation of the country. Ultimately, Washington forged his reputation as a transformational leader. He brought about comprehensive and lasting change by combining strong institutional shape with a unique philosophy of executive leadership that called for inspiring and cementing citizens' fundamental commitment to their federal government.<sup>48</sup>

The art of leadership is a subject of study that has captivated generations of people since the dawn of humanity and will likely continue to do so until the end of time. Everyone seems to possess their own definition of what it means to be a leader. To achieve a thorough understanding of what the act of leadership entails, numerous areas of study must be considered. Numerous scholars have emerged to offer their interpretations of what makes a great leader, all highlighting theories of what they find to invoke some of the most critical aspects of a quality executive.

In considering the theories of Harold D. Lasswell and E. Victor Wolfenstein, Washington's loss of paternal influence during his childhood played a vital role in his

development as a leader. From his youth into his early adulthood as a military man, Woodrow Wilson's thinking demonstrates that Washington emulated the traits necessary to be deemed a leader in action. As Washington grew older and worked to mold the country while establishing the office of presidency, Sidney Hook's typologies demonstrate that he was clearly an event-making man, and it was shown that he meets James MacGregor Burns' vision of a transformational leader.

George Washington is more than just the face of the one dollar note. His life offers an interesting case study in examining the art of leadership. His storied career afforded him the opportunities to lead in a military capacity and as the United States' first president. However, the actions he took and his personality while in various offices provide fascinating insight into why he led, why his followers followed, and how his conduct has left an imprint on American history and the study of leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert F. Jones, *George Washington: Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Leadership* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Washington Quotes on Leadership," *Mount Vernon Ladies' Association*, 2018, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/quotes/topic/leadership>.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Maccoby, "Why People Follow the Leader: The Power of Transference," *Harvard Business Review*, September 2004, <https://hbr.org/2004/09/why-people-follow-the-leader-the-power-of-transference>; Roger Holmes, "Freud, Piaget, and Democratic Leadership," *The British Journal of Sociology* 16, no. 2 (1965): 123-139, doi:10.2307/588354.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (New York, NY: Viking, 1960), 65-77, in *Political Leadership: A Sourcebook*, ed. Barbara Kellerman (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 59-60.

<sup>8</sup> E. Victor Wolfenstein, *The Revolutionary Personality: Lenin, Trotsky, Gandhi* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 303-313, in *Political Leadership* ed. Kellerman, 95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, in *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Brookhiser, *George Washington on Leadership* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2009), Chapter 2: Strategy.

<sup>13</sup> Edward G. Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing, 2005), 65.

<sup>14</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> Harold W. Bradley, "The Political Thinking of George Washington," *The Journal of Southern History* 11, no. 4 (1945): 472.

<sup>17</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 86-88.

<sup>18</sup> Mark McNeilly, *George Washington and the Art of Business: The Leadership Principles of America's First Commander-in-Chief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.

<sup>19</sup> James Rees and Stephen J. Spignesi, *George Washington's Leadership Lessons: What the Father of Our Country Can Teach Us about Effective Leadership and Character* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 49.

<sup>20</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "Leaders of Men," an address delivered 17 June 1890, in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 646-650, 659-664, 670-671, in *Political Leadership* ed. Kellerman, 428.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, in *Ibid*, 431.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, in *Ibid*, 430.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, in *Ibid*, 425.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, *George Washington: Ordinary Man*, 109.

<sup>25</sup> Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of George Washington* (Wichita, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1974), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ethan Fishman, William D. Peterson, and Mark J. Rozell, *George Washington, foundation of presidential leadership and character* (Westport, CT: Praeger Books, 2001), 131.

<sup>27</sup> McNeilly, *George Washington and the Art of Business*, 167.

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- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 168.
- <sup>29</sup> James Thomas Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensable Man* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 220.
- <sup>30</sup> McNeilly, *George Washington and the Art of Business*, 168.
- <sup>31</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 198.
- <sup>32</sup> Jones, *George Washington: Ordinary Man*, 118.
- <sup>33</sup> McNeilly, *George Washington and the Art of Business*, 168.
- <sup>34</sup> Jones, *George Washington: Ordinary Man*, 151-155.
- <sup>35</sup> McNeilly, *George Washington and the Art of Business*, 175.
- <sup>36</sup> Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1943), 151-170, in *Political Leadership* ed. Kellerman, 25.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid, in Ibid, 27.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, in Ibid, 32.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, in Ibid, 25-26.
- <sup>40</sup> Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensable Man*, 320.
- <sup>41</sup> McDonald, *The Presidency of George Washington*, 177.
- <sup>42</sup> James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn, *Washington* (New York, NY: Times Books, 2004), 51.
- <sup>43</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1978), 12-22, in *Political Leadership* ed. Kellerman, 295.
- <sup>44</sup> Brookhiser, *George Washington on Leadership*, Chapter 16: Bringing Out the Best.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, in Ibid, 296.
- <sup>46</sup> Burns and Dunn, *Washington*, 49.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid, 119-120.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid, 64.

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