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## Washington in glory, America in tears: The nation mourns the death of George Washington, 1799-1800

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WASHINGTON IN GLORY, AMERICA IN TEARS  
The Nation Mourns the Death of George Washington, 1799-1800

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the American Studies Program

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

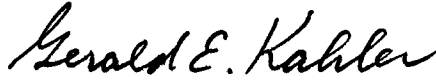
Gerald Edward Kahler

2003

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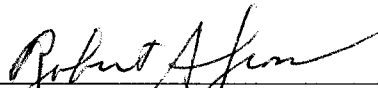
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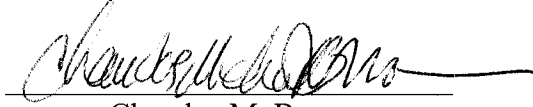
Doctor of Philosophy




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## PREFACE

### THE OLD CONTINENTAL. A Fragment

"Is he"—said the grey-haired Corporal—His eyes were filled with a watery amount, and he was obliged to take out his handkerchief. He forgot the mug of Beer, which he had called for—shouldering his walking stick, then reversing it marched home to a slow march.

"*The General is dead Phoebe,*" said he, as he made a halt and sat down.

"*Is he sir!*"—Phoebe was emptying her milk-pail—at this moment her hand trembled and the pail fell as she put her checked apron up to her eyes.

A little Girl, at this instant, came running from school—"General WASHINGTON's dead!" sobbed out Phoebe.

"*Is he?*"—the Girl sat down to cry.

Moses had just put up the cows and came in to dry his feet before he went to singing school—"What's the matter, Mima?" said he to his little sister.

"*General Washington's dead*"—she could barely lisp.

Moses forgot his feet were wet, and sat down in one corner whilst he wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his frock.

Phoebe was still standing with her apron to her face. Jemima had retired to her little block in the chimney corner. Moses had wet his frock sleeve through and through.

When the old Corporal raised his head from the top of his staff, "*Phoebe,*"—said he, "*you need not make my hasty pudding tonight.*" "*No sir!*"

Jemima at length said her prayers to her sister and went to bed. The whole family shortly followed her example, and even Moses raked up the fire and retired to his garret, forgetting that he was to have learnt *St. Martins* that evening.

By the break of day the next morning, the old man had got on his regimentals, which had remained in his oak chest ever since his return from West Point. He knocked up a neighboring shopkeeper to get a yard of black ribbon, and his grief seemed to be somewhat more calm when he had tied a piece of this round his left arm, and Phoebe had made a bow knot upon the top of his walking stick.

Jemima, seeing her father thus trimming himself with black ribbon, held up her little hands—"I too," said she. The old Corporal smiled upon her, and made shift to tie a knot upon her arm himself.

"I hoped once, Moses, that you would fight the enemies of our country with him—but God's will be done, as our Minister told me when your mother died. The old General's done fighting now.—I heard the Chaplain of our regiment say once, when he was burying the Colonel, that he supposed the ghosts of good men saw all that was done here among us—and could take out of harm's way all that they used to love here in the world. I suppose, Moses, our General's looking at us now! For I am sure he was a good man—and if our soldiers should have to fight the French, why he would be among 'em—and give orders too, only we shouldn't see him."

For the CENTINEL.

NORVAL.

*Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, Boston, 8 January 1800.

## ABSTRACT

The sudden death of George Washington at his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia, on December 14, 1799, plunged America into a prolonged period of national mourning. It is the central argument of this study that, although often overlooked by historians, the national mourning for George Washington from December 14, 1799 through February 22, 1800, represented a major event in the civic culture of the early American Republic that consolidated and crystallized the image of Washington and shaped him into an enduring symbol of the nation that was to become central to the American memory. The study compiles a comprehensive history of the national mourning for Washington by documenting over four hundred funeral processions and memorial services held around the nation during the winter of 1799-1800. These public mourning rituals are also analyzed in terms of cultural performance in their social, political, and religious contexts. In addition, one of the products of the study is a contemporary biographical sketch of the character and achievements of George Washington compiled from the prose portraits of him that were central to nearly all the eulogies and funeral orations delivered during the period of national mourning. The study is based on an extensive examination of printed materials from the mourning period for Washington. Printed copies of nearly three hundred Washington funeral eulogies and orations delivered throughout the country were located and carefully read and analyzed. The second major source of printed materials for this history of the national mourning for Washington was found in the complete runs of forty-two American newspapers published beginning in December 1799, when news of Washington's death was received, through the national day of mourning declared by Congress and proclaimed by President John Adams for February 22, 1800, the sixty-eighth anniversary of Washington's birth. During the national mourning for Washington in 1799-1800, vast numbers of Americans of all classes and regions, under the aegis of national, state, and local authorities, participated in official activities designed to mark the passing of the "Father of His Country." Through such commemorative events, they paid tribute to Washington, expressed gratitude for his services, and acknowledged and submitted to God's will in the death of their beloved and venerated hero. They also pursued secular agendas tied to the circumstances of the time. The mourning activities were orchestrated to affirm and demonstrate the stability of the new republic, the unity of its Federalist governing elites, and the consensus of the values upon which the American Republic stood. The memorial events were also used to advance the claims of specific groups in American society for active roles in civic life and for leadership of the nation. Clergymen, Freemasons, the Society of the Cincinnati, military officers, and Federalist political elites all vied for key roles in shaping and directing the national mourning for Washington. In mourning Washington, Americans at once displayed their sincere sentiments for the man, asserted their attachments to the republic whose cause he embodied, and showed their eagerness to participate in public life.

WASHINGTON IN GLORY, AMERICA IN TEARS



## INTRODUCTION

Let the faithful historian of these times remember to record it, for the information of the world, and of all future generations: That at the death of General George Washington, "All the Country Wept with a Loud Voice."

The Reverend Phillips Payson, Chelsea, Massachusetts,  
14 January 1800

On Monday, December 16, 1799, the inhabitants of Portland, District of Maine, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, read a traveler's account in their local weekly newspaper about George Washington's life at Mount Vernon since retiring from the presidency in March 1797. Washington had been unable to remain fully retired from public service for very long, having been commissioned on July 4, 1798 by President John Adams and Congress to the position of lieutenant general and commander in chief of the American armies, in anticipation of possible war with France. *Jenks' Portland Gazette* printed the following glimpse of General Washington's daily life at his Virginia estate:

By a gentleman who has recently visited Mount Vernon, we learn that the illustrious tenant of its quiet vales, passes his hours, in health and happiness, in agricultural pursuits, discoursing on topics of husbandry, sometimes of philosophy, studiously avoiding politics.—He gives himself up with his accustomed freedom to social intercourse, and keeps open house for all who come that way, taking an excursion now and then to the National City, to review the progress of the buildings and public works there.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Jenks' Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 16 December 1799.

However, because of Portland's distance from major cities and the slow communications systems of late eighteenth century America, the readers of the *Portland Gazette* could not have been aware that General George Washington had died suddenly at Mount Vernon on Saturday, December 14, 1799, two days before the story appeared in their newspaper describing his happy, healthy and bucolic lifestyle in semi-retirement. On Thursday evening, December 26, 1799, twelve days after Washington's death, Major Rowe of the United States Infantry arrived in Portland, bearing the melancholy news. Its columns bordered in black, Elezer Jenks' *Portland Gazette* on Monday, December 30 carried the headline: "AGONIZING MORTALITY! WASHINGTON, THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY, AND THE ADMIRATION OF THE WORLD IS DEAD!"<sup>2</sup>

On the morning following receipt of the news, the town selectmen of Portland, "moved with the same sorrow which touched the hearts of all the grateful inhabitants of the town, judging they wished to manifest their respect to the memory of that justly esteemed man," recommended a suspension of business and amusements from one o'clock until the close of the day. They ordered that the town's church bells be tolled and asked the Rev. Dr. Samuel Deane to deliver a funeral oration at a public memorial service that same evening at Rev. Kellogg's meetinghouse. Based on the citizens' responses to the arrangements made by their selectmen, it appears that the town fathers had accurately gauged the sensibilities of their constituents to the news of Washington's death, because the people of Portland "almost universally" complied with their recommendations. The shops and stores were closed, along with the public offices, tokens of grief were generally observed, minute guns were fired, and the United States flag was displayed at half-mast by ships in the harbor. "It was truly affecting to see the change which suddenly took

place. The bustle of business gave way at once to the silence of sympathetic sorrow.” The solemn services of the evening were attended by a “numerous assemblage.”<sup>3</sup>

As the word of Washington’s death was disseminated across the United States, a communications process that required nearly four weeks to be accomplished fully, the initial reactions of most American people seem to have been much like those of the inhabitants of Portland, Maine. A biographical sketch of Washington included in Massachusetts printer Isaiah Thomas’s 1801 almanac observed that “the death of General Washington was felt as an electric shock throughout the union. As the sad tidings spread, people of every description spontaneously united in their expressions of grief.”<sup>4</sup> In villages, towns, and cities across America, local newspapers reported the death of Washington and described the universal grief of their citizens upon hearing the news. The papers also announced public measures such as suspension of business, tolling of church bells, and funeral ceremonies to mark the death of the man who had been called since the time of the Revolutionary War, the “Father of His Country.” The initial responses to the news of Washington’s death were characterized by their spontaneity and universality throughout the nation. Benjamin Russell’s Boston newspaper, the *Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, reported: “Every paper we receive from the towns which have heard of Washington’s death are enveloped in mourning; and every city, town, village, and hamlet has exhibited spontaneous tokens of poignant sorrow.”<sup>5</sup> Joseph Gales’s *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser* observed: “Every paper in the Union teems with expressions of regret for the death, and

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 December 1799.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Isaiah Thomas’s Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode-Island, New Hampshire & Vermont Almanack, with an Ephemeris, for the Year of Our Lord 1801* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Isaiah Thomas, 1800).

reverence for the memory of General Washington . . . Were we to detail half the honors that have been paid to the memory of this great man, we should exceed the limits of our paper.”<sup>6</sup>

The announcement of Washington’s death in many towns and cities was followed almost immediately by hastily called meetings of selectmen or common councilmen who passed unanimously a series of resolutions to begin the public mourning process. They ordered bells to be tolled and minute guns to be fired, requested churches to drape their pulpits and altars in black, and called town meetings of the citizenry to formulate plans for appropriate funeral ceremonies. Often all business and commerce was suspended, and shops and offices were closed, sometimes for several days. Theaters cancelled their scheduled performances, dancing assemblies were postponed, and other forms of public amusement were suspended. Many towns organized spontaneous processions to their local meetinghouses where their ministers offered prayers and funeral sermons and eulogies in memory of Washington.

State legislatures that were in session when the news of Washington’s death was received typically adjourned immediately, after first passing unanimous resolutions calling on all members to wear black crape armbands or full mourning clothing during the balance of the current session. The United States Congress was in session in Philadelphia on December 18, 1799 when the intelligence of Washington’s death first arrived in the city. An “agitated” Congressman John Marshall of Virginia announced the news to the House of Representatives and moved an immediate adjournment, and the Senate also adjourned. Upon their return the next day, a joint committee of the two

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<sup>5</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>6</sup> *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 14 January 1800.

houses was appointed to formulate recommendations for appropriate measures to mark the death of the former president of the United States and commander in chief of the American armies.

The statewide governing bodies of fraternal organizations such as Masonic Grand Lodges and the Society of the Cincinnati immediately called meetings of their standing committees to discuss appropriate mourning measures and issued newspaper notices announcing funeral ceremonies and directing their members to wear badges of mourning for thirty days or longer. In recognition of General Washington's long military career and his active duty status at the time of his death as commander in chief of the American armies, state militia general officers and regular army unit commanders issued orders that all soldiers and officers wear crape armbands when in uniform and that officers wrap the hilts of their swords in black ribbon. James McHenry, Secretary of War, and Benjamin Stoddert, Secretary of the Navy, issued orders from President John Adams formally announcing the death of Washington to the military and specifying that officers of the army, navy, and marines wear badges of mourning for six months. Vessels of the navy in American and foreign ports were ordered to fly their standards at half-mast for one week. Major General Alexander Hamilton, second in command of the United States Army, issued orders containing detailed instructions for funeral honors to be paid at all army stations.

The universal mourning that followed the death of Washington provided profit-making commercial opportunities to printers of newspapers, eulogies, poems, songbooks, commemorative subscription books, and to merchants who sold a variety of merchandise including black crape and other fabrics for badges of mourning and for use in draping

churches and public buildings, jewelry, medals, paintings and prints, ceramics, and other commemorative objects. A variety of commemorative ceramic pieces were made in England and sold by American entrepreneurs including creamware pitchers or jugs that were made in Liverpool, England and shipped to merchants in America. Many of these Liverpool pitchers were decorated with a black transfer print by James Aikin and William Harrison, Jr., portraying a disconsolate woman, representing America, and a mourning eagle with a drooping head, standing at the tomb of Washington. The somber scene is encircled by the motto which lends its sentiment to the title of this study, *Washington in Glory, America in Tears*. Aikin and Harrison published the memorial print in Philadelphia on January 20, 1800, and advertised it in the *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser* as an ornament for the parlor or for needlework on white satin, “an agreeable pastime for the Ladies.”<sup>7</sup>

The sudden death of George Washington at his home at Mount Vernon, Virginia, on December 14, 1799, plunged America into a prolonged period of national mourning. It is the central argument of this study that, although often overlooked by historians, the national mourning for George Washington from December 14, 1799 through February 22, 1800 represented a major event in the civic culture of the early American Republic that consolidated and crystallized the image of Washington and shaped him into an enduring symbol of the nation that was to become central to the American memory. The study compiles a comprehensive history of the national mourning for Washington by documenting over four hundred funeral processions and memorial services held around

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<sup>7</sup> One such Liverpool pitcher is included in the author’s personal collection of antique decorative arts and memorabilia related to George Washington. The memorial print that decorates the creamware pitcher is described in Wendy C. Wick, *George Washington, An American Icon: The Eighteenth-Century Graphic Prints* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1982), 138-141

the nation during the winter of 1799-1800. These public mourning rituals are also analyzed in terms of cultural performance in their social, political, and religious contexts. In addition, one of the products of the study (see Chapter Eight) is a contemporary biographical sketch of the character and achievements of George Washington compiled from the prose portraits of him that were central to nearly all the eulogies and funeral orations delivered during the period of national mourning.

The study is based on an extensive examination of printed materials from the mourning period for Washington. Printed copies of nearly three hundred Washington funeral eulogies and orations delivered throughout the country were located and carefully read and analyzed. Soon after their delivery, many local governments, churches, and Masonic lodges ordered copies of the eulogies to be printed for distribution to their constituents, a fortuitous action that resulted in the preservation of the eulogists' manuscripts in the form of pamphlets, reprints in contemporary newspapers, and their inclusion in several collections of eulogies published in subscription books. The second major source of printed materials for this history of the national mourning for Washington was found in the complete runs of forty-two American newspapers published beginning in December 1799, when news of Washington's death was received, through the national day of mourning declared by Congress and proclaimed by President John Adams for February 22, 1800, the sixty-eighth anniversary of Washington's birth. The newspapers were selected from those published in all major cities and regions of the country, and the sample includes at least one paper from each of the sixteen states that comprised the United States in 1799-1800. The sample size represents about twenty percent of the approximately two hundred newspapers being published in the United

States in 1800. There are about two Federalist papers for each Republican paper in the sample, a ratio mirroring that of all American newspapers published in the period.

Because the national mourning for Washington was documented so thoroughly in print, there is a wealth of related information available including descriptions of funeral processions and memorial services, eulogies and orations, legislative resolutions, poems, dirges and hymns, letters to editors of the newspapers, and reports of the activities of religious, fraternal, and military and civic groups in expressing their grief.

During the national mourning for Washington in 1799-1800, vast numbers of Americans of all classes and regions, under the aegis of national, state, and local authorities, participated in official activities designed to mark the passing of the "Father of His Country." Through such commemorative events, they paid tribute to Washington, expressed gratitude for his services, and acknowledged and submitted to God's will in the death of their beloved and venerated hero. They also pursued secular agendas tied to the circumstances of the time. The mourning activities were orchestrated to affirm and demonstrate the stability of the new republic, the unity of its Federalist governing elites, and the consensus of the values upon which the American republic stood. The memorial events were also used to advance the claims of specific groups in American society for active roles in civic life and for leadership in the nation. Clergymen, Freemasons, the Society of the Cincinnati, military officers, and Federalist political elites all vied for key roles in shaping and directing the national mourning for Washington. In mourning Washington, Americans at once displayed their sincere sentiments for the man, asserted their attachments to the republic whose cause he embodied, and showed their eagerness to participate in civic life. The national mourning gave expression to a broad consensus



among Americans at a time of intense ideological divisions, thereby offering a brief respite from the internal conflict between Federalists and Democratic Republicans that would culminate only a few months later in the divisive presidential election of 1800.

American newspapers played an important role in the dissemination of the news of George Washington's death and coverage of the innumerable funeral processions and memorial services that followed. In addition to their news reporting functions, the newspapers provided an important theater for the unfolding of the dramaturgy of the national mourning. Eight major subjects accounted for most of the newspaper coverage of Washington's death and the ensuing mourning period. The first stories in the papers announced the death of George Washington at Mount Vernon on December 14, 1799, followed by descriptions of his funeral and interment at Mount Vernon. Eager for more details of the cause of Washington's death, Americans all over the nation read a widely reprinted newspaper statement by two of his deathbed physicians providing medical details of his last illness and death. "National honors," including official acts of mourning by Congress and President John Adams, were reported in detail as were the official mourning activities of state legislatures and state militias. Local government resolutions and announcements regarding civic observances of the death of Washington appeared in newspapers all over the country, as did descriptions of local funeral processions and memorial services held in commemoration of Washington. Finally, the last will and testament of Washington appeared in the nation's newspapers with special emphasis of those provisions of his will that granted freedom to his slaves upon his death.

The mourning rites in memory of Washington were clustered in two distinctive stages, the first of which included hundreds of spontaneous demonstrations of grief

planned and executed locally as well as carefully orchestrated public mourning events under the sponsorship and direction of state and federal governments, military units, and fraternal organizations like the Freemasons and the Society of the Cincinnati. This first stage of nationwide public mourning rites began as the news of Washington's death spread throughout the nation in late December 1799, and it continued through the end of January 1800. A second stage of public mourning occurred in response to the Congressional resolution and presidential proclamation calling for a national day of mourning for Washington on his next birthday, February 22, 1800. Local newspapers reported in full detail the Washington funeral ceremonies conducted in their towns, major cities, and adjacent communities. These accounts are rich sources of information about how Americans observed the death of Washington. Many of the accounts featured an order of procession that listed the organizations and groups of citizens who participated as actors in the solemn funeral dramas. This study includes an analysis of eighty-three published orders of procession in which eighteen distinct groups of citizen actors were identified who participated in the funeral rites. Some citizens performed active roles through their participation in the processions and memorial services while others played more passive roles as observers of the funeral pageantry. During this period of national mourning, Americans were both actors and audiences, participants and spectators, in elaborately staged mourning rites planned by members of the Federalist leadership elites who sought to use the death of Washington as a catalyst to unite the citizens of the nation around the bier of their deceased "Father." Although the mourning rituals included many common elements, the funeral processions and memorial services varied according to their location and sponsorship. Narrative descriptions of ten public funeral ceremonies

were selected from numerous newspaper accounts to provide illustrative examples of the various types of processions and services that took place during the national mourning period. These ten examples, detailed in Chapter Two of the study, were chosen to demonstrate the diversity as well as the similarities of mourning events held in large cities and small towns in various regions of the country. Of special interest is the account of the “state funeral” held in Philadelphia, the national capital, on December 26, 1799, and attended by members of Congress, President and Mrs. John Adams, Major General Alexander Hamilton, and senior members of the executive and judicial branches of the federal government. That elaborate national ceremony with its distinguished cast of actors stands in vivid contrast to the more modest mourning rites held at a frontier military fort in Knoxville, Tennessee, on the national day of mourning, in which nine principal Cherokee chiefs joined John Sevier, the governor of Tennessee, a number of the principal citizens of the new state, and many “common Indians” in procession to express their sorrow in the loss of their “common parent.”

Never before had the American Republic been called to mourn the death of a leader of Washington’s stature, and the nation was breaking new ground self-consciously as its local and national leaders planned and organized public funeral rites. When Washington died suddenly, the leadership elites were confronted with the problem of how to commemorate appropriately his indispensable services to the country and, at the same time, to demonstrate to Americans the continued strength of the political and social order in the absence of the man who had been the acknowledged Father of His Country. Their solutions to the problem involved the staging of elaborate displays to create an “imagined community” of united mourners to strengthen the ties of American citizens to

the nation. In creating their own uniquely republican mourning rituals, the organizers of the national mourning events adapted some elements from the traditional public rituals performed in England for mourning the deaths of monarchs and also from the American colonial traditions of mourning the deaths of royal governors and other civil and military leaders. Of course, they had to modify the English monarchical burial traditions to make them more acceptable to post-Revolutionary Americans. For example, in keeping with the English tradition of placing a crown and scepter on top of the biers and coffins of deceased monarchs carried in funeral processions, in several American cities General Washington's hat, gloves, and sword were displayed on top of a bier or coffin, personalized representations of republican rather than monarchical symbols of authority.

The funeral processions and memorial services for George Washington were dramatic performances incorporating many of the elements of theatrical productions, such as stages, casts of actors, and story lines or scripts. The stage managers of the cultural performances, the producers and directors of the mourning rituals, were generally members of the Federalist ruling elites, men of the "upper sort" of the social hierarchy who were either elected or appointed to "committees of arrangement" charged with responsibility to plan and direct the funeral rites in their respective towns and cities. In addition to adapting American colonial and English monarchical precedents for public mourning rituals for governors and kings, the committees of arrangement also had access to several contemporary sources of scenarios or scripts that could be followed in planning the Washington funeral processions and memorial services. The mourning ceremonies were often patterned after the burial rites for Washington held at Mount Vernon and Major General Alexander Hamilton's orders detailing the funeral honors to be accorded

the deceased commander in chief at all United States army posts. Perhaps the greatest impact of Hamilton's orders flowed from their provisions for mock funerals, complete with bodiless biers carried in funeral processions and simulated interment ceremonies. As a result of Hamilton's orders, mock funerals were held throughout the nation as part of both civil and military commemorative ceremonies. Other sources of scripts for the local committees of arrangement were the newspaper accounts of the "state funeral" held in Philadelphia and the reports of elaborate processions held in Boston, New York, and Charleston, in addition to accounts of the funeral rites held in neighboring towns. Following these common scripts that served to standardize the national funeral rites, the committees of arrangement organized orders of procession according to the Federalist worldview to convey messages to the citizenry that commemorated Washington's virtues and public service and also displayed the hoped-for ongoing stability of the new republic despite his death. These messages were conveyed theatrically through carefully ordered appearances by representatives of religious, military, civic, fraternal groups, and citizens at large. The central message of the public mourning rites seemed to be, "Washington is dead, long live the Republic!"

The stages for the national mourning rituals for Washington were a variety of public venues including the streets, meetinghouses that were often the largest buildings in town that could accommodate the biggest audiences, courthouses, statehouses, and the churchyards and cemeteries of towns and cities throughout America. Huge crowds of townspeople turned out to watch the funeral processions and to participate in the memorial services. A variety of "props" were used in connection with the elaborate theatrical productions that characterized the national mourning for Washington. The

altars and pulpits of meetinghouses were draped in black crape, and the mourners often wore traditional mourning clothing and black armbands as symbols of their grief. The mock funerals often featured biers bearing an urn or empty coffin. A riderless horse representing the mount of the deceased General Washington was often led in the processions just in front of the bier, escorted by members of the Society of the Cincinnati, military officers, and troops in mourning, bearing their arms reversed. The “soundscape” also contributed greatly to the theatrical staging of the Washington funerals. The processions often wound their way through the main streets of town while muffled church bells tolled, fife and drum corps played their mournful tunes, and military bands played solemn dirges. Throughout the processions, minute guns were fired by artillery units, and the roar of cannons being discharged added to the military aura of the funeral rites.

The decade of the 1790s, known as “the Federalist Era,” was one of the most politically acrimonious periods of American history. Bitter party strife raged through Washington’s second presidential term, exacerbated by popular agitation stirred by opposing views on the French Revolution and the controversial Jay Treaty with England. Although he looked upon political parties as one of the greatest threats to the union and consequently tried to remain aloof from party politics, Washington’s highly visible support of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton’s economic program linked him closely to the Federalists. Consequently, during his second term Washington became the target of political attacks by the Democratic Republican opposition. In addition to his administration’s policies, the opposition criticized the pomp and formality of the

“monarchical” court-like ceremonies adopted by the Federalists, claiming that such displays were inappropriate for a republic.

Although Washington’s death on December 14, 1799, occurred on the eve of the “Republican Revolution of 1800,” in which Democratic Republican Thomas Jefferson defeated Federalist John Adams in the presidential election, at the time of the death of Washington the political hegemony of the Federalists appeared to be firmly entrenched in the national government and in most of the state legislatures. Because of Washington’s identification with the Federalists and the close proximity of his death in late 1799 and the upcoming presidential election of 1800, historians have generally argued that the Federalists attempted to take advantage of the national mourning for Washington in order to advance their own political agenda. However, this study reveals that the name of Thomas Jefferson, the Democratic Republican candidate, was not mentioned or attacked by a single funeral orator, and there were virtually no overt references to the upcoming presidential election in the eulogies and funeral sermons delivered during the national mourning period. However, the generally pro-Federalist eulogists, including many New England Congregational ministers, often concluded their orations with a brief endorsement of President John Adams, characterizing him in biblical terms as the worthy “Elisha” upon whom had fallen the mantle of “Elijah.” Similarly, newspaper coverage of the national mourning events in commemoration of Washington was generally nonpartisan.

Despite the muting of overt political rhetoric in the funeral orations and newspaper coverage of the national mourning for Washington, there is ample evidence to suggest that there were powerful political forces operating, and clearly the Federalist

worldview shaped the public mourning rituals. To understand fully how significantly the worldview of the Federalists influenced the national mourning for Washington, Federalism must be viewed as a political culture as well as a political party. The historian David Hackett Fischer argues that the Federalist political system was held together by the deferential spirit of eighteenth-century Anglo-American society in which the “multitude” was trained from birth to submit to the subordination necessary to permit the “natural rulers” to govern them. Professor Gordon Wood writes that the Federalists’ firm conviction of the precariousness of the American social order and their belief that there was an impending crisis of social disorder, disintegration, and cultural chaos, caused them to be preoccupied with social cohesiveness and the critical need to make a single nation out of disparate sections and communities. In this historical context, it can be argued that the public mourning rituals following the death of Washington provided a unique opportunity for the Federalist political culture to attempt to use the universal grief for Washington as the catalyst to bring together Americans of all social ranks and political loyalties around the bier of Washington. By uniting Americans in their common grief, the Federalists sought to advance their objectives of preserving the social order, improving social cohesion, and fostering a sense of American national identity from Maine to Georgia. Consequently, thousands of ordinary American citizens were invited to become important actors in the dramas of public mourning that took place throughout the nation during the winter of 1799-1800. Through their participation, Americans were given opportunities to demonstrate their personal grief for the loss of their “Father” and also to act politically by supporting mourning rituals that were organized by Federalist elites to advance the objectives of their party. In their efforts to maximize the



participation of ordinary citizens of all ranks in the national mourning for Washington, the Federalists invited adult male citizens, women, and children to assemble around the bier of Washington to mourn his death. In all regions of the country, citizens of all ranks turned out in unprecedented numbers to participate in and observe the Washington funeral rites. The orderly behavior and universal grief of the mourning citizens was noted frequently in the newspaper accounts of the public ceremonies.

American women performed a variety of politically and culturally important roles during the national mourning period, even though their gendered roles were shaped by prevailing attitudes and practices that governed the nature of women's participation in the public sphere of politics and the civic culture. Women attended memorial services, wore sable badges of mourning, and even marched in funeral processions in a few towns and cities. Young women dressed symbolically in white were often included in the funeral processions. In New York City, "a Lady" delivered a funeral oration at one of the city's memorial services for Washington, a radical departure from the cultural norm of the time that women did not speak in public. A small group of women of the "upper sort" in Charleston, South Carolina, when uninvited by their committee of arrangement to participate in the city's commemorative ceremonies, published an invitation in the local newspaper for the women of the city to join them in taking their rightful place in Charleston's planned funeral procession in remembrance of Washington. The national mourning also advanced the post-Revolutionary ideal of "Republican Motherhood" as women were urged by Washington's eulogists to teach Washington's virtues to their children so as to raise future virtuous Washingtons to serve the republic. Schoolchildren and youth were also included in the public mourning rituals. They marched in funeral

processions with their schoolmasters, participated in special school programs and public memorial services, and heard eulogies and funeral sermons in which orators encouraged them to lead virtuous lives by copying the example of “their common father,” George Washington. Young children mourning the death of their “father” in the public funeral rituals provided a poignant metaphor for the “orphaned citizens” of America.

While most Americans mourned the death of George Washington as their “father,” thousands of Freemasons and members of the Society of the Cincinnati mourned the death of their “brother.” Publicly identified with both groups, Washington had been the most prominent member of both fraternal organizations. Both troubled groups sought to capitalize on their brotherly ties to Washington by their conspicuous participation in public and fraternal mourning events, hoping to advance their causes by further linking their organizational identity to their illustrious brother, George Washington. At the time of his death, Washington was the president-general of the Society of the Cincinnati, a fraternal order of former Revolutionary War officers that was founded at the end of the war in 1783. When Washington died, the Society was struggling for survival, its membership base shrinking as a result of the deaths of aging former continental army officers. But, they rallied their dwindling memberships to take an active role in mourning the death of their former commander in chief and the order’s president-general. The most highly visible roles played by the Society of the Cincinnati in the national mourning for Washington were as pallbearers and chief mourners in the public funeral processions. Dressed in their old military uniforms and wearing badges of mourning and the eagle insignia of their order, the veteran officers of the Revolution were acting out their claims to be the embodiment of the “Spirit of Seventy-Six” that was

already on its way to becoming an important part of the American national mythology. Freemasons sought to influence the public opinion of their organization by purposefully combining the images of Washington, the nation, and their benevolent fraternity. Their public expressions of grief were intended to enhance their reputation and to earn the respect of their countrymen. Washington had become a member of the Freemasons as a young man in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and he was to be identified with the fraternal organization for the balance of his life. Masons participated in about sixty percent of the funeral processions included in this study. Although Masonry had experienced unprecedented membership growth after the Revolution, it had come under public attack in 1798-1799 stemming from a widely reprinted series of three political sermons by the Reverend Doctor Jedidiah Morse who claimed that seventeen American lodges had been infiltrated by the Bavarian Illuminati, a shadowy European group that was linked to pro-French activities and religious infidelity. The negative publicity surrounding the Illuminati controversy was still damaging the image of Freemasonry at the time of Washington's death. American Masonic lodge officials seemed to have realized quickly the potential of exploiting the national mourning for Washington as an opportunity to demonstrate their strong fraternal ties to their Brother Washington by actively participating in the public mourning rituals in the weeks following his death. Accused of being secretive conspirators and subversive infidels, Freemasons donned their regalia and took to the streets of America to demonstrate their openness, religious fidelity, and close fraternal ties to Washington. Members of the Masonic lodge from Alexandria, Virginia were active participants in the funeral rites for Washington held at Mount Vernon on December 18, 1799.

Virtually all the funeral processions in commemoration of Washington, with the exception of Masonic mourning parades, had a distinctive and dominant military tone. When George Washington died, the nation was still involved in an ongoing undeclared naval war with France, later called by historians the “Quasi-War.” The Federalists’ creation of an expanded army in 1798-1799 to defend the nation in the event of war with France was a matter of major political disagreement in the United States. The fundamental question of John Adams’s presidency from 1797-1801 was how to regain a neutral position with France and avoid war. Alexander Hamilton had championed the creation of a large standing army and had been appointed Inspector General and second in command to Lieutenant General Washington shortly after the retired president was appointed by Congress and President Adams to the rank of commander in chief of the American armies on the Fourth of July 1798. Opposed to war with France, John Adams, to the dismay of Hamilton and Congressional High Federalists, decided to send peace envoys to Paris. Despite Hamilton’s efforts to lobby influential Federalists in Congress to support the plans to mobilize an expanded American army, the continuation of forming the new army was in jeopardy at the time of Washington’s death. The impending collapse of “Hamilton’s army” in late 1799 suggests an explanation for the high visibility of the military establishment during the national mourning for Washington. Major General Hamilton may still have been trying to propagandize the American people about the necessity to continue to build the standing army to ensure the security and stability of the republic. This objective could explain why Hamilton issued his orders for elaborate funeral honors to be paid at all military posts with local militia units and citizens to be invited to participate in and observe the ceremonies. The death of Washington played

into Hamilton's hands and the supporters of an expanded military establishment by providing them with a strategic opportunity to display publicly the strength of the army and to indoctrinate the citizenry about the potential benefits to be derived from continued support of the new army. However, Hamilton's efforts were unsuccessful in convincing Congress to continue its endorsement of the new army. Congress repealed its authorization of the expanded military force shortly after Washington's death, and President Adams's steadfast pursuit of peace with France caused Hamilton to withdraw his support of the president's bid for reelection. Hamilton's bitter retaliation against Adams split the Federalist party, enabling Democratic Republican Thomas Jefferson to be elected the third president of the United States, marking the end of the "Federalist Era."

The religious culture of late eighteenth-century America provided another major influence on shaping the national mourning for Washington. American clergymen gave a voice to the national mourning through their eulogies and funeral sermons. Of the nearly three hundred funeral orations included in this study, about two-thirds were delivered by clergymen representing all the major denominations of the time. Other funeral orations were given by men in secular professions such as physicians, lawyers and judges, statesmen, federal officeholders, and military officers. The content of both the secular and religious eulogies focused on Washington's character and his lifetime achievements in the service of his country. The primary difference between the religious and secular funeral orations was that the clergymen's orations were dominated by theological issues related to the death of Washington. As the nation's clergymen eulogized Washington, they fused his symbolism with Christianity and patriotism, an important development in

the creation of an American civil religion. The traditional position of clergymen as authoritative spokesmen for society had come under increasing challenge during the Revolutionary Era, and they faced increasing competition for moral leadership in their communities. Consequently, through their eulogies of Washington the ministers hoped to shore up their standing and to strengthen the role of religion in the republic. In their funeral sermons and orations, clergymen reflected the contemporary religious culture by developing a “theology of mourning” that included their religious sanction of the national mourning, warnings that excessive praise of Washington could constitute idolatry and deification, instruction on the lessons or “religious improvement” to be derived from the death of Washington, and jeremiads, or national warnings for the people of America to repent of their sins and to return to following the precepts of God. The centerpiece of the ministers’ efforts to bring about a national religious revival in connection with Washington’s death was their portrayal of George Washington as the epitome of the devout Christian whose religious beliefs and practices should be emulated by all Americans. In spite of contemporary evidence that Washington may have been inclined to Deism, the ministers offered “proofs” of his Christianity, even though their arguments could not be supported by citing any written or spoken words by Washington that confirmed his belief in Jesus Christ. His public support of religion during the Revolution and his presidency had been expressed by his attendance of public worship services and his repeated references in proclamations and addresses to the superintending power and protection of “Providence” and the “Governor of the Universe.” But these contemporary concerns about Washington’s Christianity had to be muted by the ministers because if one took seriously the notion that the great man had not been a Christian and that he had

adopted the philosophy of deism which was undermining established religion, then clearly he could not be regarded as the chosen instrument of the Christian God who had established a national covenant with the American Israel much like he had done with the ancient Hebrews, the Children of Israel. In the final analysis, Washington's personal religious beliefs were known only to him and his God, but his Christianity has been the subject of lively debate since the time of his death.

Biographical sketches of Washington constituted the major component of nearly all the religious and secular eulogies and funeral orations. Many of the orators used the metaphor of painting a portrait to describe their literary efforts to compose a biographical sketch of Washington. The occasion of Washington's death provided the first nationwide opportunity for Americans to look back over his long public career and to assess his significant contributions to the welfare of his country. It is this contemporary perspective of the Washington funeral eulogies that makes them a unique and valuable source of biographical information about him. This study uses the eulogists' prose portraits of Washington's character and achievements to construct a composite biography of Washington that reflects his life and times in the eyes of his contemporaries. To his eulogists, George Washington was a man made of flesh and blood, rather than the cold, remote historical figure portrayed in formal portraits and statuary. The eulogists described him as a majestic figure, a warm, affable, smiling man who enjoyed "condescending" to talk to people of all ranks. To George Washington's eulogists, the flesh had not yet turned to marble, and the man they mourned was in their minds unquestionably the greatest mortal who had ever lived in any age or time. He had left an indelible mark on the face of the new nation, and his eulogists sensed that such a

remarkable man belonged to the ages. They predicted that Washington's beloved and revered name would become immortal in American history.

#### Relevant Scholarship

Most of the scholarship that has been published on subjects directly related to George Washington's death and the national mourning for him have appeared either in journal articles or as chapters or portions of chapters of books on broader themes. Much of the published work on this subject tends to focus on limited aspects of the event, and there is nothing else published that provides the comprehensive history and detailed analysis of the national mourning that characterize the current study. There are, however, several groups of Washington studies that address other related aspects of Washington's life and death and his transformation to an important American cultural symbol. One group of such related Washington studies explores the functions performed by the national mourning activities including the construction of a civil religion and the creation of Washington as a national symbol and the legitimization of popular attachments to the nation through his figure. Although she does not focus specifically on the national mourning for Washington, Catherine L. Albanese in *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* claims that during his lifetime Washington became his nation's "holy man," a collective symbol of American unity. Using the work of sociologists Victor Turner and Emile Durkheim as her theoretical basis, Albanese asserts that in this sacred role, George Washington performed the function of "Father of fathers," epitomizing the emergent religious identity of the new nation, thus becoming a central figure in the civil religion of the American Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Sociologist Barry Schwartz

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 143-81.



continues this theme in *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol*. He analyzes the process by which Washington became a national symbol and develops the argument that, in the terms of Durkheim, Washington became a living tribal totem, symbol of the bond between America's political and religious sentiments. Schwartz includes a discussion of Washington's death and the national mourning, quoting from several eulogies and describing the funeral processions held in Boston and Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> Robert P. Hay develops the civil religion theme of Washington as the American Moses based on the frequent use of the metaphor by clergymen in many of the Washington funeral orations.<sup>10</sup> Historian Marcus Cunliffe asserts that Washington has been "entombed in his own myth," arguing that Washington's eulogistic biographers made his career practically synonymous with American history with Washington at center stage as the virtuous classical hero—the transcendent American.<sup>11</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, a sociologist, asserts that Washington's role was to serve as the new nation's charismatic authority figure, the symbol of American unity who embodied the nation's values and aspirations. Lipset believes that American leaders used Washington's funeral ceremonies to contribute to the formation of national character, enlisting the clergy to support Federalist views of an ordered society epitomized by Washington.<sup>12</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin discusses the symbolism of Washington in a chapter entitled "The Mythologizing of George Washington" in *The Americans: The National Experience*. He asserts that the Washington legend was a self-conscious product—a cumbersome figure of literary

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<sup>9</sup> Barry Schwartz, *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol* (New York: The Free Press, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Robert P. Hay, "George Washington: American Moses," *American Quarterly* 21 (Winter 1969): 780-91.

<sup>11</sup> Marcus Cunliffe, *George Washington: Man and Monument* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1958). Reprinted, (Mount Vernon, Virginia: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 1998), 92-93.

<sup>12</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 20-23.

contrivance. The myth was created by deifying Washington as a symbol of the nation following his death. Boorstin credits primary authorship of the Washington legend to Parson Mason L. Weems, ignoring the literature of the mourning period that included the hundreds of biographical eulogies that preceded Weems's work.<sup>13</sup> Following Boorstin's lead, Lawrence J. Friedman argues that the development of the George Washington mythology was part of the patriotic crusade of American writers between the end of the Revolution and the 1830s to cultivate the ideological loyalties of the citizenry in order to establish a viable nationhood. He writes that these authors proclaimed the "Rising Glory of America" in their writings, and they invented Washington as the "flawless hero," a mythic, demigod-like Founding Father. Friedman's book contains an entire chapter on the Washington eulogies, representing perhaps the most comprehensive description and analysis of the eulogies that had been written prior to the current study of the national mourning.<sup>14</sup> Cultural historian Michael Kammen asserts that the American Revolution stands as the single most important source of our national sense of tradition. He argues that, viewed as a national "rite of passage," the Revolution created and unified the nation and shaped our character. Washington was a central figure in popular culture, and his character was linked to the national character during his lifetime and following his death.<sup>15</sup> Garry Wills develops the theme that as a symbol of the new nation Washington elicited veneration that had not yet been given to less personal symbols of republican order. Wills argues that educated artists and propagandists shaped a deliberately didactic

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965), 337-356.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 44-78.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

image of Washington in order to make him the national symbol based on several significant acts of Washington that made him larger than life in the early republic.<sup>16</sup>

A second group of related Washington studies inquires into the agency of various actors involved in the national mourning—notably into the role of the Federalists and other groups in organizing the national mourning events in commemoration of Washington. Simon P. Newman’s journal article, “Principles or Men? George Washington and the Political Culture of National Leadership,” credits the Federalists with the appropriation and cultivation of a monarchical culture around George Washington. Their project was accomplished, according to Newman, by formal celebration of Washington through courtly rituals, popular celebrations, and use of a variety of symbolic forms to extend his image throughout the nation.<sup>17</sup> Newman further develops his thesis in his book, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*, in which he argues that the public memorial events were organized by the Federalists who hoped to retain power by capitalizing on Washington’s death. To this end, Newman writes that the Federalists created commemorative rites to encompass whole communities.<sup>18</sup> David Waldstreicher’s *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism* develops a similar theme of the use of parades and festivals to provide a vehicle for the participation of ordinary people in the political world of the early American republic. He argues that the Federalists used national celebrations to carve out a unitary public sphere, and these festivals provided an opportunity for the “upper sorts” to display their virtue and for ordinary citizens to act politically between

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<sup>16</sup> Garry Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment: Images of Power in Early America* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Simon P. Newman, “Principles or Men? George Washington and the Political Culture of National Leadership,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Winter 1992): 477-507.

elections. In this context, Waldstreicher writes that the Washington funerals had a “nonpartisan yet unmistakably Federalist aura.”<sup>19</sup> In an essay in *Launching the “Extended Republic”*: *The Federalist Era*, John L. Brooke develops the argument that the Republicans were able to use their dominance of certain Masonic lodges to assert themselves into the public funeral ceremonies for Washington. According to his theory, because they were able to participate in key roles in many of the public rituals, the Republicans in effect used Freemasonry to shift Washington’s symbolism from Federalists to Republicans.<sup>20</sup>

A third body of related Washington studies investigates some of the specific forms of the commemoration of Washington and the rhetorical and material means by which they evoked responses from participants and observers. William Alfred Bryan’s book, *George Washington in American Literature*, is the seminal study of George Washington as he appeared in American literature between 1775 and 1865. One of the book’s chapters is devoted to a discussion of Washington references in oratory, including the funeral eulogies. Bryan argues, as does this study, that the eulogies comprise a “large block of material highly important in crystallizing and to a limited degree in forming popular conceptions of Washington.”<sup>21</sup> Howard Mumford Jones in *O Strange New World: American Culture: the Formative Years* writes that Washington served as an

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<sup>18</sup> Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 68-74.

<sup>19</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> John L. Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere of the Early Republic,” in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Launching the “Extended Republic”*: *The Federalist Era* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1996), 273-377.

<sup>21</sup> William Alfred Bryan, *George Washington in American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 55.

the “compelling power of antiquity” in the formative years of American culture. He notes that in the Washington eulogies the often-used parallel was to classical figures from antiquity, in addition to comparisons of Washington to religious figures.<sup>22</sup> Michael T. Gilmore analyzes the Washington eulogies along with funeral orations for other deceased leaders of the American Revolution in an essay entitled “Eulogy as Symbolic Biography: The Iconography of Revolutionary Leadership, 1776-1826.” Gilmore asserts that the purpose of eulogy is didactic, and it involves the construction of a symbol/emblem to instruct the audience and to compose the collective biography of an entire people. In this context, he suggests that the Washington eulogies represented the most sustained effort in the early republic to uphold public order by making Washington a symbol of paternal authority using biblical models. The eulogists equated filial piety to Washington’s memory to patriotism itself using Puritan religious themes to support the republic, and in so doing, they created a national religion.<sup>23</sup> Scott Casper also argues that the paramount function of biography in the early nineteenth century was didactic, to do social and cultural work, and that demigods like Washington were produced by the “assertive nationalism” of biographers and eulogists of the early republic. Though he does not discuss the Washington eulogies as such, Casper analyzes the early biographies of Washington by Mason L. Weems, John Marshall, and Jared Sparks and describes them as projects of cultural nationalism written to preserve the memory of Washington, to

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<sup>22</sup> Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World: American Culture: The Formative Years* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), 262-65.

<sup>23</sup> Michael T. Gilmore, “Eulogy as Symbolic Biography: The Iconography of Revolutionary Leadership, 1776-1826,” in Daniel Aaron, ed., *Studies in Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 131-157.

announce American glory to the world, and to inculcate his virtues in the next generation.<sup>24</sup>

Material culture studies have also contributed significantly to the body of scholarship on the national mourning for Washington and his transformation into a symbol of the American republic. Some of the most informative studies of the material culture related to the national mourning period for Washington have been written by Anita Schorsch, Davida Tenenbaum Deutsch, and Patricia A. Anderson.<sup>25</sup> In 1982, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Washington, the Smithsonian Institution published two exhibition catalogs that dealt with the material culture of the Washington myth.<sup>26</sup> The exhibit of prints of Washington made in America through 1800 included several apotheosis prints that were published a few months after Washington's death. Karal Ann Marling studied the centrality of the Washington in the material culture of the late nineteenth century to the present. Her book, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986*, focuses on the role of the colonial revival in popular culture and the use of Washington as the major symbolic figure in American material culture during the period of her study.<sup>27</sup> Barbara J. Mitnick recently edited *George Washington: American Symbol*, an exhibition catalog and series of essays on the iconography of George Washington throughout American history. The underlying

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<sup>24</sup> Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Anita Schorsch, *Mourning Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation* (Clinton, New Jersey: The Main Street Press, 1976); Davida Tenenbaum Deutsch, "Mourning Memorial Prints," *The Magazine Antiques*, February 1977, 324-31; and Patricia A. Anderson, *Promoted to Glory: The Apotheosis of George Washington* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Smith College Museum of Art, 1980).

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Brown Klapthor and Howard Alexander Morrison, *George Washington: A Figure upon the Stage* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1982); and Wendy C. Wick, *George Washington, An American Icon: The Eighteenth-Century Graphic Portraits* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1982).

<sup>27</sup> Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

premise of the book is that during each period of American history there have been significant parallels in the biographical and visual representations of Washington.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the groups of published scholarship discussed above, there have been several other relevant scholarly works that include discussions of the death of Washington and the national mourning. For example, the last volume of Douglas Southall Freeman's seminal biography of George Washington includes a brief appendix on the national mourning, citing some of the major themes of the eulogies and listing the ten major achievements of Washington during his career as most frequently noted by his eulogists.<sup>29</sup> Richard D. Brown in his essay, "The Dynamics of Contagious Diffusion," analyzes how the word of Washington's death spread throughout the early republic, the nation's "first great media event." Brown argues that the national mourning for Washington became a didactic opportunity for churchmen, public officials, and Freemasons to advance their vision of America.<sup>30</sup> Finally, as part of an ambitious program of special activities organized to observe the bicentennial of Washington's death in 1999, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association published a monograph by Peter R. Henriques about Washington's death and funeral. The MVLA also published a reprint edited by Professor David Holmes of The College of William and Mary of the eulogy of Washington delivered by Bishop James Madison in Williamsburg, Virginia on February 22, 1800.<sup>31</sup> The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, James C. Rees, Executive Director,

<sup>28</sup> Barbara J. Mitnick, ed., *George Washington: American Symbol* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> John Alexander Carroll and Mary Wells Ashworth, *George Washington*, vol. 7, completing the biography by Douglas Southall Freeman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 648-653.

<sup>30</sup> Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 253-57.

<sup>31</sup> Peter R. Henriques, *The Death of George Washington: He Died as He Lived* (Mount Vernon, Virginia: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2000); David L. Holmes, ed., *A Nation Mourns: Bishop James Madison's Memorial Eulogy on the Death of George Washington* (Mount Vernon, Virginia: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 1999).

also sponsored a reenactment of Washington's funeral at Mount Vernon on December 18, 1999, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his entombment on his estate in December 1799. The elaborate reenactment was based on extensive research and involved a cast of over 250 reenactors.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The author of this study and his dissertation advisor, Dr. Robert A. Gross, and their wives were in the audience at Mount Vernon on December 18, 1999 to observe the reenactment of Washington's funeral. A videotape of the funeral entitled "Reenactment of George Washington Funeral" is available from C-SPAN Archives, P. O. Box 2909, West Lafayette, IN, 47996.



## CHAPTER ONE

### NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE DEATH OF WASHINGTON

The sorrowful Citizen pours with anxious curiosity over every sentence which names WASHINGTON—or notes a tribute of respect to his hallowed Memory. We, therefore, with sympathizing assiduity, search the darkened columns of every paper which reaches us, and carefully select each paragraph which involves the interesting subject.

*Boston Massachusetts Mercury, 27 December 1799*

American newspapers played an important role in the dissemination of the news of George Washington's death and coverage of the innumerable mourning events that occurred throughout the nation in the days and weeks that followed. Consequently, the newspapers provided an important theater for the unfolding of the dramaturgy of the national mourning. Conforming to the established news gathering conventions of the time, each printer-editor compiled his paper's coverage of Washington's death and the ensuing mourning period by perusing the columns of the latest editions of other local newspapers and those exchanged through the mails with his counterparts in other towns. Using "scissors and paste pot," the editors filled their columns with verbatim copies of stories from other newspapers that related to the major news event of the day.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The newsgathering practices and publishing conventions of eighteenth-century American newspapers are discussed in: Richard B. Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860s* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989), 141-161; Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 260 Years: 1690 to 1950*, Rev. ed., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), 43-64; Charles E. Clark, "Periodicals and Politics," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *A History of the Book in America, Volume One, The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 347-366.

United States Post Office Acts of 1792 and 1794 had formalized the colonial practice of carrying exchange newspapers postage-free in the mails, thereby providing an indispensable service to the printers of newspapers by relaying information about non-local affairs. These exchanges of out-of-town papers were the lifeblood of the press and formed the backbone of newsgathering before the appearance of the telegraph and wire services.<sup>2</sup> Viewed in their totality, the collective editorial decisions of newspaper publishers regarding which stories to include in their coverage of Washington's death have much to tell us about how Americans reacted, individually and collectively, to the death of the Father of His Country. The newspaper stories shed light on the personal sensibilities of grieving Americans and the political, social, and religious factors that influenced their mourning.

The newspaper coverage of the story of the death of George Washington was extensive, both in terms of its volume and the prolonged time period over which it was sustained. Richard D. Brown has called Washington's death on December 14, 1799, "the nation's first great media event."<sup>3</sup> For about two months, contemporary papers devoted a large proportion of their black-bordered news columns to reports of funeral processions and ceremonies conducted locally as well as in other parts of their state and the nation. Funeral eulogies and orations were printed in their entirety or in extract form. Governmental resolutions and other acts of official mourning were dutifully reported, whether at the national, state, or local level. Notices were published by military, fraternal, and civic organizations providing instructions to their members about the wearing of mourning badges and other displays of their organizational grief. Newspapers

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<sup>2</sup> Kielbowicz, 145-51.

published elegiac verses by local poets and hymns and odes that were sung during public funeral ceremonies. Editorial essays and letters to the printers of the papers endeavored to portray Washington's character and his services to the nation and to underscore the significance of his death to the grieving nation.

Editorial comments printed in most of the newspapers reflected the intense pressures and frustrations involved in publishing the story of Washington's death and the national mourning. Noting that almost every town and village in the country had performed funeral honors, Elezer Jenks of the *Portland Gazette* commented: "The publication of these numerous testimonials would entirely engross the pages of the *Gazette* for weeks. A few general sketches therefore can only be given."<sup>4</sup> Inundated with newspapers filled with stories related to Washington's death, James Wilson, publisher of the Wilmington, Delaware *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser* observed that "every day's mail conveys to us the sorrowing effusions of the citizens of all parts of the union where the account of the death of Washington has reached."<sup>5</sup> Stories related to Washington's death crowded other news out of the papers, causing some editors to offer explanations to their readers. Printer Benjamin Russell of the *Boston Columbian Centinel* wrote that "to do justice to all the manifestations of high respect for the memory and unfeigned grief at the decease of the beatified father of our country would require more limits than we can command.—We must, therefore, content ourselves with recording them as spontaneously as they arise." Russell also confessed that he had excluded all "foreign records" from his paper in order to devote its columns to "the

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<sup>3</sup> Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 254.

<sup>4</sup> *Jenks' Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 13 January 1800.

<sup>5</sup> *Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 4 January 1800.

painfully pleasing task of perpetuating the testimonials” to Washington’s memory.<sup>6</sup> In an attempt to deal with the unusually high volume of news generated by the death of Washington, Isaiah Thomas’s *Massachusetts Spy* announced the publication of a “Gazette Extraordinary,” a two-page supplement “to make room for the Foreign News, the Proceedings of Congress, and the Honors which a grateful Country are every where paying to that deceased Patriot, Hero, and Father.”<sup>7</sup> The following week, the *Spy* acknowledged that the paper would like to give the details of each of the public testimonials of respect in memory of Washington being exhibited “in every city, town, and village in United Columbia,” but that “the limits of a weekly paper will not permit it.” The editor continued, “We are obliged this week to curtail our Congressional Affairs, and omit many articles of domestic news, prepared for this paper, in order to make room for the late European intelligence.”<sup>8</sup> The printer of the *Walpole, New Hampshire Farmer’s Museum* also acknowledged the space problem he faced because of the overwhelming volume of stories related to Washington’s death. He told his readers, “The accounts from all parts of the Union of the death of Gen. Washington, and which we are anxious to detail at large in our Gazette, precludes the possibility of publishing the minutes of foreign incidents.”<sup>9</sup>

In spite of their space limitations and other frustrations in attempting to provide their readers with full details of the death of Washington and subsequent events, the printer-editors of American newspapers, for the most part, managed to publish very complete coverage of the national mourning that enveloped the country from late

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<sup>6</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>7</sup> *Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette*, 8 January 1800.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 January 1800.

<sup>9</sup> *Walpole (New Hampshire) Farmer’s Museum, or Lay Preacher’s Gazette*, 6 January 1800.

December 1799 through February 22, 1800. Consequently, the newspapers of the period provide a rich archive of detailed reports of funeral processions, ceremonies, governmental actions, and other manifestations of the national grief for the death of Washington. This study tapped into that rich source of information to compile all the relevant articles, notices, poetry, and advertisements published in forty-two of the American papers published during the period of national mourning. The sample represents about twenty percent of the approximately two hundred newspapers being published in the United States in 1800.<sup>10</sup> Of the 42 papers, seventeen (41%) were published in New England, fourteen (33%) in the Middle Atlantic states, and eleven (26%) in the South.<sup>11</sup> An analysis of the political affiliation of the 42 papers in the sample indicates that 26 (62%) were Federalist, 13 (31%) were Republican, and 3 (7%) were politically impartial.<sup>12</sup> The political affiliations of the forty-two papers appear to match closely that of all newspapers being published in the United States in 1800.<sup>13</sup>

Eight major subjects accounted for most of the newspaper coverage of Washington's death and the ensuing national mourning. Multiple articles on subjects related to the following news stories appeared in virtually all 42 of the newspapers in the sample: (1) The announcement of the death of George Washington at Mount Vernon on

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<sup>10</sup> Mott, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Kielbowicz says that in 1801, 30% of American newspapers were published in New England, 38% in the Mid-Atlantic, and 28% in the South Atlantic. Though his regional grouping of the states does not match exactly that of this study, his data suggest that the current sample is generally representative in terms of its distribution of newspapers by state; Kielbowicz, 45.

<sup>12</sup> The political affiliation of each paper in the sample was determined by deferring to the judgments of Donald H. Stewart and David Hackett Fischer whose independent analyses of the politics of the papers published in this period reflected identical conclusions in most cases. Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), 867-93; David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 413-29.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart (page 623) concludes that in 1800 the effective proportion was about three Federalist papers to two Republican papers; Mott (page 122) estimates that the ratio of Federalist to Republican papers in 1800 was two to one.

December 14, 1799. (2) Descriptions of Washington's funeral and interment at Mount Vernon. (3) A statement by two of Washington's physicians providing medical details of his last illness and death. (4) "National honors," including official acts of mourning by the federal government such as congressional resolutions, presidential proclamations, and military orders issued to the United States army and navy. (5) Official mourning activities of state legislatures and state militias. (6) Local government resolutions and announcements regarding civic observances of the death of Washington. (7) Funeral processions and memorial services held in commemoration of Washington. (8) The last will and testament of George Washington, especially those provisions granting freedom to his slaves upon his death.

In addition to news stories on these eight major subjects, most newspapers also published miscellaneous items such as commercial advertisements, elegiac poetry, and songs and hymns related to the death of Washington. The locally written poems were lengthy, patriotic lamentations, often composed by women and submitted to the press by their anonymous authors. The study documented a total of 68 poems found in forty newspapers in fourteen states. A total of 42 songs and hymns were printed in 24 papers in eleven states. The advertisements described a variety of items being offered by printers and merchants who sought to exploit commercial opportunities during the period of national mourning. A total of about 150 advertisements were published in the forty-two newspapers including ads for black crape, music, medals, prints and paintings, and printed items such as eulogies and orations, poems, music, and Washington's will and his Farewell Address. The newspaper printers were usually also the printers of the eulogy pamphlets, and they advertised them heavily in their own papers. Too, some printers

published proposals for subscription books containing collections of eulogies and documents comprising Washington's printed legacy to his countrymen.

The eight major news stories that comprised the bulk of the American newspaper coverage of the death of Washington and the mourning events that followed are described below. The dual purposes of this narrative are to provide a comprehensive account of the national mourning for George Washington and also to describe what contemporary Americans in all sixteen states of the union were reading in their local newspapers during the winter of 1799-1800 about the death of the Father of their country. Subsequent chapters of this study provide further analysis and interpretation of the contemporary social, political, and religious factors underlying each of these eight news stories.

#### Announcement of the Death of Washington

The newspaper coverage of George Washington's death commenced with the shocking announcement that the General had died suddenly at his Mount Vernon, Virginia home on December 14, 1799, following a brief illness. The news was initially conveyed by word of mouth, but its publication in local newspapers served to confirm the rumors and to enable civic authorities to act publicly to notify inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> The dissemination of the news of Washington's death in newspapers throughout the United States provides a revealing example of the operation of the printers' exchange network and the practice of mutual copying in the publication of American papers in the late eighteenth century. On Monday, December 16, printers in nearby Alexandria, Virginia, John and James D. Westcott, broke the story of Washington's death. Relying on information supplied by local doctors Elisha Cullen Dick and James Craik, two of

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<sup>14</sup> Brown, 255.

Washington's deathbed physicians, *The Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser* reported the story as follows:

It is our painful duty first to announce to our Country, and to the world, the death of their illustrious benefactor—GEORGE WASHINGTON. This mournful event occurred on Saturday evening, about 11 o'clock. On the preceding night, he was attacked with a violent inflammatory affection of the throat, which, in less than four and twenty hours put a period to his mortal existence.—Conscious of his approaching dissolution, he bore the excruciating agonies of a violent and painful disease with that heroic and Christian fortitude for which he was ever distinguished, and expired in the possession of that serenity of mind resulting from a consciousness of integrity, and a well-spent life.<sup>15</sup>

In keeping with their usual practices, the Westcotts placed exchange copies of their paper in the mails, and the *Times* was delivered to newspaper printers throughout the country. As soon as the paper was received with its “awful intelligence” of Washington's death, the article from Alexandria was reprinted word-for-word in newspapers from Maine to Georgia. It appeared in neighboring Georgetown in *The Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser* on Tuesday, December 17, along with an editorial comment encouraging area citizens to attend Washington's interment at Mount Vernon at noon the next day.<sup>16</sup> The news reached Richmond, the capital of Virginia, on December 17, whereupon the Speaker of the Virginia Senate informed his fellow legislators that he had received “a paper published in Alexandria, called the *Times*,” announcing the death of General Washington. James Madison made a similar announcement in the Virginia House of Delegates. Both houses adjourned for the day after first passing resolutions calling for their members to wear black crape badges of mourning through the current session of the General Assembly.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 16 December 1799.

<sup>16</sup> *Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 17 December 1799.

<sup>17</sup> *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 24 December 1799.



The Alexandria *Times* had made its way to the nation's capital in Philadelphia by December 18, and the announcement of Washington's death was reprinted in that evening's edition of the *Gazette of the United States*, the leading Federalist newspaper in the nation.<sup>18</sup> The story reached New York City by Friday, December 20, appearing in Noah Webster's *Commercial Advertiser* on that day and in the associated semi-weekly paper, *The Spectator*, on Saturday, December 21.<sup>19</sup> The article was published on Tuesday, December 24 in newspapers in Albany, New York, Elizabeth-town, New Jersey, and Raleigh, North Carolina.<sup>20</sup> By now the *Times* article was being reprinted from second-hand sources as exemplified by the *Albany Centinel's* having copied it from a Philadelphia paper, thus expanding the reach of the original article in the Alexandria paper. The *Times* article was reprinted in papers in Northampton, Massachusetts on Christmas Day and in Boston and Hartford on December 26. On New Year's Day, January 1, 1800, the story was reprinted in a Charleston, South Carolina newspaper, copied verbatim from a Fredericksburg, Virginia paper. The article appeared in an Augusta, Georgia newspaper on January 4 and in Frankfort, Kentucky on January 9, 1800, nearly four weeks after Washington had died.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, there were other sources of information about the death of Washington that were used by newspaper printer-editors as the basis of their announcements of the

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<sup>18</sup> *Gazette of the United States, and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, 18 December 1799.

<sup>19</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 20 December 1799; *New York Spectator*, 21 December 1799.

<sup>20</sup> *Albany Centinel*, 24 December 1799, reprinted from an unidentified Philadelphia newspaper of December 18; *Elizabethtown New Jersey Journal*, 24 December 1799; *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 24 December 1799.

<sup>21</sup> *Northampton (Massachusetts) Hampshire Gazette*, 25 December 1799, reprinted from an unidentified Philadelphia newspaper of December 18; *Boston Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, 26 December 1799; *Hartford (Connecticut) American Mercury*, 26 December 1799; *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 1 January 1800, reprinted from an unidentified Fredericksburg, Virginia newspaper of 17 December 1799; *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 4 January 1800; *Frankfort (Kentucky) Palladium: A Literary and Political Weekly Repository*, 9 January 1800.

“melancholy event.” In addition to their usual practice of gathering news from exchange newspapers, editors also relied on letters from correspondents to inform them of important developments around the country. At least six such letters bearing the news of Washington’s death were written by citizens of Alexandria on Sunday, December 15, and were subsequently published in newspapers. One of these letters was addressed to John W. Fenno, editor of the *Gazette of the United States*, and another was written by Jonathan Swift to Benjamin Russell, editor of the *Columbian Centinel*.<sup>22</sup> Four additional letters were sent from Alexandria to private citizens in several locations, who in turn submitted them to their local newspapers for publication.<sup>23</sup> The most frequently reprinted letter from Alexandria announcing the death of Washington was published originally in the *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser* on December 17, 1799. This letter contained more information on the details of Washington’s death than had been included in the Alexandria *Times* article that was so frequently reprinted in American newspapers:

I mention to you the truly melancholy event of the death of our much loved General George Washington.—He made his exit last night, between the hours of 11 and 12, after a short but painful illness of 23 hours. The disorder of which he died is by some called the Croupe, by others an inflammatory Quinsey, a disorder lately so mortal among children of this place, and I believe not until this year known to attack persons at the age of maturity. My information I have from Dr. Dick, who was called in at a late hour. Alexandria is making arrangements to show its high esteem for him. We are all to close our houses, and act as we should do if one of our family had departed. The bells are to toll daily until he is buried, which will not be until Wednesday or Thursday. He died perfectly in his senses, and from Dr. Dick’s account, perfectly resigned. He informed them

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<sup>22</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette of the United States*, 18 December 1799; *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 25 December 1799.

<sup>23</sup> (1) *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 17 December 1799. “The following is the most particular account of this mournful event we have seen yet. It was received by a respectable house of this city and politely handed us last evening.” (2) *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 18 December 1799 and *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 18 December 1799. “Extract from a letter from a gentleman of veracity, dated Alexandria, December 10, 1799 [sic]. (3) *Norwich (Connecticut) Packet*, 26 December 1799. “The following letter is from Mr. Edward Merks, jun. to his father in this city.” (4) *Norwich (Connecticut) Packet*, 26 December 1799. “We have a copy of another letter from a respectable merchant in Alexandria, dated December 15<sup>th</sup>.”

he had no fear of death, that his affairs were in good order, that he had made his will, and that his public business was but two days behind hand.<sup>24</sup>

### Washington's Funeral at Mount Vernon

Many Americans who watched the nationally televised coverage of President John F. Kennedy's funeral in November 1963 still remember the somber images of the flag-draped coffin borne on a caisson, the riderless horse with boots reversed, the courageous, black-veiled widow of the dead president walking with dignitaries in a procession behind her husband's body, and the young John Kennedy saluting the coffin of his deceased father. Americans of the winter of 1799-1800 who mourned the death of the first president, George Washington, formed their mental images of his funeral largely from a single printed source. An unnamed reporter, possibly the editor of *The Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, attended the funeral of Washington at Mount Vernon on Wednesday, December 18, 1799 and wrote a moving, almost poetic account of the procession and interment that was published in the December 20th edition of *The Centinel of Liberty*. Under the simple dateline, "George-Town, December 20," the anonymous reporter's story was reprinted word-for-word in 32 of the 42 newspapers included in this study. Grieving Americans throughout the nation read the following description in their newspapers of the last rites for their fallen commander in chief and former president:

On Wednesday last, the mortal part of WASHINGTON the Great—the Father of his country and the Friend of man, was consigned to the tomb, with solemn honors and funereal pomp.

A multitude of persons assembled, from many miles around, at Mount Vernon, the choice abode and last residence of the illustrious chief. There were

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<sup>24</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 17 December 1799. (This letter from Alexandria was reprinted in 11 of the 42 newspapers on the sample.)

the groves—the spacious avenues, the beautiful and sublime scenes, the noble mansion—but alas! the august inhabitant *was now no more*. That great soul was *gone*. His mortal part was there *indeed*; but ah! how affecting! how awful the spectacle of such worth and greatness, thus, to *mortal eyes fallen!*—Yes! fallen! fallen!

In the long and lofty *Portico* where oft the hero walked in all his glory, *now* lay the shrouded corpse. The Countenance still composed and serene, seemed to express the dignity of the spirit, which lately dwelt in that lifeless form. There those who paid the last sad honors to the benefactor of his country, took an impressive—a farewell view.

On the ornament, at head of the coffin, was inscribed SURGE AD JUDICUM—about the middle of the coffin, GLORIO DEO—and on the Silver plate, GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON, departed this life, on the 14<sup>th</sup> December, '99. Aet. 68.

Between three and four o'clock, the sound of artillery from a vessel in the river, firing minute guns, awoke afresh our solemn sorrow—the corpse was moved—a band of music with mournful melody melted the soul into all the tenderness of woe.

The procession was formed and moved on in the following order:

Cavalry,  
 Infantry, [with arms reversed.]  
 Guard,  
 Music,  
 Clergy,  
 The General's horse with his saddle, holsters, and pistols.

<i>Pall Bearers</i>		<i>Pall Bearers</i>
<i>Cols.</i>		<i>Cols.</i>
Simms,		Gilpin,
Ramsay,	CORPSE.	Marsteller,
Payne,		Little.
Mourners,		
Masonic Brethren,		
Citizens.		

When the procession had arrived at the bottom of the elevated lawn, on the banks of the Potomack, where the family vault is placed, the cavalry halted, the infantry marched towards the Mount and formed their lines—the clergy, the Masonic brothers and the citizens descended to the vault and the funeral service of the church was performed. The firing was repeated from the vessel in the river and the sounds echoed from the woods and hills around.

Three general discharges by the infantry—the cavalry and 11 pieces of artillery, which lined the banks of the Potomack back of the vault, paid the last tribute to the entombed Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States and to the venerable departed hero.

The sun was now setting, Alas! the SUN OF GLORY was set forever.

No, the name of WASHINGTON—The American President and General—will triumph over death—the unclouded brightness of his Glory will illuminate future ages.<sup>25</sup>

Two other accounts of Washington's funeral also appeared in some newspapers. A correspondent from Alexandria sent a description of the funeral to Benjamin Russell, editor of the *Columbian Centinel*. Printed in Russell's paper on January 1, 1800, the story appeared in eight other newspapers in the sample within the next ten days. The correspondent began: "Yesterday, I attended the Funeral of the Savior of our Country at Mount Vernon, and had the honor of being one who carried his body to the vault." He enclosed a sketch of the procession and provided some additional details that were not included in the Georgetown reporter's story, mentioning that the coffin bore Washington's sword and Masonic apron. He also observed that the General's "elegant old Charger" had been led by two of his servants, dressed in mourning. "As I helped place his body in the vault, and stood at the door while the funeral service was performing," he wrote, "I had the best opportunity of observing the countenances of all— Everyone was affected, but none so much as his domestics of all ages." The correspondent also included a description of Washington's last illness, the details of which he had apparently gleaned from a conversation with one of the deathbed physicians. Washington had "closed his mouth and eyes with his own hands, and expired without a sigh or a groan." The Alexandria correspondent closed his letter with the observation that Washington's countenance was "but very little altered, if any. I wish our country would have his body embalmed."<sup>26</sup> His comment about Washington's having closed his own mouth and eyes later found its way into a number of eulogies by

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<sup>25</sup> *The Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 20 December 1799.

<sup>26</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 January 1800.

clergymen who used the “fact” to illustrate the Christian fortitude with which the great man had faced death.

The *Alexandria Times* printed a third account of the funeral on December 20, 1799. This article, unlike the one in the *Times* a few days earlier announcing the death of Washington, was reprinted in only two other newspapers in the sample, the *Raleigh Register* and the Frankfort, Kentucky *Palladium*. The article included a description of the funeral procession similar to the George-town account, adding that Washington’s relations had followed the coffin and that his horse had been led by “his own servant.” The military had been commanded by Colonel George Deneale, and Doctor Elisha Cullen Dick had performed the Masonic ceremonies. The report said that the “concourse of people was immense.” Members of three Masonic lodges had attended, including brothers from Lodge No. 22 in Alexandria, of which Washington was the former master.<sup>27</sup>

In his funeral oration delivered at Portsmouth, New Hampshire on the national day of mourning, the Reverend George Richards, minister of the Universalist Church in that city imagined what might have been on the minds of those citizens of Alexandria who had participated in Washington’s funeral at Mount Vernon:

Favored inhabitants of Alexandria! Oh tell me my friends: Yes, ye are mine for ye were the friends of WASHINGTON! What must have been your unspeakable sensations at following the breathless corpse of the illustrious deceased to the “narrow house which is appointed for all living.” Can it be that you realized the sudden transition from the heights of glory to the dark chambers of the grave? Did not the thunder of cannon, re-echoing the sound of war, on the banks of the Potomac, involuntarily press the right hand of the brave on the sword of defense? Say, did you not start in idea, from the solemn line of march, moving mournfully slow; and gaze wildly around, in ardent search of the hoary veteran of Vernon’s hill? Is it possible that your eyes caught the iron charger, led in front; while fancy pictured his martial lord as

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<sup>27</sup> *Alexandria (Virginia)Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 20 December 1799.

vaulting for the field of battle? Alas! the vacant seat, the nodding plumes of woe; the courser's measured step, announced that his rider was no more; and the drawn falchion, gleaming on the bier, a melancholy ray, confirmed the truth that WASHINGTON was dead. Deep, silent grief must emphasize the rest. With streaming eyes surcharged in sorrow's dew; with hands fraternal, clasped in mystic forms of love, again you move, towards the last abode, beneath the skies; and speechless agony surrounds a master's brother's, neighbor's tomb.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to their providing Americans with a description of Washington's last rites, it appears that these accounts of the Mount Vernon funeral were also used in towns across the country as models for planning local funeral processions. The organizers of many of the civic mourning events arranged their orders of procession to simulate that of the Mount Vernon funeral. Riderless horses were paraded, sometimes led by one or two black men dressed in servant's livery, and empty coffins were carried, bearing swords, hats, and Masonic aprons. Civic officials, Masonic lodges, military units, and clergymen joined in most of the processions, followed by an assemblage of mourning citizens.

#### Medical Report of Washington's Death

In an effort to use the national print media to disseminate a medical report of George Washington's last illness and death, two of his physicians, Dr. James Craik and Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, jointly composed an account of the General's last hours and submitted it to two Alexandria newspapers for publication. Addressing their report to Messrs. J. & J. D. Westcott of *The Times* and Mr. Ellis Price of *The Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, the two doctors wrote: "Presuming that some account of the late illness and death of General George Washington will be generally interesting, and

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<sup>28</sup> Richards, George, *An Historical Discourse, Part the Second, Commemorative of Washington* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Published by Charles Peirce, at the United States Oracle Office, 1800), 69-70.

particularly so to the professors and practitioners of medicine throughout America, we request you to publish the following statement.”<sup>29</sup> Their sense of the probable national interest in the subject was confirmed by the popularity of the article as evidenced by the frequency of newspaper reprints. Of the 42 papers in this study, 29 of them printed the Craik and Dick letter verbatim.

The doctors reported that, having been exposed to a rain on the preceding day, General Washington was attacked sometime in the night of Friday the 10<sup>th</sup> with an “inflammatory affection of the upper part of the wind pipe, called in technical language, *cynanche trachealis*.”<sup>30</sup> Washington’s symptoms included a violent “ague,” chilling, sweating, throat pain, fever, and laborious respiration. Believing that blood-letting was necessary, Washington himself called in “a bleeder in the neighborhood” who took twelve or fourteen ounces of blood from his arm during the night. He “would not be prevailed upon by his family to send for the attending physician until the following morning,” therefore, Dr. Craik did not arrive at Mount Vernon until about eleven o’clock on Saturday. Diagnosing the illness as “highly alarming and foreseeing the fatal tendency of the disease,” Dr. Craik sent for two consulting physicians, Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick of Alexandria and Dr. Gustavus Brown of Port Tobacco, Maryland, both of whom arrived between three and four o’clock in the afternoon. In the interim, two copious bleedings were employed, a blister was applied, and various medicines were administered to the dying patient. With the concurrence of the first of the consulting physicians to arrive, another 32 ounces of blood were taken with “no apparent alleviation of the

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<sup>29</sup> *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 21 December 1799; *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 21 December 1799.



disease,” and Washington’s respiration became even more “difficult and distressing.” The doctors tried a number of remedies including vapors of vinegar and water, calomel, repeated doses of emetic tartar, a bran and vinegar application to the throat, and blisters applied to the extremities. Speaking, which had been painful from the beginning, now became almost impracticable, and Washington’s respiration became more contracted and imperfect. At “half after eleven o’clock on Saturday night, retaining the full possession of his intellect,” Washington “expired without a struggle.” The doctors offered the following description of Washington’s demeanor during his last hours of life:

He was fully impressed at the beginning of his complaint as well as through every succeeding stage of it, that its conclusion would be mortal, submitting to the several exertions made for his recovery rather as a duty, than from any expectation of their efficacy. He considered the operations of death upon his system as coeval with the disease; and several hours before his decease, after repeated efforts to be understood, succeeded in expressing a desire, that he might be permitted to die without interruption. During the short period of his illness, he economized his time in the arrangement of such few concerns as required his attention, with the utmost serenity, and anticipated his approaching dissolution with every demonstration of that equanimity, for which his whole life has been so uniformly and singularly conspicuous.

Signing their letter, “James Craik, Attending Physician, and Elisha C. Dick, Consulting Physician,” the two doctors added a postscript that “the signature of Doctor Gustavus Brown, of Port-Tobacco, who attended as consulting Physician, on account of the remoteness of his residence from this place, has not been procured to the foregoing statement.”<sup>31</sup>

The statement of Washington’s physicians was printed in newspapers throughout the nation, generally without further comment. However, on January 23, 1800 a

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<sup>30</sup> The date of the onset of the illness was actually Friday, December 13. The *Times* misprint of the December 10<sup>th</sup> date was copied by many papers, while others noted the error and corrected it prior to publication.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Savannah physician, Dr. John Brickell, submitted a letter to a local paper in which he took exception to the medical treatment administered to Washington in his final hours. From the published account of Drs. Craik and Dick, Dr. Brickell estimated that “the enormous quantity of 82 ounces, or above two quarts and a half of blood” had been taken from the patient in about thirteen hours. In his opinion, not even “the most robust young men in the world” could survive such a loss of blood, and an elderly person could only be so weakened by the procedure as to make his death “speedy and inevitable.” Of course Washington had expired “without a struggle,” said the Savannah physician, “the excessive bleeding had left him no strength to struggle!”<sup>32</sup> Doctor Brickell’s letter was printed in only three newspapers, but his professional concern about the extensive bleeding that Washington’s physicians had prescribed has been the subject of ongoing medical debate in the two centuries since his death.

#### National Honors

In the days and weeks following the death of Washington, it seems that the eyes of many Americans were on Philadelphia and the official responses of the federal government to the death of the commander in chief and former president. Sensing this interest on the part of their readers, printer-editors of newspapers throughout the country filled their columns with detailed reports of congressional resolutions and other official acts related to mourning Washington’s death. Often printed under the heading “National Honors,” these reports first appeared in Philadelphia papers and were copied verbatim by editors around the nation. Prefacing his paper’s coverage of some of the initial federal mourning activities, the editor of the *Centinel of Liberty or George-Town and Washington Advertiser* wrote: “It was reserved for the government of the Union to

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<sup>32</sup> *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 25 February 1800. (From a Savannah paper.)

represent the nation in its universal grief and pay the highest honors to the memory of their best loved citizen, magistrate, and General, thus taken off from the summit of glory. They have not failed in this sacred duty.”<sup>33</sup>

Congressman John Marshall, of Richmond, Virginia attained national prominence in the press as the federal government’s spokesman through much of the mourning period. He announced the death of Washington to the House of Representatives on December 18, 1799, his announcement described in the Republican *Aurora General Advertiser* as follows:

Immediately after reading the journal, General Marshall came into the House of Representatives, apparently much agitated, and addressed the Speaker in the following words: Information, sir, has just been received that our illustrious fellow citizen, the Commander in Chief of the American army, and the late President of the United States, is no more. Though this distressing intelligence is not certain, there is too much reason to believe its truth. After receiving information of a national calamity so heavy and so afflicting, the House of Representatives can be but ill fitted for public business.—I move you therefore, that we adjourn.

The House immediately adjourned. The Senate also adjourned in consequence of this distressing intelligence.<sup>34</sup>

When Congress reconvened the next day, December 19, 1799, a message from President Adams was read in both houses, informing the members officially of the death of Washington. Adams wrote: “The letter herewith transmitted will inform you that it has pleased Divine Providence to remove from this life our excellent fellow-citizen, George Washington, by the purity of his character and a long series of services to his country, rendered illustrious throughout the world. It remains for an affectionate and

<sup>33</sup> *Centinel of Liberty or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>34</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 19 December 1799. In his biography of Washington, John Marshall recalled that the news of Washington’s death was first communicated by a passenger in the stage to an acquaintance whom he met on the street, and the report quickly reached the House of Representatives, then in session. “The utmost dismay and affliction was displayed for a few minutes,” after which Marshall stood in his place and relayed the information which was “not certain, but there was too much reason to

grateful people, in whose hearts he can never die, to pay suitable honor to his memory.” The President enclosed a letter addressed to him from George Washington’s secretary, Tobias Lear, and written at Mount Vernon the day after the General’s death. Lear informed the President that “the great and good General Washington” had died the night before of an inflammatory sore throat, preceded by a cold. He had received “every medical attention” from Doctors Craik, Dick, and Brown, “without the desired effect.” Lear said that “His last scene corresponded with the whole tenor of his life. Not a groan nor a complaint escaped him, in extreme distress. With perfect resignation and a full possession of his reason, he closed his well spent life.”<sup>35</sup>

John Marshall addressed the House “with deep sorrow on his countenance, and a pathetic tone of voice,” confirming that the melancholy event that was announced yesterday was now, without doubt, “rendered but too certain.” Marshall eulogized the fallen hero, sage, and patriot, observing that Washington had contributed more than any other individual to the founding of the nation, the attainment of its independence and freedom, and the establishment of a sound government. Marshall continued:

Let us then, Mr. Speaker, pay the last tribute of respect and affection to our departed friend. Let the grand council of the nation display those sentiments which the nation feels. For this purpose, I hold in my hand some resolutions which I will take the liberty to offer to the house. Resolved, That this House will wait on the President of the United States, in condolence of this mournful event. Resolved, That the Speaker’s chair be shrouded in black, and that the Members and Officers of the house wear black during the session. Resolved, that a committee, in conjunction with one from the Senate, be appointed to consider on the most suitable manner of paying honor to the memory of the man, first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his country.<sup>36</sup>

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believe it true.” John Marshall, *The Life of George Washington*, vol. 5, (London, 1804-1807; reprint, Fredericksburg, Virginia: The Citizens’ Guild, 1926), 363.

<sup>35</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 21 December 1799.

<sup>36</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799. In his *Life of Washington*, Marshall said that these resolutions had been written and placed in his hands by another Virginia Congressman, General Henry Lee, thus attributing to Lee full credit for having authored the now-

Putting aside their political animosities, the members of the House agreed unanimously to Congressman Marshall's proposed resolutions. Sixteen members of the House of Representatives, eleven Federalists and five Republicans, and six Federalist senators were appointed to the joint committee formed by authority of the third resolution.<sup>37</sup>

President John Adams received the members of the House of Representatives at his home at one o'clock that same day. Speaker Theodore Sedgwick addressed the president: "The House of Representatives, penetrated with a sense of the irreparable loss sustained by the nation by the death of that great and good man, the illustrious and beloved Washington, wait on you, sir, to express their condolence on this melancholy and distressing event." President Adams responded, "I receive with great respect and affection the condolence of the House of Representatives on the melancholy and afflicting event in the death of the most illustrious and beloved personage which this country ever produced. I sympathize with you—with the nation, and with the good men through the world, in this irreparable loss sustained by us all."<sup>38</sup>

The Senate voted that all of its members would wear a black crape around the left arm during the session, and that the chair of the president would be shrouded in black,

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famous description of Washington as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Lee changed the word "country" to "countrymen" in his eulogy before Congress and President Adams on December 26, 1799. Marshall, 5:366.

<sup>37</sup> *U. S. House Journal*, 6th Congress, 1st sess., 19 December 1799. Members of the House of Representatives appointed to the joint committee included: John Marshall (Fed., VA); William Craik (Fed., MD); Henry Lee (Fed., VA); Joseph Eggleston (Rep., VA); John C. Smith (Fed., CT); David Stone (Rep., NC); John Rutledge, Jr. (Fed., SC); Abiel Foster (Fed., NH); Peter Muhlenberg (Rep., PA); Philip Van Cortlandt (Rep., NY); Dwight Foster (Fed., MA); Franklin Davenport (Fed., NJ); William Charles Cole Claiborne (Rep., TN); Lewis R. Morris (Fed., VT); John Brown (Fed., RI); and Benjamin Taliaferro (Fed., GA). A message was received from the Senate that they had appointed Senators Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey, William Bingham of Pennsylvania, Samuel Dexter of Massachusetts, James Gunn of Georgia, John Lawrance of New York, and Uriah Tracey of Connecticut to serve on the joint committee. All six of the senators were Federalists.

<sup>38</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 21 December 1799.

overhung with curtains of black, and the whole chamber lined in a similar manner.<sup>39</sup> The Senate also exchanged messages of condolence with President Adams, their message drafted by a committee made up of Senators Samuel Dexter of Massachusetts, James Ross of Pennsylvania, and Jacob Read of South Carolina, all members of the Federalist faction in the Senate. Senator Dexter reported the draft on the floor of the Senate on December 23, and it was read in paragraphs and adopted. Informed that the president would receive them immediately at his house, the members of the Senate met with Adams and exchanged their consolatory addresses. The address to the president was delivered by Samuel Livermore, president of the Senate, pro tempore. The Senate's address extolled with patriotic pride the virtues of Washington and expressed the hope that his country would consecrate his memory by teaching their children never to forget that the fruits of his labors and his example are their inheritance. Adams responded with an address that included a poignant expression of his personal sensibilities on the death of Washington:

In the multitude of my thoughts and recollections on this melancholy event, you will permit me only to say that I have seen him in the days of adversity in some of the scenes of his deepest distress and most trying perplexities; I have also attended him in his highest elevation and most prosperous felicity: with uniform admiration of his wisdom, moderation, and constancy. Among all our original associates in that memorable league of the continent, in 1774, which first expressed the sovereign will of a free nation in America, he was the only one remaining in the general government. Although with a constitution more enfeebled than his, at an age when he thought it necessary to prepare for retirement, I feel myself alone, bereaved of my last brother, yet I derive a strong consolation from the unanimous disposition which appears in all ages and classes, to mingle their sorrow with mine, on this common calamity to the world.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 20 December 1799.

<sup>40</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 3 January 1800; *Senate Journal*, 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 23 December 1799.

Mrs. Abigail Adams also received national press coverage of her announcement that, in consequence of the death of Washington, her “drawing-room” would be deferred until Friday, December 27, “when the Ladies are respectfully requested to wear white, trimmed with black ribbon, black gloves and fans, as a token of respect to the late President of the United States—the Ladies of the officers of the general government will please to wear black.”<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Adams’s announcement was especially significant because, coming from the wife of the President, it legitimated the propriety of a public role for women in mourning the death of Washington. In publicly mourning George Washington, Abigail Adams modeled a highly visible display of grief that would be copied by women throughout the nation during the mourning period.

Because Lieutenant General George Washington was commander in chief of the American armies at the time of his death, orders were issued to all national military units with regard to their duties and obligations in mourning the death of their chief. On December 19, 1799 Secretary of War James McHenry issued orders to the army from Adams, expressing the president’s grief on the death of General Washington and directing that funeral honors be paid him at all military stations. The president also ordered that officers of the army and of the several corps of volunteers wear crape on the left arm, by way of mourning, for six months.<sup>42</sup> The president’s orders were followed by instructions issued on December 23 from Major General Alexander Hamilton detailing the funeral ceremonies to be conducted at all army stations. Hamilton prefaced his orders with a statement of his personal grief, “mingling his tears with those of his fellow

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<sup>41</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 19 December 1799. (Appeared in 15 newspapers.)

<sup>42</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799. (McHenry’s orders to the army were published in 27 of the 42 newspapers in the sample.)

soldiers.” Because they were “companions in arms with our lamented chief,” the army could justly claim “the sad privilege of pre-eminence in sorrow” in mourning the irreparable loss of “a kind and venerable Patron and Father.” Hamilton’s orders set forth in precise detail the required elements of the military funeral ceremonies to be conducted, including the order of procession, the music to be played, how guns were to be fired, and martial ceremonies to be executed. A bier was to be carried in the processions, and honors were to be performed over it at the “place of interment.” Hamilton’s orders resulted in the enactment of mock funerals in military and civil commemorative ceremonies throughout the nation. Hamilton expressed the wish that in places where the processions of unarmed citizens shall also take place, the civilian and military ceremonial should be united.<sup>43</sup>

On December 20, 1799, Secretary of the Navy Department, Benjamin Stoddert, issued President Adams’s orders to the navy and marines for honoring the memory of Washington. The president directed that the vessels of the navy, in American and foreign ports, “be put in mourning for one week, by wearing their colors half mast high.” Officers of the navy and of the marines were to wear crape on the left arm, below the elbow, for six months.<sup>44</sup>

John Marshall again appeared before the House of Representatives on December 23 to offer a series of resolutions from the joint committee appointed to consider a suitable mode of commemorating the death of General Washington. The following resolutions were passed unanimously by both houses of Congress:

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<sup>43</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette*, 3 January 1800. (Major General Hamilton’s orders were published in 22 of the newspapers in the sample.)

<sup>44</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799. (Secretary Stoddert’s orders to the navy and marines were published in 27 of the newspapers in the sample.)



*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That a Marble Monument be erected by the United States in the capital of the City of Washington, and that the family of General Washington be requested to permit his body to be deposited under it, and that the monument be so designed as to commemorate the great events of his military and political life.

*And be it further Resolved,* That there be a funeral procession from Congress Hall, to the German Lutheran church in memory of General George Washington, on Thursday, the 26<sup>th</sup> instant. And that an Oration be prepared at the request of Congress to be delivered before both Houses that day, and that the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives be desired to request one of the members of Congress to prepare and deliver the same.

*And be it further Resolved,* That it be recommended to the people of the United States to wear crape on their left arm as mourning for thirty days.

*And be it further Resolved,* That the President be requested to direct a copy of the resolution to Mrs. Washington, assuring her of the profound respect Congress will ever bear to her person and character, of their condolence on the late afflicting dispensation of providence, and entreating her assent to the interment of the remains of Gen. Washington in the manner expressed in the first resolution.

*And be it further resolved,* That the President be requested to issue a Proclamation, notifying to the people throughout the United States, the recommendations contained in the third resolution.<sup>45</sup>

Major General Henry Lee<sup>46</sup>, a longtime friend and military subordinate of Washington's and a newly-elected congressman from Virginia, was chosen to deliver the oration to Congress at the German Lutheran Church in Philadelphia on Thursday, December 26. The funeral procession to the church, the largest in the city, formed at noon at Congress Hall. When the procession reached the church, a bier bearing an empty coffin representing the body of Washington was carried inside and placed in front

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<sup>45</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 January 1800.

<sup>46</sup> On July 19, 1798 Henry Lee and Dr. Edward Hand were appointed major generals in the ten thousand-man "Provisional Army" authorized by Congress to be raised in the event of war with France. Because the Provisional Army was never raised, Lee and Hand were not called into service during the Quasi-War with France. Major generals Alexander Hamilton and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney were commissioned to serve in July 1798 as senior officers under Lieutenant General George Washington in the "Additional Army," a congressionally authorized expansion of the Regular Army of the United States in order to prepare for

of the altar. The galleries were filled with about 4000 men and women, including President and Mrs. Adams. Lee's oration was described in the Philadelphia papers as "an admirable production" in which he did "great justice to the American hero and credit to his own talents and feelings." The funeral services closed with the chanting of several anthems by a choir, solemn martial music, and the discharge of three volleys by a select corps.<sup>47</sup> Henry Lee's funeral oration was the most widely published of all the eulogies and orations that were delivered during the period of national mourning for Washington. In addition to its being published in pamphlet form by several printers around the country, the full text of the oration was printed in half of the 42 newspapers. Lee's oration is probably best known for his memorable eulogy of Washington as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

President John Adams issued a proclamation on December 24, 1799, as requested by one of the congressional resolutions of the preceding day, recommending to the people of the United States that they wear crape on the left arm for thirty days.<sup>48</sup> The presidential proclamation was widely disseminated and appeared in thirty-two of the forty-two newspapers in the study. About the same time, a dozen papers reprinted a Philadelphia newspaper's description of the elaborate mourning decorations in the chambers of the House of Representatives:

The House of Representatives of Congress exhibits a pleasing, though mournful, evidence of the respect which is felt for the character of General Washington, and of the unfeigned regret which has been excited by the melancholy event of his death. The Speaker's chair and table, and the table on each side, are entirely shrouded in black. The casement in the rear of the

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possible war with France. See Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), vol. 22: 9n, 385, and 387n.

<sup>47</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 4 January 1800 (from a Philadelphia paper); *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799; *Philadelphia Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, 27 December 1799.

<sup>48</sup> See for example, *Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 7 January 1800.

Speaker's chair, and the recess are also elegantly ornamented with mourning emblems. The prints presented to the House by Mr. [John] Trumbull are overhung with curtains of black. Between these, and in the center of the house, Mr. [Charles Willson] Peale, proprietor of the Museum, has added a very striking likeness of the illustrious Hero, which, besides being highly ornamental to the house, acts as an intelligible and feeling index to the occasion of the mourning emblems which surround it.<sup>49</sup>

John Marshall, speaking again on behalf of the congressional joint committee, proposed another mourning resolution in Congress on December 30, 1799:

*Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled, That it be recommended to the people of the United States, to assemble on the twenty-second day of February next, in such numbers and manner as may be convenient, publicly to testify their grief for the death of Gen. George Washington, by suitable eulogies, orations and discourses; or by public prayers. And be it further resolved, That the President of the United States be requested to recommend the same, by a proclamation for that purpose.*<sup>50</sup>

On January 6, 1800 President Adams duly proclaimed the national day of mourning to be held on February 22, the 68<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's birth.<sup>51</sup> The President also informed Congress a few days later that he had received a response from Martha Washington regarding its request that she agree to the interment of her husband's remains in the Capitol. In transmitting Mrs. Washington's letter, President Adams wrote: "It would be an attempt of too much delicacy to make any comments upon it; but there can be no doubt that the nation at large, as well as all the branches of the government, will be highly gratified by any arrangement which may diminish the sacrifice she makes of her individual feelings." In her letter, Washington's widow said:

While I feel with keen anguish the late dispensations of divine providence, I cannot be insensible to the mournful tributes of respect and veneration which are paid to the memory of my deceased Husband; and, as his best services and most anxious wishes were always devoted to the welfare and happiness of his

<sup>49</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 27 December 1799.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>51</sup> See for example *Jenks' Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 20 January 1800. (President Adams's proclamation of the national day of mourning appeared in 29 of the sample newspapers.)

country, to know that they were really appreciated and gratefully remembered affords no inconsiderable consolation.

Taught by the great example which I have so long had before me never to oppose my private wishes to the public will, I must consent to the request made by Congress, which you have had the goodness to transport to me, and in doing this I need not, I cannot say what a sacrifice of individual feeling I make to a sense of public duty.

With grateful acknowledgement and unfeigned thanks for the personal respect and evidences of condolences expressed by Congress and yourself, I remain, Sir, your most obedient, and Humble Servant,

MARTHA WASHINGTON<sup>52</sup>

One newspaper reported that “the reading of the message and Mrs. Washington’s letter produced a sensation not to be described—the manly tears of several members flowed in quick succession—and a deep melancholy seemed to pervade the venerable assembly.”<sup>53</sup>

Benjamin Russell, publisher of the *Columbian Centinel*, observed that “Mrs. Washington’s late letter to the President of the United States is a display of dignified susceptibility which would do honor to a Roman Matron in Rome’s old days.”<sup>54</sup>

George Washington’s body was never moved to the new capital city in compliance with the December 1799 resolution of Congress and Martha Washington’s subsequent consent for her husband to be buried under the proposed marble monument in Washington. Instead, the remains of General and Mrs. George Washington lie today in a pair of marble sarcophagi that are placed in the foreground of an iron-gated, red brick, Gothic-style tomb on the grounds of Mount Vernon overlooking the Potomac River. Washington had specified in his will that a new family vault was to be constructed at Mount Vernon to receive his body and those of family members, but his heirs did not get

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<sup>52</sup> See for example *Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 24 January 1800. (Martha Washington’s poignant letter to President Adams was published in 35 of the sample newspapers.)

<sup>53</sup> *Newark (New Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 14 January 1800.

around to replacing the crumbling, old family tomb until 1831. Because of political delays over funding issues, Congress never followed through on its plan to construct a monument to Washington under which his body would be interred. A tomb for Washington was eventually constructed in the basement of the Capitol in connection with the centennial celebration of Washington's birth in 1832, and two decorative marble sarcophagi to receive George and Martha Washington's remains were sculpted by John Struthers of Philadelphia. However, the plans to place the bodies in the Capitol tomb were never implemented because of the refusal to release the remains by John Augustine Washington, the third-generation heir to Mount Vernon. In declining the request, John Augustine Washington cited his late relative's last wishes as expressed in his will that his body be deposited in the family tomb at Mount Vernon. Consequently, the remains of George and Martha Washington were placed in Struthers's two marble sarcophagi in the new tomb at Mount Vernon in 1837. Even though Washington's body was never moved to the national capital, some historians trace the legislative roots of the current Washington Monument in the District of Columbia to the 23 December 1799 resolution of Congress providing for a marble monument to be erected "to commemorate the great events of [Washington's] military and political life."<sup>55</sup>

The final public mourning activity of the leaders of the federal government was their participation in the national day of mourning events in Philadelphia on February 22, 1800. Invited by the Society of the Cincinnati to attend a commemorative oration,

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<sup>54</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 22 January 1800.

<sup>55</sup> Karal Ann Marling, "The United States Capitol as Mausoleum—Or, Who's Buried in Washington's Tomb?" in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1999), 448-464.

President John Adams, Vice President Thomas Jefferson, and members of Congress were present in the German church in Philadelphia for a one hour and twenty minute-long eulogy delivered by Major William Jackson, former secretary to President Washington and secretary-general of the Society of the Cincinnati.<sup>56</sup> A resolution received from the Senate that members of Congress should walk in procession to hear the Society of the Cincinnati eulogy was voted down in the House of Representatives so that its members could attend either Jackson's eulogy or one being delivered at the same time by the Rev. Mr. Carr at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup> Many government officials also attended a Masonic eulogy given that afternoon at Zion Church by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Magaw at the request of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.<sup>58</sup>

#### State Government Honors

Complementing the national honors paid to the memory of Washington by President John Adams and the Congress of the United States, all of the individual state governments also initiated their own official acts of mourning. The appropriateness of the state governments' participating in the mourning for Washington was defended in the following statement by the Governor of Georgia: "It is but a just tribute, due to the most excellent character of that once great man, and father of his country, that a grateful respect should be paid to his manes, and a deep sense of his loss be exhibited, not only by the United States, but by the individual state governments."<sup>59</sup>

Though some of the state legislatures were in recess during the period of national mourning, those that were in legislative session typically adjourned for the day upon

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<sup>56</sup> *Gazette of the United States, and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, 24 February 1800.

<sup>57</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 25 February 1800; *Annals of Congress, House of Representatives*, 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 21 February 1800, 536.

<sup>58</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 25 February 1800.

receiving the news of Washington's death. Upon reconvening, the legislatures often appointed committees to recommend appropriate public mourning measures to commemorate the death of Washington. The states' official mourning activities were often patterned after those of the federal government as reported in newspapers throughout the nation. Because the individual state governments tended to follow the model of official mourning activities established by the national government, there appears to have been little regional variation among the states in the manner in which they observed Washington's death. As commander in chief of their state militias, at least eight governors issued orders that the soldiers and officers of the militia should wear black crape armbands in memory of Washington. The members of at least six state legislatures voted to wear black crape badges of mourning during their current session, and the governor and members of the legislature of at least nine states marched in funeral processions and attended public memorial services. The governors and legislatures of several states exchanged addresses of condolence similar to the exchange of similar messages by President Adams and the Senate and House of Representatives. Three state legislatures passed measures to commission a portrait or statue of Washington to be displayed in their statehouses. The newspaper coverage of the individual state honors to Washington's memory tended to be published primarily in the respective states in which the activities occurred, although some of the states' mourning events were reported on a regional, or in a few instances, on a national basis. The official state mourning activities as described in local newspapers are summarized in the following narrative accounts.

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<sup>59</sup> *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the United States*, 18 January 1800.

Connecticut. The legislature of Connecticut was not in session when news was received of Washington's death, but on January 1, 1800, Federalist Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., secretary to General Washington during the Revolutionary War, issued orders to the Connecticut militia to wear black crape badges of mourning on the left arm "on every Sunday, on public days, and on every occasion of military duty for a term of six months."<sup>60</sup> In keeping with a longstanding New England tradition of blending the roles of church and state by periodically observing official days of public fasting and prayer, Governor Trumbull proclaimed the customary statewide Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer which was to be observed throughout Connecticut on April 11, 1800. The proclamation included a reference to the "late dispensation of His wise and holy Providence" in the death of "our revered and beloved Washington" and encouraged the citizens of Connecticut to pray that the spirit of "our Moses [who] is taken from us to heaven . . . will rest upon our present and future civil fathers."<sup>61</sup>

Delaware. Governor Richard Bassett issued a proclamation through the office of his Secretary of State on December 24, 1799 in which he recommended to all civil officers of the state to wear crape on their left arm, below the elbow, for three months. As commander in chief of the Delaware militia, the Governor also ordered that all officers of the militia wear crape armbands for three months.<sup>62</sup> In his speech to the legislature of Delaware at the opening of its session on January 10, 1800, Governor Bassett eulogized Washington and strongly endorsed Adams by expressing confidence that the President would "continue to walk" the road laid out by his "highly favored and exalted predecessor." The Senate and House of Representatives met in General

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<sup>60</sup> *Hartford Connecticut Courant*, 13 January 1800.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 March 1800.



Assembly on the same day and resolved unanimously to commission at the state's expense "an elegant and full portrait, large as life, with suitable devices and applicable motto, bearing the resemblance of the first of heroes and the greatest of men."<sup>63</sup> In addition, the Delaware statehouse in Dover was the site of a eulogy delivered by a state senator, John Vining, on February 22, 1800, the national day of mourning.<sup>64</sup>

Georgia. The "Executive of Georgia," over the signature of Thomas Johnson, Secretary, issued orders on January 13, 1800 that all officers in military commission and all civil officers within the state wear a black crape around the left arm for six weeks "as a manifestation of the affection and veneration that the government and people of Georgia possessed for him whilst in life, and the deep affliction with which they are penetrated at his irreparable loss." It was also recommended to "every description of citizens" residing within the state to wear crape armbands for six weeks.<sup>65</sup>

Kentucky. Governor James Garrard was unanimously chosen chairman of a meeting of the citizens of the town of Frankfort, the capital of Kentucky, held on January 18, 1800. The citizens resolved unanimously to wear mourning scarves for one month, and an "Elegy, Sacred to the Memory of the Illustrious Washington" was delivered by William Murray, Esquire.<sup>66</sup> In observance of the national day of mourning, the

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<sup>62</sup> *Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 1 January 1800.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 January 1800.

<sup>64</sup> John Vining, *Eulogium, Delivered to a Large Concourse of Respectable Citizens, at the State-House, in the Town of Dover, on the 22d of Feb. 1800, in Commemoration of the Death of General George Washington* (Philadelphia: John Ormrod, 1800.)

<sup>65</sup> *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 18 January 1800.

<sup>66</sup> *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 30 January 1800.

Honorable Harry Toulmin, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, delivered an oration at the capitol building in Frankfort on February 22, 1800.<sup>67</sup>

Maryland. The mourning activities of the government of Maryland received greater national press coverage than that of any other state government, due to their being the first legislative body to propose an official day of mourning in their jurisdiction. On December 17, 1799 the General Assembly of Maryland resolved unanimously that a message from the legislature be communicated to the Governor requesting him to proclaim a day of mourning, humiliation, and prayer throughout the state. The Governor's proclamation should recommend that "the citizens assemble in their respective places of worship to testify, in the most public manner, their veneration for his memory and to derive, from the just eulogiums of his meritorious services, the best motives for the imitation of his virtues." The General Assembly also resolved unanimously to furnish black scarves and hatbands as badges of mourning to the Governor, members of the senate and house of delegates, judges of the general court, and all other officers of the state and general governments now in the city of Annapolis, "to be worn during the session as the external mark of their unfeigned grief."<sup>68</sup> Because of the relative timing of their legislative actions, it can reasonably be argued that the congressional joint committee may have borrowed the idea of a national day of mourning from the Maryland legislature. On December 18, Governor Benjamin Ogle issued his proclamation of the day of mourning in Maryland to be observed on February 11, 1800.<sup>69</sup> After the federal government declared a national day of mourning to be held on February

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<sup>67</sup> Harry Toulmin, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, *An Address, Delivered at the Capitol in the Town of Frankfort on the 22d Day of February, at a Meeting Held in Consequence of a Proclamation of the President of the United States, in Frankfort (Kentucky) Palladium*, 27 February 1800.)

<sup>68</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 21 December 1799.

22, Governor Ogle modified his original proclamation and declared that Maryland would also observe the federal day of mourning on February 22, 1800.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, the Governor and other state officials marched in a funeral procession on the national day of mourning, forming at the Maryland statehouse in Annapolis and moving to a local church where a discourse was delivered by Rev. Mr. Higinbothom.<sup>71</sup>

Massachusetts. The commander in chief of the militia of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Lieutenant Governor Moses Gill,<sup>72</sup> issued orders on January 1, 1800 directing that officers and soldiers of the militia wear their uniforms every Sunday for six months with a black crape on the left forearm, just above the cuff, and that the hilts of the officers' swords be covered with black.<sup>73</sup> The General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, perhaps more than any other state legislative body, appears to have modeled their official acts of mourning the death of Washington after the example set by the federal government. The legislative session began on January 8, 1800, and on that day Lieutenant Governor Moses Gill sent a communication from the Council Chamber to the gentlemen of both houses: "The President of the United States, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December last, agreeably to a resolve of Congress of that day, has, by Proclamation, recommended to the Citizens an uniform mode to express their profound sorrow on this occasion. If you, Gentlemen, should think proper to adopt any measure in conformity with said resolve of Congress, I shall readily concur with you."<sup>74</sup> That same day both

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 December 1799. (Governor Benjamin Ogle's proclamation of a state-wide day of mourning was reported in 20 of the 42 newspapers in the sample.)

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1800.

<sup>71</sup> *Annapolis Maryland Gazette*, 27 February 1800.

<sup>72</sup> Governor Increase Sumner had died in June 1799, shortly after his reelection as governor of Massachusetts. Lieutenant Governor Moses Gill was serving as interim governor of the state until the election of a replacement for Sumner.

<sup>73</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 January 1800.

houses of the Massachusetts legislature voted that members should wear a black crape or ribbon on their left arm during the session and that their chambers should be shrouded in black. They also voted to accept an invitation from the Selectmen of Boston to participate in the town's public honors to the memory of Washington to be held on January 9, featuring a funeral procession and eulogy to be delivered at the Old South meetinghouse by Judge George Richards Minot. The Lieutenant Governor and members of the legislature marched in the procession in Boston the next day. On January 10, both houses agreed to form a joint committee "to consider and report what public measures are proper to be adopted by the Legislature to commemorate the sublime virtues of that eminent defender, guardian and father of his Country, that Benefactor to Mankind, and distinguished Ornament of his Species, Gen. George Washington." The Lieutenant Governor's opening address to the legislature on January 10 included an expression of grief for the death of Washington, "this unsearchable dispensation of Divine Providence," and a tribute to his virtues and services to his country.<sup>75</sup>

On January 13, the Senate answered Lt. Governor Gill's speech with a formal address that included a eulogy to Washington's memory. The next day both houses unanimously concurred to a resolution that the Legislature of the Commonwealth would attend a public oration in tribute to Washington at the Old South meetinghouse, the designation of the date and selection of the orator being delegated to a committee including the Lieutenant Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House. The state legislators also agreed to assemble on February 22 in the meetinghouse in Brattle Street to attend divine services to be performed by the chaplain of the General Court pursuant to President Adams's proclamation of a national day of mourning. In the

resolution, the legislature also expressed the wish that “our fellow-citizens of all denominations throughout the Commonwealth will then unite in like services” on that day.<sup>76</sup> Both houses of the legislature passed unanimously two additional resolutions on January 17, 1800. The first called for the erection of a statue or monument of marble in the center of the lower hall of the New Statehouse in memory of General George Washington. The second resolution directed that copies be published of President Adams’s proclamation of the national day of mourning on February 22 and the legislature’s resolutions of January 14 encouraging all citizens of Massachusetts to observe the day. The copies were to be “transmitted through the hands of the Sheriff to the several Ministers of the Gospel of every denomination in this Commonwealth, and to the Deacons or Elders of those churches which are destitute of a Minister.”<sup>77</sup>

The Federalist politician, the Honorable Fisher Ames, was chosen to deliver the oration on the sublime virtues of Washington to the Lieutenant Governor and members of the legislature at Old South in Boston on February 8, 1800. His oration, replete with High Federalist political rhetoric, was one of the most frequently reprinted eulogies of the national mourning period.<sup>78</sup> On February 22, the General Court and Lieutenant Governor Gill attended public worship at the Church in Brattle Street and heard a discourse delivered by their Chaplain, Rev. Dr. Peter Thacher.<sup>79</sup>

New Hampshire. The General Court of New Hampshire was in session at Exeter on Thursday, December 26, 1799 when the report reached town that Washington had

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1800 and 18 January 1800.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 January 1800.

<sup>78</sup> Fisher Ames, *An Oration on the Sublime Virtues of General George Washington*, in *Eulogies and Orations on the Life and Death of General George Washington* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800), 108-129.

<sup>79</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 26 February 1800.

died. Hoping that the report would prove to be untrue, the “public suspense was terminated” by the arrival that evening of a Boston paper confirming the story with “an authentic account of the distressing event.” On the following morning, the bells were ordered to be tolled, and the General Court suspended their ordinary proceedings and appointed a committee to consider the most proper method to mourn the death of Washington. Adopting the recommendations of the committee, the legislature resolved to “go in mourning” for three months and to form a procession on Saturday, December 28, moving to the meetinghouse for services to be conducted by the Rev. Mr. Rowland. The legislators also established a committee of arrangements for the funeral procession, and another committee was directed to procure a black curtain for the window behind the Speaker’s chair. On Saturday morning, Governor John Taylor Gilman and the legislature met in the Representatives’ chamber and exchanged addresses of condolence on the death of Washington. Wearing scarves on their arms, they joined the citizens of Exeter and moved in procession to the meetinghouse, draped in black, where hymns were sung and prayers were offered. Student of Phillips’ Exeter Academy, in uniform with “proper badges of mourning,” participated in the procession and memorial service. On December 30, the House of Representatives voted that 100 copies of the funeral proceedings, together with Washington’s Farewell Address, be printed and a copy given to each of the students of the academy.<sup>80</sup>

New Jersey. Governor Richard Howell, commander in chief of the New Jersey militia, issued general orders in Trenton on December 18, 1799 requesting that every military gentleman of New Jersey wear a black crape on his left arm, and when in

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<sup>80</sup> *Portsmouth New Hampshire Gazette*, 8 January 1800.

regimentals, a black sword knot or narrow black ribbon wrapped around the guard of his sword for one entire year.<sup>81</sup> These militia orders were more widely reprinted than those of any state, appearing in twelve newspapers in six states. Because they appear to have been the first issued in the nation, the New Jersey militia's general orders to wear badges of mourning in memory of Washington may have set the example for other states that subsequently announced similar orders to their militias. On January 14, 1800, the citizens of Trenton organized a funeral procession and eulogy at the New Jersey statehouse. The orator was Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith, president of the College of New Jersey. Governor Richard Howell served with the mayor of Trenton and clergymen on the committee of arrangements.<sup>82</sup> Governor Howell and his aides also participated in the congressional funeral procession held in Philadelphia on December 26, 1799.<sup>83</sup>

New York. His Excellency, Governor John Jay, issued general orders to the militia of New York on December 26, 1799, directing officers to wear crape on their left arm for six months. A note appended to the orders, appearing first in the *Albany Centinel*, requested printers of the state to publish them in their papers.<sup>84</sup> When the New York legislature convened on January 28, 1800, Governor Jay, in his opening speech, expressed his deep regrets for the death of Washington. The governor recommended that future leaders of the people should imitate Washington's "excellent example" and follow his "excellent admonitions."<sup>85</sup> The Assembly of New York answered the

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<sup>81</sup> *Newark (New Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 24 December 1799.

<sup>82</sup> *Centinel of Liberty or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 31 January 1800 (from a Trenton paper dated January 21, 1800); *Portsmouth New Hampshire Gazette*, 8 January 1800.

<sup>83</sup> John Stancliff, *A Sermon on the Death of General George Washington, Delivered at Cape May on the 22d of February 1800* (Mount Holly, New Jersey: Printed by S. C. Ustick, 1800), 16.

<sup>84</sup> *Albany Centinel*, 27 December 1799.

<sup>85</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 February 1800.

governor's address, assuring him that they shared his grief on the death of Washington.<sup>86</sup> The Senate also addressed the Governor, saying that "we unite with your Excellency in deeply regretting the loss of that great and good man." The state senators resolved to wear crape on their left arms during the session and to shroud the president's chair in black.<sup>87</sup> On the national day of mourning, the members of the New York legislature attended a memorial service at the North Dutch Church in Albany that featured a eulogy by one of the General Assembly's chaplains, the Rev. John Barent Johnson.<sup>88</sup>

North Carolina. The Governor, his Council, and other officers of the State of North Carolina participated in a funeral procession in Raleigh on February 22, 1800. The memorial service was held in the statehouse, and Major Robert Williams delivered an oration on Washington "in an handsome and eloquent manner."<sup>89</sup>

Pennsylvania. The legislature of Pennsylvania was sitting at Lancaster when the news of Washington's death arrived in the town. On December 19, 1799 Thomas McKean, the newly-elected Republican governor of the state, sent a message to the legislators announcing the death of Washington and delegating responsibility to them to "devise a proper testimonial of the public feelings and sorrow upon the present occasion." Governor McKean assured the legislature that he would concur with their recommendations. Before adjourning, both the Senate and House of Representatives resolved to wear crape on their left arms during the present session.<sup>90</sup> Members of the legislature participated in a funeral procession in Lancaster on January 7 and a memorial

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<sup>86</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 11 February 1800.

<sup>87</sup> *New York Spectator*, 8 February 1800.

<sup>88</sup> *Albany Centinel*, 25 February 1800.

<sup>89</sup> *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 25 February 1800.

<sup>90</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 24 December 1799.



service at the Episcopal Church, the eulogy delivered by the Rev. Dr. Clarkson.<sup>91</sup> In one of the few instances of an overt display of political animosities during the national mourning for Washington, Governor McKean did not participate in the Lancaster funeral ceremonies. Because the invitation to the event had been publicized by the committee of arrangements in the local newspapers, no particular request to participate had been extended to the Governor. When McKean failed to appear, Colonel Mosher was appointed to wait on him and was informed that “the Governor thought there had been a want of attention and respect on the part of the Committee, and refused to attend.”<sup>92</sup> The legislature of Pennsylvania authorized Governor McKean “to purchase two full length portraits of General Washington to be executed by a complete artist, and to be framed in a handsome manner, one of which is to be hung in a conspicuous place in the chamber of the House of Representatives and the other in the chamber of the Senate.”<sup>93</sup>

Rhode Island. The Governor of Rhode Island and the members of the state legislature and other civil officials marched in the funeral procession and attended the memorial services held in Providence on January 7, 1800.<sup>94</sup> During their legislative session, the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island passed a resolution to appoint a committee to procure two full-length portraits of General Washington that were to be placed in the two statehouses located in Newport and Providence.<sup>95</sup>

South Carolina. Governor Edward Rutledge, commander in chief of the South Carolina militia announced Washington’s death and issued general orders on January 3

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<sup>91</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 13 January 1800.

<sup>92</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 15 January 1800.

<sup>93</sup> *Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette*, 5 February 1800.

<sup>94</sup> *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 11 January 1800.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 March 1800.

for militia officers to wear badges of mourning for thirty days.<sup>96</sup> Members of the South Carolina legislature participated in a funeral procession on January 15 to St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Charleston. A report of the procession mentioned that the Governor had been unable to attend "by reason of a severe indisposition." Only ten days later, the grieving citizens of Charleston formed another funeral procession and attended a memorial service for Governor Rutledge who died on January 21, 1800.<sup>97</sup>

Tennessee. Governor John Sevier and a number of principal citizens of Knoxville marched as official mourners in a funeral procession organized by the United States Army troops garrisoned at the two federal forts in South West Point and Tellico, Tennessee, on February 22, 1800.<sup>98</sup>

Vermont. The Governor of Vermont, Isaac Tichenor, served on the committee of arrangement and participated in the funeral procession and memorial service for Washington that was held in Bennington on December 27, 1799.<sup>99</sup> Governor Tichenor also marched in the procession held in Burlington, Vermont, on the national day of mourning.<sup>100</sup>

Virginia. On December 18, 1799, on receipt of the "affecting news" of Washington's death, both houses of the Virginia legislature immediately adjourned, after having resolved for each member to wear a badge of mourning on the left arm during the remainder of the session.<sup>101</sup> Newly elected Governor James Monroe suggested that his

<sup>96</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 3 January 1800.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 January 1800 and 25 January 1800.

<sup>98</sup> *Boston Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 20 March 1800.

<sup>99</sup> *Bennington Vermont Gazette*, 2 January 1800.

<sup>100</sup> "His Excellency the Governor of Vermont" was listed in the order of procession published with a eulogy delivered on February 22, 1800 in Burlington, *A Discourse Pronounced at Burlington, Vermont, in Commemoration of General George Washington, by Daniel Clarke Sanders, A. M., President of the University of Vermont* (Burlington: Printed by John K. Baker, 1800), 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 24 December 1799.

Executive Council follow the resolutions of both houses of the legislature by also wearing badges of mourning. The *Times* report approvingly observed: “The liberal conduct of the Governor evinces a spirit which will be pleasing to every generous mind, since it is a proof that, notwithstanding he disapproved many of the political measures of the very respectable person deceased, and had reasons for personal dissatisfaction, yet he would lay aside every consideration of the kind and join with the legislature and the council in bearing testimony to the acknowledged merits of so distinguished a citizen.”<sup>102</sup> On Sunday, December 22, a grand funeral procession composed of the legislative body, the council of state, Masonic lodges, and “a large concourse of the most respectable citizens” of Richmond solemnly marched to the Capitol where the Reverend John Dubarrow Blair, chaplain to the House of Delegates, delivered a eulogy in memory of Washington.<sup>103</sup>

#### Local Government Honors

The first official governmental actions taken in response to the news of the death of George Washington occurred spontaneously in villages, towns, and cities throughout the nation. Immediately upon receipt of the news, city councils, boards of selectmen, and hastily called town meetings convened and passed resolutions to begin the public mourning in their respective jurisdictions. These local actions were reported primarily in local newspapers, but many of these reports were also widely reprinted in newspapers around the country. Some representative examples follow from towns and cities in various regions of the country.

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<sup>102</sup> *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 24 December 1799.

<sup>103</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 24 December 1799.

Alexandria, Virginia, because of its close proximity to Mount Vernon, was the first town to respond officially to the death of Washington. At a town meeting on Sunday, December 15, 1799 the citizens agreed to wear badges of mourning for thirty days. It was also generally agreed that Monday, December 16 would be observed as a day of mourning with all stores and shops closed and a general suspension of business.<sup>104</sup> On receipt of the news of Washington's death, the Common Council of Philadelphia on December 18 passed a resolution requesting the mayor of the city to have the bells muffled for three days and agreed to suspend the council's deliberations until Monday, December 23, "as a public testimony of respect due to his exalted and most excellent character." The Select and Common Councils also passed resolutions that each member of the councils would wear a crape on his left arm for six months. They authorized and requested the mayor to have the bells muffled on December 26, the day of the congressional funeral procession, and resolved to open their chambers that day for the reception of citizens attending the event.<sup>105</sup>

"The mournful information of the death of Gen. George Washington having arrived in this city," the Common Council of the City of New York on December 20 passed three public mourning measures. They requested that the city's churches "be dressed in mourning" and that their respective bells be muffled and tolled every day from twelve to one o'clock until December 24, inclusive. The Council also recommended to the owners and masters of ships and vessels in the harbor to hoist their colors half-mast through December 26. Finally, they resolved that members and officers of the corporation of New York would wear a black crape on their arms for six weeks, and that

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<sup>104</sup> *Richmond Virginia Argus*, 20 December 1799; *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 16 December 1799.

it be recommended to the inhabitants of the city to do likewise.<sup>106</sup> In neighboring Newark, New Jersey, a public meeting convened at the Court House on December 20, the day the incoming newspapers announced the death of Washington. A series of resolutions were passed by the citizens of Newark regarding the public measures the town would initiate to mourn Washington's death. They agreed that citizens should wear a black crape on their left arms for thirty days, that the churches in town should "dress in mourning" for thirty days, and that the church bells should toll the next day for one hour after sunrise, one hour at noon, and one hour at sunset. They also agreed to set aside Friday, December 27 as a day of public mourning in Newark with a funeral procession and oration to be delivered by the Rev. Dr. Alexander Macwhorter, and a committee of arrangements was named. A final resolution provided that "if the government of the United States should point out any uniform mode for expressing the public sorrow on this mournful occasion, that the arrangements prescribed in the foregoing resolutions should be made conformable therein."<sup>107</sup>

In Albany, the capital of New York, the Common Council on hearing the "melancholy tidings" of Washington's death expressed the hope that "for the honor of humanity, that even his enemies will now acknowledge that his country in pouring their tears over his tomb, do no more than they ought." The Council resolved that the bells of the city be tolled from three to five o'clock the afternoon of December 23, and they also agreed to wear crape around the left arm for six weeks "as a testimony of respect to the memory of Lieutenant General Washington, deceased."<sup>108</sup> The Selectmen of the Town of

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<sup>105</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 19 December 1800 and 26 December 1800.

<sup>106</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 21 December 1799.

<sup>107</sup> *Newark (New Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 24 December 1799.

<sup>108</sup> *Albany Centinel*, 24 December 1799.

Boston issued a notice for a town meeting to be held at Faneuil Hall on December 30 “to consult on measures to pay a suitable respect to the memory of the deceased General George Washington.”<sup>109</sup> At the town meeting, the citizens voted to appoint a committee of eighteen men, including the nine Selectmen, to plan and organize appropriate public mourning activities.<sup>110</sup> In addition to the Selectmen of Boston, those appointed to the committee included Colonel Thomas Dawes, John C. Jones, Judge George Richards Minot, Josiah Quincy, Colonel Paul Revere, Colonel Samuel Bradford, General Simon Elliot, General John Winslow, and Joseph Russell. At its meeting, the committee appointed George Richards Minot to deliver a eulogy on January 9, 1800 at the Old South Meetinghouse.<sup>111</sup>

The City Council of Charleston, South Carolina voted on January 3, 1800 to wear black crape on the left arm for thirty days and requested local religious societies to drape their pulpits in black in respect for Washington’s piety. A town meeting on the same day produced a resolution of the citizens of Charleston to open subscriptions for a marble pedestrian statue of Washington, or a bronze equestrian statue, to be erected in his memory. They also resolved “to go into mourning for thirty days by wearing a crape on the left arm” and to set aside a day of public mourning, all business to be suspended, with a eulogy to be pronounced by the noted historian, Doctor David Ramsay.<sup>112</sup> The Mayor and Aldermen of the city of Savannah, Georgia resolved to wear deep mourning for one month and also published a notice recommending that the merchants, shopkeepers, and tradesmen shut their stores and shops for three days. The recommendation was duly

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<sup>109</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>110</sup> The nine Selectmen of Boston in 1800 included: Charles Bullfinch, David Tilden, Russell Sturgiss, Joseph Howard, Ebenezer Hancock, William Porter, William Sherburne, John Tileston, and Ebenezer Oliver. *The Boston, Massachusetts Directory, 1800* (Boston: Printed by John Russell for John West, 1800.)

complied with, according to the newspaper report. The city officials also requested that the Rev. Mr. Henry Holcombe preach a funeral sermon on Sunday, January 12.<sup>113</sup> The Common Council of Savannah later resolved that a marble statue of Washington be erected in Johnson square, and they ordered a subscription to be opened for that purpose in the amount of three thousand dollars, five hundred of which was to be paid by the city.<sup>114</sup>

It seems apparent from the newspaper coverage of these official acts of local governing bodies that the newspapers played an important role in carrying examples of appropriate civic responses to town fathers throughout the nation. The civic leaders' opportunity to read about the mourning activities of other town fathers seems to have provided a model for their own resolutions and official acts of mourning. Though spontaneous and universal throughout the nation, the responses of local governments to the news of the death of George Washington seem to have been standardized through the influence of press coverage of similar official actions in other towns and cities. This standardizing influence of the newspaper accounts of funeral rites in other locations is evidenced in the common elements of civic mourning events held around the nation.

#### Funeral Processions and Memorial Services

Innumerable funeral processions and memorial services for George Washington were held throughout the United States during the period of national mourning. Over four hundred such events were documented by this study's analysis of newspapers and printed eulogies and orations. The Appendix to this study lists the dates and locations of

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<sup>111</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 January 1800.

<sup>112</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>113</sup> *Savannah Georgia Gazette*, 9 January 1800 and 16 January 1800. (Rev. Holcombe was detained in South Carolina by bad weather, so his sermon was postponed until Sunday, January 19, 1800.)

419 memorial rites held in the United States during the national mourning period. Newspaper editors typically devoted extensive coverage to funeral processions and memorial services that took place in their own or neighboring towns. The accounts of a few of the funeral ceremonies in memory of Washington were reported throughout the nation, including the congressional procession and eulogy by Henry Lee in Philadelphia on December 26 and the spectacular public funerals held in Boston and New York. In addition, many local newspaper stories about funeral processions and ceremonies that were held in smaller towns were also reprinted in out-of-state newspapers, usually on a regional basis. The next several chapters of this study are devoted to a comprehensive description and analysis of these public funeral ceremonies and an interpretation of the mourning rituals as cultural performances using a theatrical model.

#### Washington's Last Will and Testament

The provisions of George Washington's last will and testament constituted the theme of another major series of related newspaper stories during the mourning period. One half of the newspapers in the study printed the full text of Washington's will, and virtually all of them published extracts from it. Fourteen of the papers carried printers' advertisements for pamphlet copies of the will. An editorial comment in Isaiah Thomas's *Massachusetts Spy* describes the keen interest of newspaper readers in seeing the text of Washington's will: "The will of the deceased Washington is now publishing at Alexandria by Messrs. Westcott and Price. To the will is annexed a schedule of the General's property. After what has been said of the master style which marks the draft of

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<sup>114</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 11 March 1800.



this instrument, and its being from the pen of Washington, it naturally becomes the matter of much expectation.”<sup>115</sup>

The most frequently reported provision of Washington’s will was his direction that his slaves be given their freedom upon the death of Martha Washington. Slavery was a regionally divisive social and political issue in post-Revolutionary America, and a national policy on the future abolition of slavery had not been resolved by the framers of the Constitution in 1787. Because of their widely disparate views on the legality and morality of the institution of slavery, the Constitutional Convention delegates from both the northern and southern states who drafted the document recognized the probability that any attempt on their part to provide for the abolition of slavery in the new United States would become an insurmountable barrier to ratification and the formation of a federal union of the states. Thus, in effect legally sanctioned by the Constitution, slavery had continued to thrive in the southern states in the early national period. Although slavery had been legal in all of the states at the beginning of the American Revolution, by 1787 Massachusetts and New Hampshire had abolished slavery and Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Rhode Island had adopted gradual emancipation measures to end slavery in their states. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had banned slavery in the western territories north of the Ohio River. By the end of Jefferson’s first presidential term, New York and New Jersey had also adopted plans for the gradual emancipation of slaves held in their states.<sup>116</sup> Reflecting the widespread interest in the ongoing national debate about the future of the institution of slavery in America, the story about Washington’s freeing his slaves in his will was reported in twenty-seven papers in

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<sup>115</sup> *Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette*, 12 February 1800.

thirteen states, including four southern slaveholding states. The *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser* printed a brief story on January 7, 1800 reporting that the editor had been “credibly informed” that “General Washington’s legacy . . . to those whom the custom of his country imposed it upon him during his lifetime to keep in slavery, [was] their freedom and land to support them!”<sup>117</sup> These same words were reprinted verbatim in seventeen newspapers in the sample. Another significantly modified version of the same story was printed in seven additional newspapers, including papers in Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina. In these stories, the references to the institution of slavery were softened by deleting the observation that the “custom of his country” had imposed the practice of slaveholding on Washington during his lifetime. In addition, in some of the modified versions of the story, the word “slavery” had been changed to “bondsmen,” suggesting the regional sensitivity to the issue of slavery at this time.<sup>118</sup> In another story about Washington’s manumission of his slaves, New York’s *Spectator* published an extract from a letter from Alexandria, dated January 4, 1800 reporting that Washington had willed his own Negroes free, numbering 130, and that the remainder on the estate belonged to his wife. Washington’s slaves are “to enjoy their freedom at the death of their Mistress, and as much sooner as she pleases.” Those who are advanced in years are to be maintained by his estate.<sup>119</sup>

The historian Jean B. Lee writes, “In 1799, when he wrote the most famous manumission in American history into his will, it was not a joyful act. Washington freed his slaves because he did not know what else to do with Mount Vernon’s burgeoning

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<sup>116</sup> Paul Finkelman, “The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Federalism,” in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 135-39.

<sup>117</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 7 January 1800.

black population. He had little faith, moreover, that African Americans would do well and fare well in the young republic.”<sup>120</sup> Lee argues that Washington felt “profoundly ambivalent” about slavery and blacks in America. Based on his personal experience as an owner of slaves, Washington believed that many blacks were lazy and untrustworthy, but he recognized the moral problem of buying and selling humans as chattel and the obvious incongruity of slavery with the principles of human liberty upon which the nation was founded. Washington hoped that the state legislatures would eventually provide for gradual emancipation, but although he may have privately anguished about slavery, he maintained a public silence about it.<sup>121</sup> Paul Finkelman concurs that, although a slave owner, Washington was never committed to slavery and believed the institution of slavery to be morally wrong. The only slave-holding president to manumit his slaves, Washington had refused to buy and sell blacks “like cattle at the market.” Sensitive to the public perceptions of a national leader holding slaves, he had hired white servants to do the publicly visible work at his official residence while president.<sup>122</sup>

Another widely reprinted story about Washington’s will was published by the *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, based on a letter from Virginia to “a gentleman of the first respectability” in Baltimore. The author of the letter said that Washington had written his will in July 1799 and that “he devises his entire estate, real and personal, to his wife for life—at her death, he manumits all his slaves and their increase, creating a fund for the young, aged, and infirm, which assigns the reason for the

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<sup>118</sup> See for example *Savannah Georgia Gazette*, 30 January 1800 (from a Petersburg paper dated January 17.)

<sup>119</sup> *New York Spectator*, 8 January 1800. (This story was printed in 17 newspapers on the sample.)

<sup>120</sup> Jean B. Lee, “Mount Vernon Plantation: A Model for the Republic,” in Philip J. Schwarz, ed., *Slavery at the Home of George Washington* (Mount Vernon, Virginia: The Ladies’ Association of Mount Vernon, 2001), 38.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

intermixture of the dower and his own slaves.” Washington bequeathed shares in the Potomac and James River companies to two colleges, and his manuscripts, books and papers, as well as Mount Vernon with 4,000 acres of land, to his nephew Bushrod Washington. He made a schedule of the remaining property and divided it into 23 shares to be divided among the Custis family. The writer of the letter mentioned that the will was a “masterly composition,” all in the general’s own handwriting. He concludes the letter by indicating that “Mrs. Washington has announced that after this year all the Negroes are to be emancipated. According to the general’s wishes, the spirit of freedom has progressed, is progressing, and will progress.”<sup>123</sup>

The coverage of Washington’s will appeared in newspapers in January and early February and was followed by reports in virtually all the papers about local observances of the national day of mourning on February 22, 1800. These stories marked, for the most part, the end of the newspaper coverage of Washington’s death and national mourning. Mixed in with coverage of the European war, ongoing partisan debates in Congress, and political stories about the presidential election of 1800, a few scattered newspaper reports appeared in March and April about foreign reactions upon receiving the news of Washington’s death. In France, First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte had issued orders to the consular guard that black crapes were to be suspended to all the standards and flags of the Republic in memory of General Washington.<sup>124</sup> The *London Morning Herald* on February 5, 1800, printed a eulogy in memory of Washington, concluding that “his memory and character must be held in the highest veneration by every lover of

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<sup>122</sup> Finkelman, 145 and 155.

<sup>123</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 27 January 1800. (The letter was reprinted in 16 newspapers in the sample, in ten states.)

<sup>124</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 28 April 1800.

public virtue and worth.”<sup>125</sup> There was a general tendency for Republican newspapers to carry the story from Paris and for Federalist editors to reprint the eulogy from the London paper, another example of the political context in which the national mourning for Washington took place.

Through their use of “scissors and paste pot,” the printer-editors of American newspapers in the winter of 1799-1800 covered the death of George Washington as a national story. By their exchanging newspapers and mutually copying each other’s stories related to the death of Washington, the printers were able to supplement their coverage of local funeral processions and memorial services with accounts of mourning activities throughout the nation. As a result of their editorial decisions in making up their papers, these newspaper publishers succeeded in bringing their readers to the bedside of the dying hero and to his tomb at Mount Vernon. They took their readers to the halls of Congress and into the nation’s statehouses to learn of legislation that would shape the form and substance of much of the public mourning for Washington. Readers of newspapers during this period were informed of the nationwide scope of personal and public mourning for Washington, and they were made aware of the extent to which their grief for the loss of Washington was shared by their fellow citizens throughout the nation.

In his book, *The Letters of the Republic*, Michael Warner writes that during the early national period the nation continued to be imagined primarily through the public sphere. “Americans understood print and the nation as intimately related.” In order to accomplish the diffusion of letters in this early period of our nation’s history, a specialized system of print discourse was required, and the printing trade, including

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<sup>125</sup> Jenks’ *Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 14 April 1800.

newspapers, was tied closely to the republican nation's self-image.<sup>126</sup> The newspaper coverage of the death of Washington provides a rich example of the role of the printing trade in shaping the national self-image. By covering Washington's death and mourning as a national story, the newspapers linked grieving for the fallen hero to American nationhood. Their extensive coverage during the national mourning period focused the attention of Americans on George Washington and created a united community of mourners by linking their common grief to their shared national identity. The newspapers' coverage of the death of Washington fused his image to that of his country, and future generations of Americans would regard that fused image of Washington and his nation as a central component of the American historical memory.

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<sup>126</sup> Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 119-20.

CHAPTER TWO  
FUNERAL PROCESSIONS AND MEMORIAL SERVICES

Fellow townsmen, we weep not alone. The millions of our nation are this day an assembly of mourners. . . . Unprecedented scene! Throughout this great nation, all characters, private and official; all ages, the blooming, the hoary, and the manly; all parties, the patriotic and the selfish, unite to embalm with their tears the ashes of WASHINGTON.

Rev. Abiel Abbot, Haverhill, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800

As the news of the death of George Washington spread throughout America, state and federal government and military officials and the Federalist elites of towns and villages across the nation began to formulate plans for public mourning rites in commemoration of the fallen Father of His Country. These mourning rituals in memory of Washington were clustered in two distinctive stages, the first of which included hundreds of spontaneous demonstrations of grief planned and executed locally as well as carefully orchestrated public mourning events under the sponsorship and direction of the federal and state governments, military units, and fraternal organizations such as the Masons and the Society of the Cincinnati. This first stage of nationwide public mourning rites began as the news of Washington's death was disseminated in late December 1799, and continued through the month of January 1800. A second stage of public mourning occurred in response to the congressional resolution and presidential proclamation calling

for a national day of mourning for Washington on February 22, 1800. Speaking from his pulpit in the South Church at Ipswich, Massachusetts on the national day of mourning, the Reverend Joseph Dana distinguished between the two stages of mourning:

I shall not indeed now call upon you, my brethren, as if no tribute of this kind has been paid.—When a WASHINGTON dies, America does not wait the slow movements of national Proclamation, but flies spontaneous to vent her grief; and this you have done. But it would wrong you much to suppose that your mourning is over. Hitherto, the hand of time has done very little to relieve us. It renders our loss more real. It impresses yet more deeply its immense magnitude.<sup>1</sup>

In both stages of mourning, most of the public rituals of grief took the form of elaborate funeral ceremonies that were influenced by traditional American and English cultural practices related to the death and burial of prominent individuals. Carefully arranged funeral processions, most of which had a military aura, wound through the streets to houses of worship or other public buildings where eulogies were delivered and various combinations of civil, religious, military, and Masonic memorial services were conducted. Doctor Josiah Bartlett, the orator at a memorial service held in Charlestown, Massachusetts on the national day of mourning, commented that “the numerous exhibitions of a funeral ceremony, in token of humble acquiescence in the immutable decrees of a Righteous Ruler, are without a precedent in the annals of America.”<sup>2</sup> The public memorial services for Washington had a religious tone, reflecting prevailing beliefs among Americans about the spiritual nature of life and death and the controlling role of the dispensations of Providence in the affairs of the nation. These cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Dana, *A Discourse on the Character and Death of General George Washington, Late President of the United States of America; Delivered at Ipswich on the 22d of February, A.D. 1800, By Joseph Dana, A. M., Pastor of the South Church in that Place* (Newburyport: Printed by Edmund M. Blunt, 1800), 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Josiah Bartlett, *An Oration on the Death of General George Washington, Delivered at the Request of the Selectmen and Parish Committee, before the Inhabitants of Charlestown, in the County of Middlesex, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, on Saturday, February 22, 1800. Being the Day Set Apart by the Congress of the United States, to Testify the Grief of the Citizens, on that Melancholy Event* (Charlestown, Massachusetts: Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 14.



linkages among religious beliefs, the fate of the nation, and the death of George Washington are illustrated in a contemporary newspaper account of the plans of the citizens of Newark, New Jersey, to mourn Washington's death:

Participating in the general grief, occasioned by the death of our illustrious countryman, General George Washington, our village, by a unanimous resolution of its citizens, appointed Friday, the 27<sup>th</sup> instant to be set aside as a day of special mourning, accompanied with solemn exercises of devotion: conceiving that the sacred duties of Religion would not only be the highest tribute of respect to the memory of the late Father of his Country, but also the most suitable expression of humble resignation to this afflictive dispensation of an ever-ruling Providence, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, on whose sovereign will is suspended the fate of men and empires, and whose gracious interpositions have been so manifestly displayed in the events of American history.<sup>3</sup>

The printer-editors of contemporary newspapers reported in full detail the Washington funeral ceremonies that were conducted in their towns, major cities, and adjacent communities. The newspapers provided another important theater for the representation of the dramaturgy of the national mourning rites. These accounts are rich sources of information about how Americans observed the death of Washington, providing detailed descriptions of the public mourning rituals that were enacted throughout the nation following his death. Many of the newspaper accounts featured an “order of procession” that listed the organizations and groups of citizens who participated as actors in the solemn funeral dramas. Some citizens performed active roles through their participation in the processions and memorial services while others played more passive roles as observers of the funeral pageantry. During this period of national mourning for Washington, ordinary Americans were both actors and audiences—participants and spectators—in elaborately designed and staged mourning rites planned by members of the Federalist leadership elites who sought to use the death of the Father

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<sup>3</sup> *Newark (New Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 31 December 1799.

of His Country as a catalyst to unite Americans around the bier of Washington. Many groups of citizen-actors performed a variety of roles in the street theater of the Washington funeral rites. Carrying their arms reversed, the barrels of their muskets pointed toward the ground, uniformed soldiers wearing black crape armbands marched with their fellow militiamen, members of independent volunteer companies and regulars of the United States Army. They marched slowly, their pace set by the mournful cadence of the muffled drums and the dirges played by their company musicians. Groups of clergymen walked in the processions, many of them to perform later in the day as orators and officiants at the religious services that followed. Local, state, and national civil authorities also marched in the processions, and brothers of the Masonic fraternity donned their mourning regalia and joined the funeral parades. Young boys and girls marched with their schoolmates, children symbolically mourning the death of their “father.” Members of the Society of the Cincinnati, aging veterans who had served as General Washington’s fellow army officers during the Revolutionary War, often marched as principal mourners or honorary pallbearers. In larger towns and cities, physicians, attorneys, and artisans marched with fellow members of their respective professions and crafts. Groups of private citizens wearing black badges of mourning walked in an orderly manner, two or four abreast, as mourners in the funeral processions. This study included an analysis of eighty-three published “orders of procession” that identified eighteen distinct groups of citizen actors who participated in the funeral rituals.<sup>4</sup> Virtually all of

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<sup>4</sup> A total of 48 (58%) of the 83 processions that were analyzed for this study took place in New England, 22 of them ((26%) were held in the Middle Atlantic states, and 13 (16%) occurred in southern towns and cities. The eighteen groups of participants identified included: military units, private citizens, clergymen, civil authorities, musicians, Freemasons, school children, orators and eulogists, honorary pallbearers and soldiers carrying biers with coffins or urns on them, committees of arrangement, occupational groupings, the Society of the Cincinnati, strangers of distinction, men leading riderless horses, young girls dressed in white, university students and professors, foreign consuls, and members of miscellaneous societies.

the processions included one or more military units, usually leading or appearing very near the front of the parades. Private citizens appeared as a group in all but five of the processions, nearly always at the end of the parades, marching behind the military units, clergymen, biers and pallbearers, civil authorities, and others. Eighty percent of the processions included clergymen and civil authorities. Nearly sixty percent of the processions included a contingent of Masonic brethren from the local lodges. School children marched as a group in about half the parades, and young girls in white robes appeared in nearly ten percent of them, strewing “laurels” in front of the bier. Members of the Society of the Cincinnati marched in about twenty percent of the processions. A bier bearing an urn or coffin representing the body of Washington was carried in about thirty percent of the 83 processions, typically appearing in military or Masonic funerals. A riderless horse was led in about fifteen percent of the processions, especially in the military rites. The members of the local committees of arrangement marched as a group in nearly a quarter of the processions. Occupational groups such as physicians, lawyers, and artisans appeared in about twenty percent of the events, especially those held in larger towns and cities. The selection of which organizations and groups of citizen-actors would participate in the Washington funeral rites, who would be excluded, and the order in which the groups were to appear were significant components of the social and political messages that the predominantly Federalist organizers hoped to communicate to their audiences. Although the mourning rituals included many common elements, the funeral processions and memorial services varied according to their location and sponsorship. For example, the largest American cities—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston—with their relatively larger populations and far greater

resources than smaller towns, organized elaborate public funerals involving thousands of participants and observers. However, although their efforts may not have been as grand as those of the major American cities, the citizens of hundreds of smaller towns and villages throughout the nation also organized solemn funeral processions and memorial services to commemorate the death of Washington.

The following descriptions of ten public funeral ceremonies were selected from numerous newspaper accounts of such events to provide illustrative examples of the various types of processions and memorial services that took place during the period of national mourning for George Washington. These examples were chosen to demonstrate the diversity as well as the similarities of mourning events held in large cities and small towns in various regions of the country. Many elements of the following newspaper descriptions of the Washington funeral rites will raise significant issues and questions about their cultural roots and their social and political meanings to contemporary observers and participants. However, the intent of this chapter is to provide a narrative description of the national mourning events that followed the death of Washington, and subsequent chapters will provide further analysis and interpretation of these events.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 26, 1799. The national funeral ceremony, in effect a “state funeral” organized and sponsored by the Congress of the United States, was held in Philadelphia on Thursday, December 26, 1799. The funeral procession was organized in compliance with the military orders issued in Philadelphia on December 21 by Major General Alexander Hamilton specifying the funeral honors to be paid at all army stations to the memory of the deceased commander in chief. Since the summer of 1798, Hamilton had served as Inspector General of the United States Army, second in

command to Lieutenant General Washington who had been commissioned to oversee the mobilization of an expanded army in the event of war with France. Accordingly, at daybreak the artillery fired sixteen guns in quick succession and continued to fire guns every half hour until sunset. The procession began at noon, under the overall direction of Brigadier General William Macpherson, commander of a federal battalion of cavalry, infantry, and artillery stationed in Philadelphia. Minute guns were fired for one hour as the procession filed through the streets of Philadelphia, from Congress Hall down Walnut Street to Fourth Street, where it turned to the left and crossed Chestnut, Market, and Arch Street to the German Lutheran Church where the memorial service was to be held. The solemn sounds of mourning filled the air with the firing of minute guns, the tolling of church bells, and the music of fifes, muffled drums, and wind instruments playing the “Dead March” from *Saul*.<sup>5</sup>

A mounted trumpeter led off the procession, followed by two troops of horse, their flags in mourning. Brigadier General Macpherson and his staff, riding with senior officers of the militia, led about twenty units of federal troops, volunteer companies, and militia. Other officers of the city and county of Philadelphia militia and of the federal army and navy marched together at the rear of their troops. Immediately behind the long parade of uniformed soldiers, two military men wearing black scarves led a riderless white steed, with boots reversed in the stirrups, caparisoned in a black gauze veil with a crest of white and black plumage. Major General Alexander Hamilton, second in command to Washington, and his staff immediately preceded the bier which bore an empty coffin, on which Washington’s hat and sword were displayed. Draped in black, the bier was carried by six army sergeants and escorted by six pallbearers including four

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<sup>5</sup> An oratorio composed by George Frederick Handel (1685-1759).

army majors, Secretary of War James McHenry, and Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert. Following the bier were the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, walking two by two. The heads of federal departments and the judiciary of the United States were immediately behind the national legislators. Members of the Pennsylvania Society of the Cincinnati and of the Pennsylvania Grand Lodge of Freemasons and several local Masonic lodges appeared next in the procession, followed by the Mayor of Philadelphia and the aldermen and members of the select and common councils of the city. Citizens walked behind the city officials, the procession ending with a corps of mounted cavalry.

When the procession reached the German Lutheran Church, the military corps, carrying their arms reversed, formed two ranks facing inward while the bier was carried into the church and deposited in front of the pulpit beneath an elevated platform. President and Mrs. John Adams, along with other civil authorities, were seated in the center of the church with the military corps in the surrounding pews. "Immense numbers crowded the streets," and the church was completely filled with an estimated crowd of mourners numbering 4,000 men and women. The funeral service began with the performance of several "fine pieces of church music," after which the Reverend Doctor William White, Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania, read specially adapted Episcopalian services for the burial of the dead. Washington had had a lifelong association with the Anglican Church, reconstituted and named the Protestant Episcopal Church following the American Revolution. After the religious rites were completed, soloists and a women's choir performed several funeral anthems. Major General Henry Lee, a friend of Washington's and a Congressman from Virginia, who had been seated on the elevated

platform in front of the pulpit along with other members of Congress, then rose and delivered the funeral oration. After delivery of the eulogy, several soft airs and additional anthems were performed. When the chanting had ceased, the procession left the church in inverted order, and the bier was borne to the destined spot for interment. The ceremonies concluded, the full band accompanied by kettledrums performed several martial airs. A corps of infantry fired three volleys, and the military corps were drawn up and the troops marched off to the tune of the President's March to their respective places of parade.<sup>6</sup> One account indicated that, after the bier was deposited at the place of interment, a double military sentry was placed over the grave for six months.<sup>7</sup>

New York, New York, December 31, 1799. The Corporation of the City of New York sponsored and organized the most elaborate public funeral ceremonies held anywhere in America in commemoration of the death of George Washington. The New York committee of arrangement published detailed "regulations relative to the procession for rendering funeral honors to the deceased General Washington."<sup>8</sup> Brigadier General James M. Hughes, the senior military officer appointed to the committee, issued orders that participation of the military should conform as nearly as possible to the ceremonials prescribed in the orders of Major General Hamilton.<sup>9</sup> Included in the committee of

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<sup>6</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799; *Richmond Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, Richmond, Virginia, 7 January 1800; *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>7</sup> Entry of 26 December 1799 in *Journal of Silvanus Seely*, from the Thomas W. Streeter Collection, Morristown, New Jersey, quoted in John Alexander Carroll and Mary Wells Ashworth, *George Washington*, volume seven, completing the biography by Douglas Southall Freeman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 650-51.

<sup>8</sup> *The Spectator*, New York, 1 January, 1800.

<sup>9</sup> On December 21, 1799, Hamilton had written to Adjutant General William North in New York enclosing a copy of his orders for funeral honors to be paid to Washington at all military stations and directing that the orders should govern generally the "celebration" in New York. He expressed his desire that the New York ceremonies would be held on December 26, 1799, the same day as the funeral ceremonies being planned in Philadelphia. North's letter of December 23 informed Hamilton that the Society of the Cincinnati had already sketched out the plan for funeral solemnities to be held in New York on December

arrangement's "regulations" was their recommendation that the day should be observed as a day of solemnity and cessation from all business. No carts, carriages, or persons on horseback, except those in connection with the procession, were to appear in the streets through which the procession was to move from ten o'clock in the morning until its termination. The procession was to form in front of the Battery Park on Broadway, then move to the left in front of the Almshouse to the head of Beekman Street. Moving down Beekman to Pearl Street, the procession would turn up Wall Street to City Hall, down Broad Street to Beaver Street, around the Bowling Green in front of the Government House, then up Broadway to St. Paul's Episcopal Church where the memorial service would be held. The committee recommended that citizens in those streets through which the procession was to pass arrange to have the streets cleaned and to clear the streets of all obstructions that might impede its progress. During the movement of the procession, minute guns were to be fired from the Battery, and muffled church bells were to be tolled. Masters of vessels in the harbor were requested to hoist their colors at half-mast. Finally, the committee asked that all citizens observe profound silence during the procession and the ceremonies in the church.

At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, December 31, 1799, a 21-pound cannon in Battery Park was fired to signal the various military units, corporations, and societies to meet at their respective places of rendezvous. The second firing of the cannon signaled the formation of the line of procession, and a third shot was the signal for the procession to begin to move forward. The cannon's fourth firing halted the procession and opened

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31, to be in the style of the pageantry that took place on the adoption of the Constitution and modified as required. Hamilton replied to North, "As a regular plan appears to have been formed for the celebration of the day in New York, it is not my wish that the regulations which I sent you should be followed when they are inconsistent with that plan." He also directed that the "whole ceremony" be deferred until the last day



the ranks of the military to the left and right to permit the bier, musicians, and clergymen to pass through and lead the rest of the procession's participants into the church for the memorial service. During the procession, minute guns were fired from the Battery and the muffled bells of the city's churches were tolled. In order to effect a solemn silence when the procession entered the church, the fifth firing of the cannon signaled the artillerymen to cease firing their minute guns and the bell ringers to cease their tolling of the church bells. An officer and squad of light dragoons headed the procession, followed by the Sixth Regiment of the United States Army, marching in platoons, their arms and colors reversed in mourning. The fife and drum corps, also in mourning, played a "dead march." Eight pieces of field artillery followed, taken from the British in different battles of the Revolutionary War. Next came cavalry and rifle companies and officers of the United States Army and Navy. Major General Alexander Hamilton and his suite followed the military units. The citizens of New York walked directly behind General Hamilton, a symbolic acknowledgment that he had filled the void in military leadership created by the death of Lieutenant General Washington, the commander in chief of the army being raised in the event of war with France.

Members of two fraternal orders followed the mourning citizens, the St. Stephen's Society and the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order. The Tammany Society, a republican fraternal order founded after the Revolution, had invented a native American heritage which they incorporated in their rituals.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the Society marched in "tribes," one for each of the original thirteen states. The Warden of each tribe bore a

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of the year, indicating his desire that the civil observance be merged with the military rites. See *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 24: 114, 119, and 124.

<sup>10</sup>David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 70.

banner decorated with the armorial bearings of one of the thirteen states, covered with black cloth and ornamented with knots of crape. On the front of each banner, a black marble urn on a white field represented “the sacred repository of the ashes of departed heroes and statesmen who were the companions of our Washington in the late Glorious and Revolutionary War.” The Virginia tribe bore their banner reversed in memory of “our beloved brother Washington, being a native of Virginia and always considered s an honorary member of that tribe.”

Artisans and tradesmen from the Mechanic Society of New York were next in the line of procession. The craftsmen were followed by a large contingent of officers and members of the New York Grand Masonic Lodge and ten local Masonic lodges. The Secretary of the Grand Lodge, carrying an urn representing the ashes of Washington, walked beneath the dome of a temple carried by four Masons of the Superior Degree. The “Grand Tyler” carried a sword, the handle covered with crape, and the “Grand Pursuivant” carried a Bible, square, and compass on a black cushion, the Bible being the one upon which Washington had taken the oath of office when he was inaugurated in New York as the first president of the United States. The Masons were followed by representatives of the business and commercial community of New York, including banks, insurance companies, and the Chamber of Commerce. Gowned students, professors, and the president and trustees represented Columbia College which was located in the city of New York. Physicians, surgeons, and gentlemen of the bar came next in the procession, and they were followed by civil officers of the city and state of New York, the members of Congress, the Lieutenant Governor, and civil officers of the

United States government. The Spanish and English consuls followed, marching with gentlemen of their respective nations.

The singers of the “Anacreontic and Philharmonic Societies,” dressed in complete mourning, walked next in the procession, followed by members of the clergy in full dress with white scarves. Following the clergymen, twenty-four girls in white robes with white surplices and turbans strewed laurels in the streets, immediately preceding the members of the committee of arrangement. Eight pallbearers appeared next in the order of procession, walking beside a bier carried by soldiers. The pallbearers included Richard Varick, the mayor of New York and military secretary to Washington during the Revolutionary War, five colonels, and two generals. Each of the pallbearers was accompanied by a member of the Society of the Cincinnati dressed in full mourning with a white crape bow on the outward arm and bearing a black banner denoting some important act of Washington. The pallbearers and the committee of arrangement wore the badges of the Cincinnati and black scarves with white roses on the bows.

An elaborately decorated urn was placed on the bier, a six by four feet litter carried on the shoulders of eight soldiers, “with others attending for relief.” The funeral urn was described as follows: “three feet in height, of burnished gold with the name of Washington in black upon the flat band; behind which the American eagle, four feet high, cloud-borne, with extended but drooping wings, appearing to hover over the ashes of the Hero, holding in its beak a laurel wreath. These figures were supported by “a rich pedestal and cornish of burnished gold—underneath was a second pedestal rising from the bier, covered with black, on the front and rear of which the laurel wreath was represented, tied together by the American stripes, and crowned by the American

Constellation, the whole on a ground of black—the sides were adorned with military trophies, composed of military standards, cavalry and infantry, with the standards of the United States and the Society of the Cincinnati. In the center of the trophies was represented the eagle, with the other emblems and mottos of the Society surrounded by branches of laurel—the whole decorated with black drapery, fringed and festooned. This superb and appropriate ornament formed an elegant mass of thirteen feet in height. The various colors of the floating standards, mingled with the metallic splendor of the urn, and the mournful solemnity of the surrounding black, formed one grand image truly sublime and affecting.”

Immediately behind the bier was the General’s horse, in mourning, led by two black servants dressed in complete mourning, wearing white turbans. Members of the Society of the Cincinnati and other officers of the Revolutionary War followed as chief mourners. The Corporation of the City marched at the end of the procession, escorted by a troop of light dragoons. When the procession reached St. Paul’s Church, the military halted, opened their ranks, and made an avenue through which the bier and those immediately attendant on it passed into the church. The ceremonies at the church were opened with a prayer by the Episcopal Bishop of New York, the Reverend Doctor Samuel Provoost, and followed by sacred music performed by the Anacreontic and Philharmonic Societies. The eulogy was delivered by statesman Gouverneur Morris, followed by additional sacred music. After the funeral services, the bier was carried from the church, deposited in the cemetery, and last military honors were performed over it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *New York Spectator*, 1 January 1800; *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 15 January 1800.

Boston, Massachusetts, January 9, 1800. The Selectmen of Boston issued a notice to citizens of a town meeting to be held at Faneuil Hall on December 30, 1799 “to consult on measures to pay a suitable respect to the memory of the deceased General George Washington.”<sup>12</sup> At the meeting, the citizens of Boston voted to appoint a committee of arrangements, consisting of eighteen men including the Selectmen “to devise and recommend to the inhabitants such marks of mourning and other expressions of public sensibility on the late afflictive event, as to the said committee shall appear just and appropriate.” The committee was delegated full authority to plan the public mourning for Washington, and their decisions were to be announced to citizens in the public newspapers.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, the committee of arrangements announced that one of its members, Judge George Richards Minot, had been appointed to deliver a eulogy at the Old South meetinghouse on January 9, 1800. Beginning that day and continuing through February 22, male citizens of Boston were to wear crape or black ribbons on the left arm above the elbow, and females were to wear black ribbons. The committee also invited the Lieutenant Governor and member of the Legislature of Massachusetts to attend the public funeral ceremonies.<sup>14</sup>

The following account of Boston’s funeral rites in memory of Washington was published in the January 11, 1800 edition of the *Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*.

The citizens of Boston never can be deficient in exhibitions of public gratitude. The recent mortality which has lacerated the hearts of millions, has been felt by them with the keenest sensibility; and they devoted last Thursday to tokens of their exalted veneration of the talents, virtues, and services of that matchless MAN, through whose instrumentality they have owed the enjoyment of their

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<sup>12</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 January 1800.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

“altars and firesides,” and who, “though he hath not made a world, has, by imitation, approached nearer its maker than any man who has lived from the creation to this day.”<sup>15</sup>

The newspaper account continued, noting that “military honors were performed with professional exactness,” and that the gun salutes were made by Captain Gardner’s artillery using brass twelve-pound cannons. The muffled bells of the town were tolled at “various appropriate periods.” The funeral procession formed in the vicinity of the New Statehouse and moved from there through Winter, Summer, Federal, Milk, Kilby, and State Streets, arriving at the Old South Meetinghouse at half past one o’clock in the afternoon. A group of young boys from ages ten to fourteen, marching eight deep and accompanied by their school instructors, led the procession. The young men were followed by a cavalry corps, dismounted, and six companies of uniformed militia, with side arms. Officers of the militia and the federal army and navy appeared next in the procession, followed by members of the committee of arrangements with a military escort. Judge George Richards Minot, the orator, and the Rev. Dr. Peter Thacher, the chaplain of the legislature, were next in the line of march, followed by the sheriff and his deputies, Lieutenant Governor Moses Gill and the Council, and the state’s senators and representatives. The state secretary and treasurer and the supreme and district judges followed. Members of the Society of the Cincinnati were next in the order of procession, preceded by three veteran non-commissioned officers in uniform, “bearing their badges of merit.” One of the Cincinnati carried a standard that had been used by the light infantry at the siege of Yorktown. Following the Cincinnati in order of appearance were the foreign consuls, “strangers of distinction,” the clergymen of the town and vicinity, civil officers of the federal government, county and town officers, the school committee,

board of health, physicians and lawyers, commercial and trading interests, and the Marine Society.

Nearly 2500 members and officers of the Boston Mechanic Society marched in the procession, grouped according to their trades including bakers, blacksmiths, boat builders, butchers, clock and watchmakers, coopers, distillers, fishmongers, goldsmiths, hairdressers, house carpenters, limners and painters, masons, rope makers, saddlers, sail makers, shipwrights, tailors, tobacconists, wheelwrights, and other tradesmen. A standard bearer for each group of tradesmen carried a banner representing their craft. Because there were many more representatives of the mechanics interests than could possibly be seated for the memorial service, when the procession arrived at Old South, "by previous arrangement," the tradesmen were led past the meetinghouse and were dismissed by the president of the Mechanics Association with thanks for their "silent, dignified, and respectful decorum which did justice to the sensibility of the Mechanics of Boston." Others in the procession crowded into available seats in Old South until the meetinghouse was completely filled.

The ceremonies began with an instrumental dirge and a "pertinent and solemn" prayer by the Rev. Dr. Joseph Eckley, "well calculated to raise the mind to those sublime contemplations which dignify our nature, and which true religion alone can inspire." The prayer was followed by a hymn written at the request of the committee of arrangements by the Rev. John S. J. Gardiner. The Honorable George Richards Minot, Esq. delivered a "chaste, correct, and pathetic" eulogy, preserving "in sentiment, in language, and in gesture a dignified composure, and an elegant simplicity, that secured the best attention,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 January 1800.

and the correct approbation of his audience.” Judge Minot’s eulogy received the acclamation of the printer-editor of the *Centinel*, who summarized the performance for his readers as follows:

The lengthy procession, the sound of cannon, and all the busy arrangements of a public mourning, while they are highly respectful to the memory of the deceased, tend in a degree to divert us from that exclusive contemplation of our bereavement, which produces grief. When the Orator ascended, WASHINGTON was set before us.—The eventful scenes of his interesting life passed in review.— We admired him in arms: We revered him at the head of the nation: We seemed again to see him revisiting our capital: We saw our children bending before the Hero while he bowed to them his benediction: We stood by his dying bed: We saw him close his eyes with his own firm hands: We followed him to his tomb; and by the river Potowmac we sat down and wept.<sup>16</sup>

The ceremonies concluded with the singing of an ode, instrumental music, and some lines of poetry that had been set to music by Oliver Holden. This patriotic poem had first appeared in the Philadelphia newspaper, the *True American*, shortly after Washington’s death, and it had been printed in many newspapers around the country:

From Vernon’s Mount behold the Hero Rise!  
Resplendent forms attend him through the skies:  
The shades of war-torn veterans round him throng,  
And lead, enwrapt, their honor’d Chief along!  
A laurel wreath th’immortal WARREN bears,  
An arch triumphal MERCER’s hand prepares;  
Young LAWRENCE, erst th’avenging bolt of war,  
With port majestic guides the glittering car;  
MONTGOMERY’s godlike form directs the way,  
And GREENE unfolds the gates of endless day;  
While Angels, “trumpet-tongued,” proclaim thro’ air,  
“Due honors for the FIRST OF MEN prepare.”

During the procession and memorial service, the offices, stores, and shops of Boston were closed, all business was suspended, and “the stillness and decorum of the

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



Sabbath prevailed. Every citizen, male and female, appeared with some mark of mourning.”<sup>17</sup>

Charleston, South Carolina, January 15, 1800. A large number of the citizens of Charleston attended a meeting at City Hall on January 3, 1800, called “in order to form a plan by which the inhabitants of this city may express the sincere grief they are penetrated with, by the loss of General Washington.” During the town meeting it was moved and agreed unanimously that citizens would wear a crape on their left arm for thirty days as an expression of their gratitude for Washington’s “disinterested services” and as testimony to “our sincere respect and veneration for his memory.” It was agreed that Friday, January 10 would be set aside as a day of mourning in the city of Charleston. All business and labor in the town were to be suspended that day, and Doctor David Ramsay, a citizen of Charleston, physician and statesman, and noted American historian, was to be requested to deliver a funeral oration. A committee of arrangement was appointed to set the time and place of the oration.<sup>18</sup> Due to inclement weather, the funeral procession and oration originally scheduled for January 10 were postponed until January 15, 1800.<sup>19</sup> At ten o’clock on that day, a procession was formed at the Orphan House composed of civic officers of South Carolina and the United States, the city council, the clergy of all denominations, military corps, members of societies, and citizens of Charleston. At eleven, the procession moved from the Orphan House yard, through St. Philip’s Street and George Street and then down Meeting Street to St. Michael’s Episcopal Church. The committee of arrangements had requested that no

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1800. The members of the committee of arrangement included Samuel Prioleau, Sr., Colonel John Mitchell, the Rev. Doctor Gallagher, Dr. McCalla, and Captain Langdon Cheves.

carriages or persons on horseback, except those concerned with the procession, appear in the streets through which it would move from ten o'clock until it was over. Masters of vessels in the harbor were requested to hoist their colors at half-mast during the day. Citizens were asked to observe a profound silence during the procession and the ceremonies at the church.<sup>20</sup>

The muffled bells of the city rang from daylight until the procession arrived at St. Michael's Episcopal Church. Two heralds led the funeral procession, their trumpets and standards in mourning. Following the heralds were three troops of horses, two battalions of artillery, officers of the federal army and navy and the state militia, the uniformed companies of two militia regiments, and a military band, their drums and fifes muffled. Behind the military units walked the commissioners of the Orphan House and the orphans who lived there, and the city's clergymen. A bier was carried, colors reversed, with eight senior military officers serving as pallbearers including two majors, two colonels, and four generals. A second cousin of George Washington, Brigadier General William Washington, a prominent Charleston citizen, followed the bier as chief mourner. He was followed by a riderless bay horse, with saddle furniture and pistols, boots and spurs reversed in the stirrups. The Secretary of State and members of the Legislature marched behind the bier and the horse, along with judges of the courts of equity, common pleas of the state, and of the United States, the port collector and other federal officers, the sheriff of the district and federal marshal, and the Intendant and City Council. The Society of the Cincinnati and about 250 Freemasons appeared next in the procession, the

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 January 1800.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1800. The Charleston committee's instructions regarding the procession used exact quotations from those of the New York committee of arrangements, suggesting that cities and towns were patterning their mourning events from newspaper accounts of processions held in other places.

Masons in funeral order. Members of other local societies marched immediately ahead of the citizens, in mourning. A company of artillery fired minute guns during the procession.

After the bier was carried into the church, prayers were read by the Rev. Doctor Purcell, after which solemn music was played. Doctor David Ramsay “then rose and delivered an elegant oration, in which, in a brief and animated style, he drew the character of General Washington and pointed out the many eminent services he had, through a long life, rendered his country.” When the oration was finished, the bier was carried from the church and a detachment of artillerymen under the command of Major Wilkie fired over it. Sixteen rounds were fired from four field pieces, under the direction of Major Darrell. The military units were then dismissed, and the citizens returned to their homes. A “great number” of the ladies of Charleston, dressed in mourning, attended the memorial service in the church.<sup>21</sup>

Portsmouth, New Hampshire, December 31, 1799. The Selectmen of Portsmouth had appointed a committee of arrangement to organize a municipal tribute to the memory of Washington to be held in Portsmouth on Monday, December 30. However, as the *Columbian Centinel* reported, “Heaven claimed Monday as its own. Darkness veiled the firmament, and the skies wept all day.” Because of the inclement weather, the procession was postponed until the next day, December 31, 1799, the concluding day of the year that also “terminated a century complete.”<sup>22</sup> At an early hour on Tuesday morning, all public offices, stores and shops were shut. A procession formed at the State Assembly Room at eleven o’clock and proceeded to St. John’s Episcopal

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 January 1800.

<sup>22</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800.

Church. Military units led the procession, including three companies of artillery and light infantry, their arms reversed and side arms in mourning. With drums muffled, the military musicians played the “Dead March” from *Saul*. Freemasons from the New Hampshire Grand Lodge and the local St. John’s Lodge marched behind the military units, followed by the orator of the day, Jonathan M. Sewall, Esq. and the Rev. Mr. Willard, the rector of St. John’s Church. United States military officers and commissioned officers of the militia of New Hampshire appeared next in the procession, followed by the Selectmen of Portsmouth, civil officers of the United States, the clergymen of Portsmouth and the vicinity, and “strangers,” marching “two and two.” When the procession entered the church, a solemn piece of sacred music was performed on the organ, followed by a dirge composed for the occasion. The Rev. Mr. Willard read appropriate prayers, and a Masonic hymn was sung. Jonathan M. Sewall pronounced an “admirable eulogy,” and “the Christian consolations were chanted with peculiar effect.” Reverend Willard solemnly gave the benediction, and a voluntary on the organ concluded the memorial service.<sup>23</sup>

In a descriptive addendum to the report of the Portsmouth funeral ceremonies, the newspaper correspondent wrote that “the day was remarkably clear, not a cloud passing over the horizon,” and “nature breathed the requiem of peace.” The citizens “as one body demonstrated every possible mark of respect, and scarcely an office, store, or shop was opened in town until the solemn service was concluded.” The flags of all the shipping in the harbor were hoisted at half mast, and mourning crapes were worn by “almost every individual of any respectability.” The ladies of Portsmouth “in particular manifested

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

those delicate attentions which refined sensibilities pay to departed heroism and virtue.” Even the infants “caught the pious sorrows of the hour, and the rising generation dropt the manly tear.” At the head of Congress Street, the whole procession was received and passed through two lines of children from the three public schools. Some of these same children had passed in review before George Washington when he visited Portsmouth during his presidency. “The tender thought that they were now assembled to mourn their common father interested every paternal spectator; and it was pleasing in the midst of so afflicting a solemnity, that our children forgot the common love of play and felt themselves honored in paying their infantile respects to the glorious dead; they will recollect with conscious pride that they walked with men; that they paid the early tribute of rising youth with elder manhood.” The detachment of artillery “who served the minute guns executed their duty with uncommon propriety and exactness,” and the last salute at the “supposed grave of the departed Hero was admirably performed.” During the entire day, “every soldier’s countenance bore a deep impressive solemnity—a solemnity not assumed for the moment but felt at the heart.” The church was “elegantly habited in mourning,” including the pulpit, organ loft, orchestra, and altar. A large branch of an evergreen fir tree hung perpendicularly like a chandelier, ornamented with black plumes, and “the severed root and the living branch addressed the heart.” The Rev. Mr. Willard read the funeral services of the Episcopal Church “with heart-felt solemnity.” The clergyman’s “feelings were affected,” and “the involuntary sigh, the forbidden tear, mingled with almost every sentence, for as a Christian he rejoiced in hope, but as a man he wept his country’s loss.” The select band of vocal performers from all the different religious societies in town performed a dirge, a Masonic ode, and Christian hymns, and

their performance was described as “excellent.” The streets of Portsmouth, from the Assembly Room to the church, were lined with people six deep on both sides, and the thousands who were assembled “all as one behaved with decorum, propriety, and awfully affecting solemnity.”<sup>24</sup>

New London, Connecticut, January 11, 1800. When he received Major General Hamilton’s orders for funeral honors to be paid at all stations of the army, Lieutenant William Steele, the commander of troops stationed at Fort Trumbull, approached the town fathers of New London with the proposal to unite with the militia and citizens of New London in paying this tribute of respect. Even though funeral honors to Washington’s memory had already been performed in New London “by particular classes of the citizens and two sermons preached on the occasion of this greatly lamented death,” Lieutenant Steele’s proposal was “embraced with alacrity.” A meeting of the town’s corporation was held on Monday, January 6, and it was resolved to carry the public funeral ceremonies into effect. A committee of arrangements was appointed which issued a handbill with the details of the plan they had devised.<sup>25</sup>

At sunrise on the morning of January 11, 1800, sixteen guns were fired from Fort Trumbull, in quick succession, and one gun was fired each succeeding hour until sunset. The procession formed at eleven o’clock in State Street, and the bier was carried from the home of Marvin Wait, Esquire, by the troops formed in a line, with presented arms, the officers, drums, and colors saluting. The bier having arrived in its place, the procession moved, passing through Bank Street and Golden Street to the Presbyterian Church. The militia and two companies of the Third Regiment of the United States Army led the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *New London Connecticut Gazette*, 15 January 1800.

procession, their standards in mourning. The musicians, with drums muffled, played Handel's "Dead March" from *Saul*, followed by Captain Smith's independent company. The citizens of New London marched next in the line of procession, followed by militia officers and officers of the federal army and navy. Masonic brethren walked immediately behind the military officers. Led by two black men, a riderless white horse appeared next, with saddle, holsters, pistols, and boots in the stirrups reversed. The horse displayed a black rose on his forehead and was decorated with emblems of mourning. Clergymen followed the horse, walking in front of sixteen girls from eleven to thirteen years of age who were dressed in white robes and turbans. The girls carried white baskets filled with laurel with which they strewed the way of the bier that came behind them. The bier was carried by four sergeants of the volunteer company, and six high-ranking military officers were pallbearers. The members of the City Corporation followed as principal mourners, including city officers and selectmen. The procession was closed by a contingent of six dragoons and an officer.<sup>26</sup>

When the procession arrived at the Presbyterian Church, the troops wheeled and formed a line, opened ranks, and rested on their arms reversed. The bier, preceded by the clergy, was carried into the church, and the whole procession followed in reversed order. A chorus sang a funeral anthem, after which Revolutionary War General Jedidiah Huntington rose and delivered a eulogy on the character of Washington. "When he attempted to portray the virtues of his beloved general, the Hero with whom in the Revolutionary War he had counseled and fought; he 'spoke as a sage, but he felt as a man,' while the orator wiped off the 'honorable dew' which progressed on his cheeks, a shower of manly drops paid the homage of pathetic sympathy." The choristers sang a

sacred hymn followed by an oration by Lyman Law, Esquire, “in which he displayed such oratorical talents as presage his future celebrity and usefulness in public life.” After the ceremonies at the church were concluded, “the procession formed as before and walked in the old burying ground.” The troops formed a line, leaning on their arms reversed, and the ceremonies of depositing the urn were performed. The girls emptied their baskets of laurels at the urn, and the troops shouldered firelocks, broke into platoons, wheeled, and fired three volleys over the tomb. The citizens then retired, and the troops marched back to the parade, the band playing the President’s March, with drums still muffled. The stores and shops of the city were shut during the day, all business was suspended, and the colors of the vessels in the harbor were hoisted at half-mast. The newspaper account concluded with the observation that “the ceremonies were conducted with great decorum and propriety; and a serious solemnity was settled on every countenance.”<sup>27</sup>

Trenton, New Jersey, January 14, 1800. One newspaper correspondent who wrote a detailed account of Trenton’s funeral honors began his description by reminding his readers of the close ties between Washington and the citizens of Trenton:

As no place within the United States has more sensibly felt the protecting arm of our late commander in chief, so no place has been more sensible of the loss sustained by his death. Fully impressed with the value of his services and the high preeminence of his virtues, the inhabitants of Trenton have ever been among the foremost to do him honor while living, nor has their zeal been less conspicuous in their tribute of respect to his memory.<sup>28</sup>

Immediately after having received news of Washington’s death, Trenton’s citizen met and “resolved unanimously to express their sorrow by funeral obsequies and their

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Centinel of Libery or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 31 January 1800.



sense of his merit by a public eulogium.” At eight o’clock on Tuesday morning, January 14, 1800, the chosen day of mourning in Trenton was announced by the firing of three cannons in quick succession, immediately after which muffled church bells began to ring for an hour. The military and citizens assembled in Warren Street, opposite the Episcopal Church. The bier, “on which were deposited the General’s hat, gloves, and sword,” was carried out of the church, preceded by the clergy and followed by the mayor and members of the common council wearing deep black. As the bier passed to its place in the procession, it was received by the troops with presented arms, the officers, colors, and music saluting. At eleven o’clock the minute guns began to fire and the bells to toll, and the procession began to move toward the New Jersey Statehouse. When the procession arrived at the doors of the statehouse, it halted and the military formed, opened ranks, faced inward and rested on their arms while the bier, the musicians, the orator, and the clergymen passed through and moved to the center of the Assembly Room.<sup>29</sup>

The musicians continued playing solemn airs until the remainder of the procession had entered the statehouse. The military standard bearers came forward, waved their colors solemnly over the bier, and deposited them on it. The front windows of the Assembly Room and the Speaker’s seat were hung with black. On the back of the Speaker’s seat, in a conspicuous place, a transparent painting had been placed, “representing a golden urn, shrouded with black, in the body of which appeared the initials of the General’s name in black, encircled with a wreath of laurel and surrounded with a Glory, immediately over which appeared the motto *Sic transit Gloria mundi*, and over the motto, the words *Obit. Dec. 14, 1799, Aet. 68.*” At length a solemn recitative broke the silence, after which a choir of female voices, accompanied by a flute, sang an

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

air that had been composed especially for the occasion. The Reverend Mr. Hunter pronounced “a pertinent and comprehensive prayer,” followed by the singing of another recitative that concluded with the words, “But now the white rob’d train are seen, who bear for him his funereal green.” At this musical cue from the choir, “eight beautiful girls about ten years of age, dressed in white robes and black sashes, with neat baskets on their arms filled with sprigs of cypress,” came forward to the sides of the bier. As female voices sang an elegiac song which began, “Strew, Virgins, the Cypress o’er Washington’s bier, whilst emblems of Sorrow excite the big Tear,” the eight young girls moved around the bier and strewed their cypress sprigs upon it. “This was a solemn and impressive part of the exercises and drew tears from many in the audience.” After the song and the strewing of laurels around the bier, Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith, the president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton), delivered the eulogy. At about the middle of his hour and a half long discourse, the exhausted orator rested while the choir sang a solemn dirge. When his strength “would admit no more,” Dr. Smith concluded the eulogy, and a consolatory air was sung accompanied by ladies playing flutes.

The bier was then carried out of the statehouse, and three volleys from Captain Claypoole’s infantry concluded the solemnities of the day. The troops marched to their respective parades to the tune of Washington’s March, and “the vast concourse of people, supposed to amount to three or four thousand who had assembled, returned to their respective abodes at about three o’clock in the afternoon, with the utmost order and decorum, appearing to be deeply impressed with the unspeakable loss so universally lamented by our country.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Concord, Massachusetts, January 16, 1800. A correspondent to the *Columbian Centinel* in Boston reported that the citizens of Concord had devoted Thursday, January 16 to a day of mourning, “to testify their gratitude, and to pay their respect to the memory of the most illustrious General Washington, and also to manifest their regret for the loss which their country had sustained by his death.”<sup>31</sup> In accordance with the arrangements made by a committee appointed by the citizens of Concord, the morning of January 16, 1800 was ushered in by the discharge of sixteen guns. At half past two in the afternoon, the inhabitants of Concord and several of the neighboring towns formed a procession at the courthouse, under the direction of Major Barrett and Captain Page who had been designated as marshals of the day. The procession “moved in a regular and solemn manner,” led by a band of musicians, their drums covered with crape and muffled. Three companies of the town’s militia, in complete uniform, marched in sections under the command of Captains Buttrick, Hayward, and Page. Male schoolboys, age ten and over, each carrying a black quill in his hand, marched immediately behind the militia with their schoolmasters from several Concord schools. The citizens of the town walked behind the young students, followed by officers of the militia in uniform and officers of the United States Army, magistrates of the county, deacons of the churches, clergymen from neighboring towns, and the sheriff of Middlesex County. Bringing up the rear of the procession were the Brothers of the Society of Freemasons, “with their proper habiliments and tokens of mourning,” the Selectmen of Concord, the members of the committee of arrangement, and the chaplain and orator. When the procession arrived at the meetinghouse, the mourners halted and opened their ranks, the military resting on

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<sup>31</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 February 1800.

their arms reversed. The orator and chaplain advanced through the procession, followed by “sixteen young ladies clothed in white robes, with proper badges of mourning, chanting an ode adapted to the occasion.” After the whole procession had entered the meetinghouse, the ceremonies began with a “plaintive hymn,” a “pathetic prayer” by the Reverend Mr. Ezra Ripley which was sung to the tune *New York, or Vital Spark, &c.* Thomas Heald, A.M., delivered “a just and pertinent eulogy.” The services were closed with an “appropriate anthem, Masonic funeral honors, and a funeral dirge.” After the procession had moved out of the meetinghouse in order, the military companies immediately formed and fired three volleys. The citizens then returned to their homes “with decency and decorum.” The *Columbian Centinel* account of the Concord funeral rites concluded by noting that the breastwork of the galleries and the pulpit of the meetinghouse had been shrouded with black cloth for the town’s memorial service. The cloth had been purchased by a number of ladies in the town, and there being enough material to make a suit of clothes, it was afterwards presented in the name of the ladies to the Rev. Mr. Ripley.

Fayetteville, North Carolina, February 22, 1800. In compliance with President John Adams’s proclamation of a national day of mourning to be held on February 22, 1800, the citizens of Fayetteville, North Carolina awakened at sunrise to the sound of cannon being fired. A procession was formed about 11 o’clock at the “town house,” under the direction of Samuel Murley, Esquire, the magistrate of police who was officer of the day. The procession moved through the principal streets of Fayetteville to the courthouse in the following order: two mounted troops of horse; an independent company and a unit of light infantry; two Continental Army officers, Colonels Dekeyser and

Overton; the militia officers of Cumberland County; the General's horse, "represented by the celebrated horse Independence who was foaled in Virginia on the same day that American independence was declared;" the orator of the day; the bier carried by four sergeants and escorted by six military officers; Messrs. Barge, Dick, and Mullett, three of the oldest inhabitants of the town who acted as chief mourners; the tutors of the Fayetteville Academy followed by their male students; the young ladies of the Academy preceded by their teacher, Miss Taylor; the ladies of Fayetteville; officers and members of the Phoenix Masonic Lodge; Mr. John Hay, Esquire, the town representative; and the citizens of Fayetteville and vicinity. When the procession reached the courthouse, an "appropriate oration" was delivered by Major S. D. Purviance. The procession again formed and returned to the town house "where the bier was deposited after the usual Masonic and military honors had been performed."<sup>32</sup>

Knoxville, Tennessee, February 22, 1800. In response to the orders of Major General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, the United States Army troops garrisoned at the two forts in South West Point and Tellico, Tennessee, observed the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February as a day of funeral honors to their fallen commander in chief, General George Washington. At both garrisons, "the dawn of the morn which was lucid and beautiful, was introduced by reveille, after which a discharge of sixteen cannon announced to this western world the death of the beloved chief of the American army, as well as the friend and benefactor of mankind." When the sixteen guns ceased their firing, artillerymen fired muskets every half hour, echoing "through and from the woods of the Indians the loss of their great father Washington." At noon the troops at South West Point, under the command of Major Peters, paraded and were joined by Captain Arthur Crozier's voluntary cavalry

from Knoxville. The line was formed, and the Reverend Mr. Carrick preceded the bier which was carried by four sergeants. The pall was supported by five military officers and Judge Roane. With “reverential respect,” the troops presented arms and marched in inverted order with “solemn slowness” in front of the bier. Then the procession began with Governor John Sevier and a number of principal citizens as mourners. They were followed by Captain Bird with nine principal Cherokee chiefs and a number of the citizens of Tennessee. Bringing up the rear of the procession were many of the “common Indians,” the respectable order with which they marched being “indicative of their true mourning and sorrow for the loss of their common parent.” When the procession arrived “at the place where the last honors were to be paid to the departed hero and friend to the human race,” the troops halted, opened their ranks, and leaned on their arms “in an affectionate attitude” as the procession passed through. After a long solemn pause, the orders of Major General Alexander Hamilton were read by Lieutenant Salmon. The Rev. Mr. Carrick ascended a pulpit that had been erected for the purpose, and “gave the audience an affecting and well-adapted discourse” on the virtues and achievements of General Washington. The correspondent who wrote the account noted that “it was very pleasing to see the friendship and sociability that reigned between the troops and the citizens,” due largely to Major Peters and the officers for their hospitable reception of citizens of the area. The account closed by relating that, on the evening of that day of official mourning in the western forts in Tennessee, two children were born in the

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<sup>32</sup> *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 11 March 1800.

garrisons—Captain Butler’s wife gave birth to a son who was named “George Washington,” and the wife of Captain Lockwood had a baby girl, who was named “Martha Washington.”<sup>33</sup>

The public funeral ceremonies in commemoration of Washington, like those described above, were secular rituals that were carefully planned and directed by civil, military, and religious elites to convey important political and cultural messages to the mourning citizens of America. The next several chapters analyze the Washington funeral rites as cultural performance, in the social, political, and religious contexts in which they occurred.

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<sup>33</sup> *Boston Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 20 March 1800.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WASHINGTON FUNERAL RITES AS CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

Never before did men go to the graveyard with so heavy a heart. Never before did we witness such long processions, such sad but affectionate preparations of funeral rites . . . and NEVER BEFORE a whole vast nation so dressed in the garb of mourning.

Daniel Clarke Sanders, President of the University of Vermont,  
Burlington, Vermont, 22 February 1800

This contemporary description by Daniel Clarke Sanders of the long funeral processions, the sad but affectionate memorial services, and the heavy hearts of Americans garbed in mourning following the death of George Washington contains many allusions to elements of theatrical performance. Never before had the American Republic been called to mourn a leader of Washington's stature, and the nation was breaking new ground self-consciously. Staged in the meetinghouses, streets, and graveyards of America, dramatic funeral rituals in memory of Washington were performed by casts of thousands of costumed actors who mourned the death of their beloved leader on an unprecedented scale. "The American Family, in one great funeral procession, is mourning its deceased Father," observed the Reverend Doctor David Tappan, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard University, as he began his funeral oration at Harvard's ceremonies in commemoration of George Washington in



Cambridge, Massachusetts on February 21, 1800.<sup>1</sup> These oratorical observations about the Washington funeral rites draw attention to the roles of Americans as actors in funeral processions and memorial services that were performed in public venues throughout the nation following Washington's death.

When George Washington died suddenly in his home at Mount Vernon, the nation's leaders were confronted with the problem of how to commemorate appropriately his indispensable services to the country and, at the same time, to demonstrate to Americans the continued strength of the social and political order in the absence of the man who had been the acknowledged Father of His Country. Their solutions to the problem involved the staging of elaborate public displays of civil, military, commercial, and religious power for which they enlisted a numerous cast of performers that included civil authorities, military officers and soldiers, clergymen, Freemasons, professionals, merchants, and artisans. Ordinary citizens were included in the public rituals in dual roles as observers of the pageantry and as participants who marched in the processions and attended the memorial services. By including much of the entire population in the mourning for Washington in ways that were appropriate to persons in their respective stations in life, the organizers of the funeral rites hoped to enhance popular affections for Washington in order to strengthen the people's sense of attachment to the nation he embodied. These collective mourning rituals, appealing to the participants' and observers' emotions as well as their reason, were designed by their organizers to strengthen the social and political order and to build national unity by fostering a sense of

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<sup>1</sup> *An Address in Latin, by Joseph Willard, S.T.D., L.L.D., President, and a Discourse in English, by David Tappan, S.T.D., Hollis Professor of Divinity; Delivered before the University in Cambridge, Feb. 21, 1800, in Solemn Commemoration of General George Washington* (Boston: Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 11.

an “imagined community” of mourners that transcended local and state boundaries and encompassed the entire nation.

Borrowing some elements from the traditional public rituals performed in England for mourning the death of their monarchs, the republican stage managers of the national mourning for George Washington organized similar performances that included solemn public processions through the streets to churches or statehouses, paying close attention to social hierarchy and protocol in the line of march. However, the organizers of the Washington funeral rituals had to modify some of the traditional monarchical mourning practices to make them more acceptable to their republican audiences. For example, symbolic biers representing the body of Washington were carried in some processions topped with the General’s hat, gloves, and sword—republican versions of the monarch’s crown and scepter that had been displayed on the coffins of dead English kings and queens. Riderless horses were led through the streets, a mourning symbol used in royal funerals as well as for fallen military leaders in England.

The research methodologies of cultural anthropologists and ethnographers are useful to historians seeking to understand the cultural role of secular ritual in society. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, editors of a book of essays on secular rituals, cite the important contributions of noted scholars like Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner in exploring the ways in which ritual not only propagates cultural ideas but also shapes them, thereby serving the dual purposes of mirroring existing social arrangements and modes of thought and also reorganizing them or even aiding in their creation.<sup>2</sup> Moore and Myerhoff write that secular rituals are essentially not spontaneous activities but are

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<sup>2</sup> Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, Assen, 1997), 3-5.

self-consciously acted like a part in a play. They assert that, by definition, collective rituals are organized events, both of persons and cultural elements, having order and precision as their dominant modes. By manipulating symbols and sensory stimulants, collective rituals use evocative presentational styles and staging to capture the attention of participants and observers and to elicit a commitment of some kind by conveying social messages.<sup>3</sup> Myerhoff argues that all rituals are “rhetorical and didactic dramas of persuasion” which employ elements like costumes, props, and settings to discourage critical, analytical thought and to blend fictions and reality in order to elicit desired behaviors from those who participate in and observe them.<sup>4</sup>

In his introduction to *Rites of Power*, a series of essays about political rituals and symbolism, historian Sean Wilentz describes secular rituals as “dramas of political expression—sometimes contrived, sometimes spontaneous—that reflect and help determine the boundaries of power.”<sup>5</sup> He observes that historians and cultural anthropologists who study political rituals and rhetoric are essentially attempting to “read” them as metaphorical acts and symbols in order “to fuse our understanding of power, cultural expression, and political consciousness.” The interpretation of these rituals, writes Wilentz, involves the identification of master fictions that order and govern the polity and operate as “the unchallenged first principles of a political order, making any given hierarchy appear natural and just to rulers and ruled.”<sup>6</sup> In one of the essays included in Wilentz’s book, Clifford Geertz describes the master fictions by which rulers justify their existence and exercise their power as “a collection of stories, ceremonies,

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara G. Myerhoff, “We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusion, Fictions, and Continuity in Secular Ritual,” in Moore and Myerhoff, 199-224.

insignia, formalities, and appurtenances that they have either inherited or, in more revolutionary situations, invented.” Geertz argues that the charisma of the dominant figures of any society derive from “the inherent sacredness of central authority,” and leaders rule “through their deep, intimate involvement with the master fictions by which their order lives.”<sup>7</sup>

The published descriptions of the Washington funeral rituals offer a rich source of information about the master fictions and cultural metaphors that may have been operating as the underlying principles of the power structure of the early American republic. The processions and memorial services, as well as the roles of the citizens-actors who participated in the funeral rites, were defined, in part, by these master fictions and metaphors. Scholars have generally agreed that public processions are essentially cultural metaphors that mirror the social structure, beliefs, and values of society. For example, Richard L. Bushman writes that English coronation processions were designed for the purpose of educating spectators and were carefully crafted to display the splendor of the social order so as to evoke the awe and respect of the onlookers.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the cultural historian Robert Darnton argues that civic processions in mid-eighteenth-century French cities were displays of urban society that embodied the existing social hierarchy by the manner in which participating members of the clergy, nobility, and commoners were ordered in them. He says that these civic processions served as a traditional idiom for urban society by conforming to the city’s superstructure and including representatives

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<sup>5</sup> Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 3-4.

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

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power,” in Wilentz, *Rites of Power*, 13-38.

of the three estates in their respective roles of church and civil authorities and commoners.<sup>9</sup> Mona Ozouf traces the significant changes in civic festivals that took place in France following the Revolution, arguing that leaders of the French Revolution took a great interest in using civic festivals as a means of displaying new social bonds that emphasized consensus and unity rather than traditional hierarchical distinctions within the community. Ozouf concludes that civic festivals and processions were used by post-Revolutionary leaders to educate the masses of French citizens through performances that combined elements of politics, psychology, aesthetics, morality, propaganda, and religion.<sup>10</sup>

The funeral processions and memorial services for Washington were dramatic performances incorporating many of the elements of theatrical productions. Public streets and specially decorated halls and houses of worship provided the “stages” or settings for the performances, and large casts of costumed actors performed their respective “roles” in the dramas. The intended story lines or “scripts” were conveyed to their audiences using various combinations of words, actions, and props to communicate religious, social, and political messages to the mourners. In his correspondence, George Washington often described himself as “a figure upon the stage,” an actor playing a role in the great events taking place in the American “theater.” In closing his address to Congress at Annapolis when he resigned his military commission at the end of the Revolutionary War, Washington had said, “Having now finished the work assigned me, I

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<sup>8</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 107-143.

<sup>10</sup> Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).

retire from the great theater of Action . . . and take my leave of all the employments of public life.”<sup>11</sup> In his study of the cultural interplay between the market and the theater, Jean-Christophe Agnew notes that the metaphor of the world as a stage, *theatrum mundi*, is one of the most durable metaphors left to us from antiquity.<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey H. Richards traced the historical use of the theatrical metaphor in American rhetoric from the colonial period to the early republic and argues that “the peculiar sociopolitical circumstances of late colonial life make theater the most dynamic metaphor for describing the American eighteenth century.”<sup>13</sup> Richards observes that the theatrical figures of speech and the play-like rituals of the Revolutionary War period mirrored the political upheaval of the era, “with God conceived as the Great Director, America as the Theater of Providence, and the war effort as the Stage of Action.”<sup>14</sup> George Washington’s centrality as the leading actor on the early American stage seems to lend a certain credence to the current study’s use of the theater model as the methodology for describing and analyzing his funeral rites as cultural performances.

Rhys Isaac used the theater as the structural model for his ethnographic history of Colonial Virginia, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790*.<sup>15</sup> In an appended “Discourse on the Method,” Isaac discusses the advantages to the social historian of using the methods and concepts of the ethnographer to reconstruct the distinctive mentalities of

<sup>11</sup> George Washington, “Address to Congress on Resigning His Commission,” Annapolis, Maryland, 23 December 1783, in John C. Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), 27: 284.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey H. Richards, *Theater Enough: American Culture and the Metaphor of the World Stage* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991), 291.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>15</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1982; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1988).

past peoples. By regarding society as a dynamic product of the activities of its members, the historian can use accounts of the actions of particular people in particular circumstances in much the same way that the field ethnographer uses his notebook. Viewing the actions of people of the past as statements, the essence of the work of the ethnographic historian, says Isaac, is to “translate” them by searching out the meanings that such actions contained and conveyed for the participants. Insights in the search for understanding others can be gained by looking at their interactions as though they were episodes displayed in a theater.<sup>16</sup> Isaac’s methodology is summarized briefly in the following excerpt from the introduction to his book, describing a mode of analysis that was adopted for use in the current study to interpret the Washington funeral rites as cultural performance.

The theater supplies a concept of dramaturgy, suggesting a way of looking at the important communications included in patterns of action. Social life, in its routines as well as in its convulsive processes of change, is viewed as a complex set of performances. Not only words but also settings, costumes, and gestures all carry their messages in the incessant exchanges of interaction. The authority system can be seen expressed in the assignment of roles. Crucial power struggles occur over the definitions of the situation—the “scenes” to be enacted, their meanings, and the forms of action appropriate to them.<sup>17</sup>

The discussion that follows is based on some of the underlying concepts that inform the work of Rhys Isaac and other anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural and ethnographic historians like those cited above who have attempted to understand the behavior of people of the past by looking at their actions as performances in which important messages were communicated to members of their societies. Because the theatrical concept of dramaturgy is central to this methodology, the Washington funeral rites will be examined in terms usually associated with the theater such as the “stage

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 323-25.

managers” who produced and directed the performances, the “scripts” they followed, the physical settings or “stages” for the performances, the “props” that were used, the “actors”, their “costumes,” and the “roles” they were playing.

In addition to viewing and participating in public funeral ceremonies that incorporated theatrical elements, many Americans who resided in large urban centers also attended special performances in commemoration of Washington that were offered to the public by commercial theaters. After respectfully suspending all their performances for a few days following the initial announcement of Washington’s death, the commercial theaters in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Charleston staged elaborate performances in commemoration of the virtues and patriotic services of General George Washington. The following advertisement describes the special performances at Boston’s Federal Street Theater that debuted on December 30, 1799 and played to a crowded hall for several succeeding evenings:

This evening, January 1, 1800, will be presented The Tragedy of the Roman Father, or Liberty Triumphant . . . After which will be delivered A MONODY ON THE DEATH OF GENERAL WASHINGTON. By Mrs. BARRETT in the Character of the GENIUS OF AMERICA, weeping over the tomb of our beloved HERO. With a solemn March of Officers, Drums, Fifes, Band of Music—Soldiers with Arms and colors reversed, forming a Grand PROCESSIONAL DIRGE—After the recital, Military Honors will take place over the Monument of the departed, but never to be forgotten SAVIOUR OF HIS COUNTRY. N. B. *The Theater will be hung with Black, and every tribute of respect due to the Melancholy occasion properly attended to.*<sup>18</sup>

Philadelphia’s New Theater suspended all entertainments for several days “in consequence of the melancholy event,” then reopened on December 23, 1799 with the performance of a “monody” on the death of Washington delivered by the actor and

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 January 1800.



theater impresario Thomas Wignell.<sup>19</sup> President and Mrs. John Adams attended the performance on December 30, accompanied by the secretaries of war and the navy. They heard Mr. Wignell's solo recitation of a mournful ode on the death of Washington and a vocal and instrumental performance of the principal airs that had been sung at the congressional funeral ceremonies in Philadelphia on December 26.<sup>20</sup> President Adams's decision to attend this theatrical performance was criticized in a Philadelphia newspaper. Noting that the monody in memory of Washington was immediately followed by the performance of a comedy on the same playbill, the paper declared, "we cannot but think public decency grossly outraged in this prompt attendance on the lighter productions of the stage, so soon after the funeral solemnities on Thursday."<sup>21</sup>

A rising literary figure of the Early Republic, Charles Brockden Brown, wrote an "elegant monody" on the death of General George Washington that was performed at the New York Theater beginning on Monday evening, December 30, 1799.<sup>22</sup> Playing to an "overflowing house," the performance began when the band played *Washington's March* as the curtain rose revealing the all-black scenery with the words *MOURN, WASHINGTON IS DEAD* painted in large letters on a black background. A New York City actor, Mr. Cooper, recited Brown's monody, but the actor reportedly embarrassed himself and his audience by forgetting his lines, his "school boy rehearsal" earning him a scathing review by a critic in one of the New York newspapers.<sup>23</sup>

Charleston, South Carolina's City Theater offered sold-out performances on January 17 and January 22, 1800 in commemoration of the death of Washington. The

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<sup>19</sup> *Philadelphia Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, 23 December 1799.

<sup>20</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 30 December 1799 and 31 December 1799.

<sup>21</sup> Reprinted in *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1800.

published account of this popular theatrical event in Charleston describes the elaborate staging and classical patriotic symbolism that were involved in the production.

The stage, the boxes, and the pillars supporting them were hung in mourning. The curtain, slowly rising to solemn music, discovered a monument, on which was placed the bust of Washington, and at its base, the Genius of Columbia, overwhelmed in grief, deploring the death of her dearest son. The Goddesses of Liberty, Justice and Humanity, approach, and sympathize with Columbia, on her irreparable loss; but at length are consoled by Minerva, who assures them that though Washington is dead, his name shall be immortal. The Goddess of Immortality, descending in a cloud, approaches the monument, and removing the bust, bears it away to her Temple. A band of choristers now entered and performed a piece of plaintive music; and Mr. Williamson's excellent occasional address closed the solemnities. It must be admitted that this mournful exhibition was conducted with a degree of propriety that reflects the highest credit on the managers and performers, and gave the utmost satisfaction to a very large and respectable audience.<sup>24</sup>

The participation of commercial theaters in the national mourning for Washington was believed to be improper by some contemporary critics who did not think that the death of the Father of His Country was an appropriate subject for adaptation to public entertainments. For example, a "very respectable correspondent" expressed his regrets in the *Massachusetts Mercury* upon learning that Mr. Barrett, the impresario at Boston's Federal Street Theater, intended "to notice the death of our illustrious Chief by some scenic representations." The indignant correspondent wrote to the editors:

The deep interest which the Public feels in this event is not of a nature to accord with theatrical representations respecting it. It is the language of every one, we have lost a Father; and who on sustaining such a loss, could be pleased with seeing it the subject of theatrical representation. Mr. B. would do well to bestow a second thought upon the subject; he will be convinced perhaps, that the above suggestions are not a whimsical refinement; and he will perceive their propriety in proportion as he duly estimates the nature of the emotions which are felt by the American public, at the death of WASHINGTON.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For the full text of Charles Brockden Brown's "Monody," see *New York Spectator*, 4 January 1800 or the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 2 January 1800.

<sup>23</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 1 January 1800.

A similar opinion was expressed by a Philadelphian, using the pen name “Civis,” who wrote to the editor of the *Philadelphia Gazette* charging that an advertised theatrical performance in that city on February 22, 1800 was inconsistent with President Adams’s proclamation of the national day of mourning in which he recommended that Americans publicly testify their grief by suitable eulogies, orations, discourses, and prayers. “We call Washington our FATHER,” wrote Civis, “Is there a family amongst us that would wish to see the decease of a parent made the subject of a theatrical representation, or to be present at such a representation, with the wounds which it has pleased the Almighty to inflict, still bleeding afresh?”<sup>26</sup>

Controversy had swirled around the professional theater in America since colonial times. The cultural historian Kenneth Silverman traces the development of the American theater during the period between the end of the French and Indian War and the establishment of the federal government in 1789. He describes the contempt that was held for the theater in colonial America and its suppression in Boston and Philadelphia on grounds of moral depravity. Quakers and Presbyterians in Philadelphia and Boston’s Congregationalists steadfastly resisted efforts of theatrical troupes to open commercial theaters in the two cities. In the mid-1750s, theaters were banned by action of the state legislatures in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, and the anti-theater legislation was not repealed in Pennsylvania until 1789. About the same time, theaters began to open again in New England.<sup>27</sup> In 1774, the Continental Congress had passed as part of their Continental Association agreement a supporting resolution that all the states will

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<sup>24</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 21 January 1800.

<sup>25</sup> *Boston Massachusetts Mercury*, 27 December 1799.

<sup>26</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 21 February 1800.

“encourage frugality, economy, and industry [and will] discountenance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibition of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments.”<sup>28</sup> The controversy surrounding the theater continued after the conclusion of the American Revolution. Wherever theater companies wanted to perform, they had to petition local legislatures for permission, and each petition usually triggered a newspaper war lasting several months. The controversies involved charges that theaters promoted vice and loose morals, Europeanization, false gentility, and social and political ideologies contrary to the best interests of citizens of a virtuous republic. Old arguments were raised, charging that the theater “threatens morals, diverts apprentices, subverts religion, and spawns brothels.”<sup>29</sup> Silverman concludes that “the breaking of the Philadelphia laws in March 1789 and the intrusion of theater into New England were preconditions for giving the stage a fairly stable and respectable place in American cultural life.”<sup>30</sup>

Theater historian, Heather Shawn Nathans, has recently studied the post-Revolutionary theater of Boston and Philadelphia, and she argues that the vehement opposition to theatrical entertainments that surfaced in those cities throughout the early national period went well beyond traditional religious objections to the immorality of the stage. She believes that “at the heart of the debates lay complex questions about the formation of American nationalism, and about who should most properly guide the

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<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution: Painting, Music, Literature, and the Theatre in the Colonies and the United States from the Treaty of Paris to the Inauguration of George Washington, 1763-1789* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 59-67, 592-597.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 536-546.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

fledgling nation in its cultural, political, and economic progress.”<sup>31</sup> Nathans interprets the emergence of the early national theater as a cultural product of conflicting ideas about American nationalism, “theatrical wars” waged by men of wealth who sought political and economic control and cultural dominance in the early republic. The theaters became contested space during the presidential administrations of George Washington and John Adams as Federalists and Republicans sought control over the social and political messages that were delivered to audiences from the stage. She writes that by 1798, in both Boston and Philadelphia, “the elites were fighting to maintain their hegemony in a society which had profited by their example and was rapidly evolving cultural systems that surpassed their own. The years from 1798 to 1800 witnessed the Boston and Philadelphia elite’s last efforts to secure their cultural and social legacy, and saw the constant influx of new and diverse elements into the theaters’ ‘democracy of glee.’”<sup>32</sup> Nathans observes that the Boston and Philadelphia theaters’ productions on the occasion of Washington’s death offered a brief respite in the ongoing struggle between Federalists and Republicans for cultural and political dominance. Although it was a fleeting unity, “through their displays and performances, the theaters offered audiences the chance to reunite and re-affirm their loyalty to what Washington had represented: the strength and ideals of the Revolution.”<sup>33</sup>

The dramatic performances on the stages of commercial theaters in commemoration of Washington’s death incorporated all the elements of traditional theatrical productions including stage managers, scripts, actors, stage sets, costumes, and

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<sup>31</sup> Heather Shawn Nathans, “‘A Democracy of Glee:’ The Post-Revolutionary Theater of Boston and Philadelphia” (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 1999), 1-3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-89.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-210.

props. These professional theatrical performances offer instructive examples of how the commercial theater mourned the death of Washington, and they also provide a basis for comparing similar theatrical elements that shaped the funeral ceremonies performed in the streets, public buildings, and churches of America in memory of Washington during the national mourning period.

### The Stage Managers

The men who fulfilled the roles of “stage managers,” the producers and directors of the Washington funeral processions and memorial services, were generally Federalists—members of the gentry or the “upper sort” of the social hierarchy, the professional and civil leadership elites in their communities, churches, Masonic lodges, and military units. These prominent men were generally either appointed or elected to serve on “committees of arrangement,” ad hoc groups that were charged with the responsibility for planning and “superintending” the funeral rites in their towns, fraternal lodges, or military posts. Typically, the committees included representatives from the town’s board of selectmen or city council, military officers, members of the clergy, physicians and attorneys, and officers of the Society of the Cincinnati and local Masonic lodges. The typical functions of the committees of arrangement included: contacting civic, military, religious, fraternal, and military organizations to invite their participation in the funeral procession and memorial service; determining the order of the procession; meeting with a local clergyman or another prominent person of proven oratorical skills to request that he prepare and deliver an oration or funeral sermon at the memorial service; arranging for the hanging of black mourning cloth and other appropriate decorations in the church or other public building to be used for the memorial service, securing singers

and musicians to perform during the service, and publicizing the event with advance notices to the public, then following up by preparing a detailed account of the ceremonies for publication in local newspapers. The newspaper accounts were intended, in short, to confirm at once the leadership of the committees of arrangement and the good order of society. The members of the committee often approached the orator following the funeral ceremonies to request a copy of his manuscript for printing and distribution to the citizens of the town and other interested parties.

The operations of the committees of arrangement were legally sanctioned by the official actions of local governments and town meetings of the citizenry. The members of the committees of arrangements were either appointed by local government officials or elected by a vote of the inhabitants of the town using a democratic process that was very much in keeping with post-revolutionary American concepts of republican government. In many locations throughout the nation, “legal” town meetings were called to consider plans for honoring the memory of Washington, and the citizens in attendance voted on several proposals ranging from recommending that inhabitants’ wear mourning badges for a specified period of time to appointing a committee to plan and arrange the town’s funeral rites. The following account of such a town meeting held in Salem, Massachusetts on December 30, 1799 was reprinted in many newspapers throughout the nation:

Yesterday, this Town in a very full meeting, passed sundry votes in order to testify their high sense of the virtues of the late General WASHINGTON, and for the deep sorrow they feel for the calamity which has befallen the country by his death. Among these—That an Orator be appointed to pronounce a public Eulogy on the deceased—That a handsome and durable Monument be erected to his memory—That the inhabitants be requested to wear a mourning badge for sixty days from the first of January—That copies of the funeral Sermons delivered in this town on the last Sabbath, on this distressing subject, be requested for

the press, to form, together with the farewell address of this Great Man, a volume to be delivered to each family. A large and respectable Committee was chosen to carry into effect the votes of the town.<sup>34</sup>

Town meetings to plan appropriate mourning activities in commemoration of Washington, like this one in Salem, Massachusetts, were not exclusive to the New England states where the tradition of government by town meeting extended back to early colonial times. Local mourning events were similarly sanctioned and planned at town meetings held throughout the country in widely scattered locations such as Sussex County, Delaware; Augusta, Georgia; Frankfort, Kentucky; Alexandria, Virginia; Georgetown, District of Columbia; Newark, New Jersey; Warrenton, North Carolina; and Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>35</sup> Newspaper reports of “legal” town meetings such as these often emphasized the unanimity of the votes of the citizens in support of measures to commemorate Washington, thus adding to their perceived legitimacy.

The legal sanctioning of national mourning activities in response to Washington’s death was also communicated by the published reports of the official commemorative actions of the federal government. For example, the congressional resolution that recommended to citizens to wear badges of mourning for thirty days and the subsequent resolution to establish February 22, 1800 as a day of national mourning were both published in the format that had been previously used for public announcements of newly approved federal laws. These resolutions had the authority of law because they were formally moved and approved by the House of Representatives and Senate in legislative sessions, they had been signed into law by President John Adams, and they were

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<sup>34</sup> *Hartford Connecticut Courant*, 6 January 1800.

<sup>35</sup> *Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 25 January 1800; *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 11 January 1800; *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 30 January 1800; *Centinel of Liberty or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 28 January 1800; *Newark (New*



promulgated as “Laws of the United States, by Authority.”<sup>36</sup> Like the official actions of local governments and town meetings, the federal mourning legislation was reported with an emphasis on its authority and legality and the unanimity of its approval in Congress.

The local committees of arrangement, acting under legal authority, performed an important cultural and political role, elements of which can be traced to the heraldic funerary practices of medieval England. By drawing on English precedents for mourning the death of monarchs, the committees of arrangement designed republican versions of monarchical funeral rites to mark the death of Washington. Many of the committees’ functions in arranging the Washington funerals are comparable to those of the College of Arms in arranging and directing the funerals of English royalty and members of the aristocracy. Charged by English monarchs with the responsibility for overseeing the burials of the aristocracy, the heralds of the College of Arms were the enforcers of a clearly stratified code of funeral pomp based on status. The reasons for the involvement of the monarch’s heralds in royal and aristocratic funerals were both social and political. The death of a monarch or a powerful subject was perceived to weaken the social hierarchy and therefore had to be compensated for by a display of aristocratic strength that stressed the continuing power of the aristocracy and proved that it remained unaffected by the death of one of its members. Introduced in Elizabethan England, the heraldic funerals continued through the seventeenth and into the early eighteenth centuries, and some elements of the ceremonies carried over into later periods. Upon the death of monarchs, noblemen, knights, esquires, gentlemen and their wives, the heralds of the College of Arms arranged the public funerals in keeping with established

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*Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 24 December 1799; *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 11 March 1800; *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1800.

precedents based on the political and social requirements of the aristocracy. The ceremonies of the heraldic funerals represented a transfer of titles and power from the deceased monarch or member of the aristocracy to the legitimate heirs. For the stability of the social fabric, it was deemed important to use the funerals of persons of high rank in the social hierarchy to demonstrate the continuity and strength of the governing aristocracy.<sup>37</sup>

There are a number of significant parallels that can be drawn between the English heraldic funerals and the funeral ceremonies held in America following the death of George Washington. Like a monarch or a member of the English aristocracy, Washington was at the apex of the American social and political hierarchy. Although this quasi-monarchical status of the president was to be contested and changed dramatically by the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, as the beloved Father of His Country, the commander in chief of the armies, and former president of the United States, George Washington epitomized the established order and stability of the social and political fabric of the United States. Washington's removal from society by death constituted a potential threat to the ongoing viability of the young American nation, creating a need to commemorate his status and role and to convey messages of social and political continuity and stability in the wake of his death. In medieval England, the heralds of the College of Arms were the arrangers of funeral ceremonies designed to convey important political and cultural messages to the people at the time of the death of members of the aristocracy. The members of the committees of arrangement who were

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<sup>36</sup> See for example, *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 10 January 1800.

<sup>37</sup> Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1984), 166-188; Clare Gittings, "Sacred and Secular: 1558-1660," in Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings, eds.,

charged with planning and carrying out the public funeral rites for George Washington were assigned the important task of designing appropriate commemorative ceremonies that honored his character and services to his country while also conveying messages of reassurance to grieving Americans of the continuity and stability of the established social and political order. Still an experiment in democratic self-government, the future of the new federal republic was still uncertain, and its ongoing viability was not secured.

### The Scripts

The committees of arrangement had a number of cultural precedents and contemporary sources to draw upon in shaping the scenarios or scripts for the public funeral rites in commemoration of General George Washington. As discussed above, the underlying cultural underpinnings of these scripts were the precedents established by English funerary practices upon the death of monarchs, military commanders, and prominent politicians. Because Americans throughout the colonial period had adapted English funerary practices for monarchs and aristocrats to the burial ceremonies they held upon the death of colonial governors and other public officials, it is reasonable to assume to some extent that the early republic's funeral rites for Washington were patterned after the English model.<sup>38</sup> It appears that the Washington funerals included elements which were monarchical in their origins but modified to reflect the more republican culture of post-Revolutionary America. Historian Richard L. Bushman's study of the monarchical culture of provincial Massachusetts in the century leading up to the American Revolution disclosed ample evidence of "an incessant round of ceremonies exalting the king" and a

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*Death in England: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 147-173.

<sup>38</sup> See for example the description of the funeral of Norborne, Baron de Botetourt, governor of colonial Virginia, held in Williamsburg, VA in October 1770, in Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 326-28.

“ceaseless flow of monarchical rhetoric.”<sup>39</sup> Bostonians celebrated coronations, royal birthdays, and anniversaries of coronations “until the eve of the tea party in 1773.” The death of King George II in 1760 was observed in Boston by the tolling of bells all day, the firing of seventy-seven minute guns—one for each year of the late king’s life, and by the General Court’s listening to sermons during the morning and afternoon of the day of mourning.<sup>40</sup> Nearly forty years later, Americans would mourn the death of Washington much like they had observed the death of the king by tolling bells, firing minute guns, and listening to sermons and eulogies.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the deaths of English monarchs were marked by great heraldic public funerals with enormous processions involving thousands of mourners, elaborate displays of royal power, and magnificently decorated chariots bearing the coffin with a life-like effigy of the deceased king or queen. Though the spectacle of the great public funeral for English monarchs had been greatly scaled down by the Georgian era, some vestiges of the pomp and pageantry of the royal heraldic funerals continued. Full heraldic funeral honors were also performed in England following the deaths of prominent military and political heroes such as the Duke of Marlborough (1722), William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham (1779), and Lord Nelson (1806).<sup>41</sup>

English royal funeral practices had changed significantly during the eighteenth century as the elaborate public ceremonials were gradually modified and privatized.

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<sup>39</sup> Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> Paul S. Fritz, “From ‘Public’ to ‘Private’: the Royal Funerals in England, 1500-1830,” in Joachim Whaley, ed., *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981), 61-62.

King George I had died en route to Hanover, Germany in June 1727, and his funeral and burial took place in Hanover. The funeral for King George II following his death in October 1760 was the last funeral for a sovereign to be conducted in Westminster Abbey. In a significant departure from previous procedures, the Lord Chamberlain, acting under the authority of the Privy Council, arranged the funeral ceremonies. This assertion of parliamentary authority denied the Earl Marshall of the College of Arms his traditional heraldic role in directing the royal funeral. In the early nineteenth century, the power of the officers of arms to control royal funerals was to be even further eroded in the course of planning the ceremonies following the deaths of George III and George IV. The lying in state and the funeral services were “privatized” by moving them from Westminster Abbey to Windsor Castle, and the degree of ceremony was greatly reduced. However, some elements of the pomp and pageantry of the heraldic funerals were continued in the burials of the Hanoverian kings, including symbolic displays of the Royal Crown of Hanover and the Imperial Crown of the United Kingdom.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to drawing on English cultural precedents for the burial of monarchs and important military and political figures, the committees of arrangement for the Washington funerals could also borrow from American colonial practices in burying men of prominence. In keeping with the religious teachings of the post-Reformation English church, the Puritans of New England had secularized their funeral ceremonies, believing that prayers and religious rituals like those performed over the dead by Roman Catholic priests would have no effect on the mitigation of the ultimate fate of the soul of the deceased. Consistent with this secularization of Puritan funerary practices, the deaths of men of prominence were observed with elaborate public displays of mourning. For

example, in 1649, upon the death of Governor John Winthrop, the Boston Artillery fired guns in his honor, and the colony paid its “civil respects” to their deceased leader.<sup>43</sup>

Gordon E. Geddes, in his study of death in Puritan New England, found that from the very beginning in New England, “the civil respect due to public officials, whether magistrate or scholar, minister or soldier, was accorded at their burials, adding to the display and pageantry of the funeral.”<sup>44</sup> The corpse of a military or civil leader was accompanied to the grave by troops in arms and musicians playing trumpets and drums, and three volleys were fired in honor of the deceased. When Governor Fitz John Winthrop died, his armor was carried and a riderless horse was led in a procession attended by a “vast concourse of people.”<sup>45</sup>

There were also several contemporary sources of scenarios or scripts that could be followed by the members of the committees of arrangement in planning their local observances. One of the most popular scripts flowed from the details of Washington’s funeral and burial at Mount Vernon as reported in a widely reprinted account in the Georgetown, Maryland *Centinel of Liberty* on December 20, 1799. This account described the order of procession from the mansion to the family tomb, including troops from several local military units, the music, the clergy, the General’s horse with his saddle, holsters, and pistols, the bier covered with a pall carried by six Revolutionary War officers, the mourning family and friends, the Masonic brethren, and citizens of neighboring areas.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>43</sup> David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 98-110.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon E. Geddes, *Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Press, 1981), 135-36.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *The Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 20 December 1799.

Many of the elements of the Mount Vernon funeral were incorporated into Major General Alexander Hamilton's orders detailing the funeral honors to be accorded the deceased commander in chief at all United States army posts. Hamilton's orders to the army were disseminated in American newspapers and were issued in response to directions from President John Adams and his Secretary of War James McHenry. As evidenced by numerous newspaper accounts of the Washington funerals, Major General Hamilton's orders provided one of the most popular scripts used by committees of arrangement in planning mock funerals as part of both military and civil funeral ceremonies in the first wave of mourning the death of Washington. Hamilton's orders for military honors, quoted below, are analyzed and interpreted in Chapter Six of this study.

At daybreak sixteen guns<sup>47</sup> will be fired in quick succession, and one gun at the distance of each half hour until sunset. During the procession of the troops to the place representing that of interment, and until the conclusion of the ceremonial, minute guns will be fired. The bier will be received by the troops formed in line, presenting their arms, and the officers, drums, and colors saluting; after this the procession will begin; the troops marching by platoons in inverted order, and with arms reversed to the place of interment; the drums muffled and the music playing a dead march.

The bier carried by four sergeants, and attended by six pall bearers, where there is cavalry, will be preceded by the cavalry, and will be followed by troops on foot. Where there is no cavalry, a detachment of infantry will precede the bier, which itself will in every case be such of the clergy as may be present. The officers of the general staff will immediately succeed the bier.

Where a numerous body of citizens shall be united with the military in the procession, the whole of the troops will precede the bier, which will then be followed by the citizens.

When arrived at the place of interment, the procession will halt. The troops in front of the bier will form in line, and opening their ranks will face inwards to

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<sup>47</sup> The number sixteen appears frequently in the published descriptions of various elements of the Washington funeral rites. Because there were sixteen states in the union at this time, it was apparently intended to be a symbol that the citizens of all the states of the nation were united in mourning the death of Washington. By the end of 1799, the United States of America consisted of the original thirteen states and Kentucky, Vermont, and Tennessee.

admit the passage of the bier, which will then pass through the ranks, the troops leaning on their arms reversed while the bier passes. When the bier shall have passed, the troops will resume their positions in line, and reversing their arms will remain leaning upon them until the ceremonial shall be closed. The music will now perform a solemn air, after which the introductory part of this order will be read. At the end of this a detachment of infantry appointed for the purpose will advance and fire three volleys over the bier. The troops will then return; the music playing the President's March, the drums previously unmuffled.

The uniform companies of militia are invited to join in arms the volunteer corps.

The commanders at particular stations, conforming generally to this plan will make such exceptions as will accommodate it to situation. At places where processions of unarmed citizens shall take place, it is the wish of the Major General that the military ceremonial should be united. And the particular commanders at those places are authorized to vary the plan, so as to adapt it to the circumstances.

Brigadier General Macpherson is charged to superintend the ceremonial in the city of Philadelphia. Major Toussard will attend to Fort Mifflin and will cooperate with him.

The day of performing the ceremonial at each station is left to the particular commander. Major General Pinckney will make such further arrangements within his district as he shall deem expedient.

Philip Church, Aide de Camp<sup>48</sup>

Military funerals such as those specified by Hamilton to honor the memory of Lieutenant General Washington were theatrical secular rituals that used the sensory stimuli of sights and sounds to evoke emotional responses from their audience. The powerful elements of theater in martial funeral ceremonies were described in a journal entry written by a Revolutionary War surgeon, Dr. James Thacher, after attending the funeral of Brigadier General Enoch Poor in 1780.

A band of music, with a number of drums and fifes, played a funeral dirge,

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<sup>48</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, 3 January 1800; Philip Church, a nephew of Hamilton's wife, was commissioned a captain in the Twelfth Regiment of Infantry on January 8, 1799 and on January 12, 1799 became an aide-de-camp to Major General Hamilton. See *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 22: 35n.



the drums were muffled with black crape, and officers in the procession wore crape around the left arm . . . No scene can exceed in grandeur and solemnity a military funeral. The weapons of war reversed, and embellished with the badges of mourning, the slow and regular step of the procession, the mournful sound of the unbraced drum and the deep-toned instruments, playing the melancholy dirge.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to scripting their local funeral ceremonies by drawing from precedents derived from Anglo-American cultural practices, descriptions of Washington's burial at Mount Vernon, and Major General Alexander Hamilton's orders for military funeral honors, especially his provisions for mock funerals, the committees of arrangement also had access to newspaper accounts of the congressional funeral rites performed in Philadelphia and the elaborate processions in New York and Boston. Reports of the funeral ceremonies held in neighboring towns were also printed in the papers, and they were another script source for the committees. The reliance by the committees of arrangement on these common sources of script material for the Washington funerals served an important cultural role by helping to standardize the social and political messages that were conveyed to grieving Americans throughout the nation during the period of mourning the death of George Washington. Following these standardized scripts, the orders of procession were arranged according to the Federalist worldview to convey messages that commemorated Washington's virtues and public service and also displayed their hoped for ongoing stability of the social and political order despite his death. These messages were conveyed theatrically through carefully ordered appearances by representatives of religious, military, civic, and fraternal groups, and the citizens at large, the order representing the placement of men of rank at the top of society and the common folk in their rightful place. Like the heralds who arranged the funerals of

English monarchs, in their own Americanized way the leadership elites serving on the local committees of arrangement seemed to be saying to the inhabitants of their towns, “Washington is dead, long live the Republic.” Although the social and political fabric of the nation had been torn by the death of George Washington, the breach was not irreparable. Even though she could no longer rely on the wise leadership of the Father of His Country, the United States of America would endure and grow even stronger under the continued providence of God and the guidance of the nation’s civic, military, and religious leaders.

### The Stages

The funeral rites for Washington were performed in public venues on many different settings or “stages”, including the streets, houses of worship, courthouses, statehouses, and graveyards of towns and cities throughout America. As indicated earlier, the newspaper accounts of the rites provided another important public “stage” for the dramaturgy of the national mourning. Even the “private” funeral and burial of Washington in the family tomb at Mount Vernon had a distinctively “public” tone. Although Washington had stated in his last will and testament the wish that “my corpse may be interred in a private manner, without parade or funeral oration,” his Mount Vernon funeral was attended by a crowd of mourners, and his coffin was followed to the tomb by a lengthy procession of Alexandria-area military and Masonic groups in addition to his mourning friends and family members.<sup>50</sup> Throughout his lifetime Washington had

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<sup>49</sup> James Thacher, *Military Journal of the American Revolution*, as quoted in Raoul F. Camus, *Military Music of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 148.

<sup>50</sup> Dorothy Twohig, ed., *The Papers of George Washington, Retirement Series* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 4: 491.

been a highly visible figure on the public stage, therefore it seems most appropriate that his funeral ceremonies would also be performed in highly visible public venues.

Funeral processions that wound through the streets from the home of the deceased to the church or graveyard were long established Anglo-American cultural traditions. In post-Restoration England, it was a common practice to carry the corpse in a procession from the home into the local church for funeral rites. As prescribed by the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, the mourners followed the body in the procession “in token that they shall all go after, at the time appointed of God.” A priest met the procession at the church gate, and his role was to read prescribed prayers and scriptures and to preach a funeral sermon containing a eulogy upon the deceased. Burial followed either in the churchyard or in the church itself.<sup>51</sup>

Heraldic funerals for members of English royalty and the aristocracy required the observance of strict protocol in the order of procession through the principal streets, with position determined by status to insure that established regulations and precedents were followed.<sup>52</sup> The long, elaborate heraldic funeral processions for deceased English monarchs attracted huge crowds of onlookers, and for the majority of spectators, the procession was the only part of the funeral they were able to observe. Consequently, the heralds who organized and directed the royal funeral processions through the streets planned stunning displays, the effect of which would have underlined the power of the monarchy in the minds of all who watched. No details were overlooked as illustrated by preparations for the funeral procession of King Henry VIII in which all roads between

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<sup>51</sup> Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England*, 136-39.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-74.

Westminster, where he died, to Windsor, the place of interment, were cleaned and mended, and hedges and trees were pruned to allow the procession to pass.<sup>53</sup>

The Puritans of New England incorporated the traditional English funeral processions into their secularized burial rites. Mourners wore their gloves, scarves, mourning ribbons, mourning cloaks, or other symbols of grief in the processions. A small group of family and close friends preceded the coffin, and the bulk of mourners followed behind.<sup>54</sup> The Puritan procession to the grave was entirely on foot, and however short or long and however composed, it would wind through the streets of the town toward the graveyard, not necessarily going the most direct way but passing through the main part of town.<sup>55</sup>

Influenced by English and colonial cultural precedents, the American Republic reshaped its own unique mourning rituals for Washington. Nearly all the mourning rites for Washington included dramatic funeral processions through the principal streets. In large cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, and in many medium-sized towns, the committees of arrangement used local newspapers and broadsides to announce the route of the procession in advance so that inhabitants could line the streets to watch the parade go by. The committees of arrangement in New York and Charleston issued directions that the streets through which their processions would pass were to be cleaned in advance, obstructions removed, and no carts, carriages, or persons on horseback were to appear in the streets unless they were connected with the processions.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-22.

<sup>54</sup> Stannard, 112.

<sup>55</sup> Geddes, 134-35.

<sup>56</sup> *New York Spectator*, 1 January 1800; *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 11 January 1800.

Huge crowds of townspeople turned out to watch the funeral processions. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the streets from the Assembly Room to the church were lined “six deep on both sides all the way.”<sup>57</sup> In Richmond, Virginia, an estimated five thousand spectators observed the Washington funeral procession on February 22, 1800, as it made its way from Capitol Square to the Episcopal Church on the hill.<sup>58</sup> Baltimore’s funeral procession on New Year’s Day, 1800, included five thousand participants, and “it is probable there appeared in Baltimore Street, at one time, not less than twenty thousand souls.”<sup>59</sup>

After the procession had wound its way through the principal streets of the town, the mourners filed into a church, courthouse, or statehouse for the carefully planned funeral services that included appropriate prayers, sacred music, and lengthy eulogies and orations delivered in memory of Washington’s character and services to his country. Most of the funeral services were performed in churches that were specially decorated in keeping with the mournful event. According to longstanding Anglo-American funerary practices, black cloth was draped over the church’s altar, sacred desk, pulpit, and gallery railings.<sup>60</sup> Some churches went beyond the traditional draping of the altar and pulpit in black and were decorated with even more elaborate insignias of mourning, an example of which is contained in the following account of the interior of Boston’s First Universal Church. It is important to note the striking absence of Christian mystical symbolism in this description of the church’s funeral decorations.

The whole inside of the House was literally clad in mourning weeds. The pulpit bore a striking resemblance of a sable “pavilion,” and the weeded

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<sup>57</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800.

<sup>58</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, 25 February 1800.

<sup>59</sup> *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 2 January 1800.

<sup>60</sup> Gittings, *Death Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England*, 135; Geddes, 146.

trumpet of the Angelic figure over the sounding board, indicated the mournful tidings the audience were to hear. The entire gallery and organ loft were hung in black; and the dial bore the ensign of mortality. In front of the organ, an *Obelisk* extended to the ceiling—The right corner of the pedestal bore an *enlightened column* (which at a proper time was extinguished,) and the left an hourglass, the “sands run out.” From the apex of the Obelisk, the *Omniscient Eye* appeared penetrating the clouds; and the shaft bore the inscription: Sacred to the unrivalled PATRIOT, SAGE, AND HERO, Brother GEORGE WASHINGTON—Whom Heaven hath ordained the FOUNDATION of his Country’s HAPPINESS, and the TOP-STONE of its GLORY. His immortal Spirit entered the Temple of Light Dec. 14, 1799. Aetatis 68. “Angels Rejoice—but Man must weep.”<sup>61</sup>

The *Columbian Centinel* reported that a stranger who had attended divine services the previous Sunday at Boston’s First Episcopal Church “upon entering was struck with reverential awe and affected even to tears at the testimonials of affliction there exhibited. The pulpit, chancel, organ, gallery, and state pew were hung in black.”<sup>62</sup> The Episcopal churches of Philadelphia, as a symbol of mourning for Washington’s death and in recognition of his lifelong membership in the Anglican/Episcopal church, hung their sanctuaries in black for several months. Christ Church in Philadelphia, where President Washington had attended worship services during his administration, shrouded his pew and their pulpits and organ in black.<sup>63</sup>

“What mean these emblems of mourning with which I am surrounded? What event has shrouded the sacred desk in sable?” asked the Reverend Joseph Buckminster as he began a funeral sermon on George Washington at First Church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. His answer to his own rhetorical question provides a contemporary interpretation of the cultural meanings of the churches being draped in black for the funeral services for Washington. “These emblems of grief,” he remarked, “are tokens of

<sup>61</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 11 January 1800.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 January 1800.

<sup>63</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 20 December 1799.

respect to departed worth, expressing the sorrow of our hearts, and evincing a desire to conform to the aspects of Providence, and to meet the voice of God summoning to deep humiliation.”<sup>64</sup> The Reverend Mr. Buckminster’s interpretation of the complex meaning of the sable shrouding of churches combines elements of personal sensibilities at the loss of Washington, a patriotic respect for Washington’s worthy services to his country, and the religious obligation to accept his death with humble obedience to the will of God and with gratitude to Providence for making Washington his instrument in leading his country to freedom and independence.

In addition to the streets, churches and other public buildings, another stage on which the Washington funeral rites were performed was in local graveyards and church burial vaults. Major General Alexander Hamilton’s orders to the army for funeral honors to be paid to Washington had specified that a “bier” be carried in the procession and later deposited in the “place of interment” with three volleys fired over it. The newspaper reports of funeral rites for Washington contained many references to such biers and places of interment. Following the congressional funeral ceremonies in Philadelphia, “the bier was borne to its destined spot amidst solemn martial music and the repeated volleys of musketry.”<sup>65</sup> At the conclusion of the funeral rites at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in New York, the urn was conveyed to the cemetery and three volleys fired over it.<sup>66</sup> The funeral ceremonies in New London, Connecticut concluded with the deposit of the urn in the town’s “old burying ground.”<sup>67</sup> As the bier passed by in the funeral procession held in Roxbury, Massachusetts, the spectators placed their right hands over

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<sup>64</sup> Joseph Buckminster, *A Sermon Delivered in the First Church in Portsmouth, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1800. The House Being Dressed in Mourning in Token of Respect to the Memory of General Washington* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Joseph Melcher, 1800), 19-20.

<sup>65</sup> *Centinel of Liberty or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 31 December 1799.

their eyes until it passed, and after the service the bier was “deposited.”<sup>68</sup> The bier used in the Providence, Rhode Island funeral was deposited under the Episcopal Church at the conclusion of the services.<sup>69</sup> In Fayetteville and Windsor, North Carolina, the bier was carried to the “place of interment” following the funeral services held in the two towns.<sup>70</sup> At the conclusion of the military funeral honors performed at Oxford, Massachusetts, the urn was “deposited in the earth.”<sup>71</sup>

One of the most informative contemporary interpretations of the cultural meaning and significance of the burials that concluded many of the Washington funeral rites was spoken at a military graveside ceremony by Dr. Welsh, surgeon of the garrison and the eulogist at Fort Independence, on Castle Island in Boston harbor. The following account of the ceremony and Dr. Welsh’s remarks appeared in the *Columbian Centinel*.

The whole proceeded to the place of interment; when the troops opened ranks, faced inwards and bearing their arms reversed, the bier passed through. The Reverend Chaplain Emerson then made an energetic, impressive and appropriate prayer, and Dr. Welsh, surgeon of the garrison, pronounced the following eulogy:

*Fellow Soldiers*, We have now, in solemn procession, followed to the tomb the remains of our illustrious chief—the pride of his country—the immortal Washington. It is true this is not his real tomb—that is on Mount Vernon. But he has a tomb on every hill and in every valley of his bewailing country. The heart of every American is his sepulcher; there shall his memory be preserved, and be transmitted down a rich inheritance to late posterity. . . While from the mouth of our carion the melancholy tidings are announced, let the earth resound the praises of Washington.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *New York Spectator*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>67</sup> *New London Connecticut Gazette and Commercial Intelligencer*, 15 January 1800.

<sup>68</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 18 January 1800.

<sup>69</sup> *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>70</sup> *Halifax North Carolina Journal*, 3 March 1800; *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 11 March 1800.

<sup>71</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 25 January 1800.

<sup>72</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 4 January 1800.



In the opinion of Army Surgeon Dr. Welsh, it seemed appropriate that General Washington should be “buried” not only at Mount Vernon but in graveyards throughout the nation, because his tomb was really located in all the hills and valleys of America and in the hearts of all Americans who had been the beneficiaries of his leadership in war and peace. “While from the fountain of our grief we pour forth the copious streams of sorrow into the rivers of tears which flow from the eyes of millions of Americans, we glory in our tears, and exclaim, where is the nation, where is the warrior, who could refrain from weeping at the loss of such a commander?” he asked his listeners.<sup>73</sup> By consecrating public spaces as a symbolic resting place for the body of George Washington, the stage managers of the funeral rites were attaching their communities to the United States; they linked their localities to the nation by providing a locally visible grave for the man who had come to embody the United States almost from its inception.

Another important dimension of the theatrical staging of the Washington funerals was the “soundscape,” the sounds of tolling church bells, the mournful beats of the fife and drum corps, the dirges played by military bands, the firing of the minute guns, and the loud roar of cannons being fired during the processions. All of these sounds conveyed elements of the social and political messages that were intended for their audiences by the men in charge of arranging the Washington funeral rites. The following excerpt from a newspaper account of the funeral honors performed by the Union Brigade, three regiments of the United States Army in winter headquarters at Scotch Plains, New Jersey, illustrates the functional role of sound in the military funeral rites for Washington.

The solemnities of the day were introduced at the Reveille Drum, by the

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

discharge of 16 rounds from the Brigade Artillery, which continued the fire of single guns every half hour until the sun had gained the zenith. . . By signal of unmuffled drum, the line shouldered, reversed their arms . . . and in inverted order commenced an affecting procession.—With countenances indicative of the very deep impression which the loss of their General and the remembrance of his virtues had made on their minds, no noise was heard except the minute guns of the artillery, and the solemn tread of the slowly moving battalion, keeping perfect time with the measures of a solemn dirge, performed on muffled drums, with the accompaniment of “ear piercing fifes” by the musicians of the Brigade, marching in the center of the open column. . . The mournful silence was interrupted by the signal drum calling on the battalions to shoulder [arms], which being done, the whole line fired three volleys by signal tap of drum.<sup>74</sup>

Two organizations provided music for seventeenth and eighteenth-century British and American military units, the fife and drum corps used in the field to establish the cadence for marching and to convey signals and orders to the troops, and the “bands of music” used in parades and ceremonies. A separate unit from the fife and drum corps, the bands of music were usually comprised of four to eight musicians who played woodwinds such as oboes, flutes, bassoons, and clarinets and brass instruments such as horns and trumpets. Cavalry units relied on trumpeters to convey signals much the same way as foot troops used their fifers and drummers.<sup>75</sup> Some form of musical ensemble usually marched in military funeral processions, preceding the bier that bore the coffin of the deceased soldier or officer. The drums were emblazoned with the coat of arms of the regiment, and they were usually shrouded for funerals by wrapping the sides of the drums with black crape as an indication, along with furled regimental flags, that the unit was in mourning for their deceased comrade. To achieve a solemn and mournful effect, the drums were muffled by placing a handkerchief or piece of cloth between the snares and

<sup>74</sup> *Walpole (New Hampshire) Farmer's Museum, or Lay Preacher's Gazette*, 27 January 1800.

<sup>75</sup> Raoul F. Camus, *Military Music of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 3-42.

snare head.<sup>76</sup> Camus indicates that the drum beat that was used in military funeral processions has not been identified, and there was apparently little standardization during the Revolutionary War. However, he believes there must have been a definite pattern because of contemporary references to “the dead march” and “the beat of muffled drums,” noting the use of the definite article in both instances. The actual melody performed is nearly as elusive as the drum beat, according to Camus, but he cites several period references to the use of the “Dead March” from Handel’s oratorio, *Saul*. Several post-Revolutionary writers mentioned that this composition was being used for American funeral processions, so it may well also have been used for military funeral processions during the Revolution. The melody often associated with Revolutionary funerals was *Roslin Castle*, a tune supposedly played by Scottish bagpipers in New York during the Revolution in honor of the castle at Roslyn, Scotland. After the Revolution, it seems to have become generally regarded as the funeral march and was still being used during the War of 1812.<sup>77</sup>

Military bands or fife and drum corps marched in virtually all of the Washington funeral processions. At Washington’s burial ceremonies at Mount Vernon on December 18, 1799, a military “band of music” played “solemn tunes” as the procession moved forward to the tomb, “melting the soul with all the tenderness of woe.”<sup>78</sup> Even in the funeral rites held in small villages and towns, members of the militia marched to the accompaniment of their company’s fifers and drummers. The presence of the military musicians was usually noted in newspaper accounts with the observation that “the music

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>78</sup> *Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 20 December 1799; *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 20 December 1799.

was playing a dead march, drums in mourning and muffled.”<sup>79</sup> In Walpole, New Hampshire, the drums in the funeral procession were “muffled with black silk, and other instruments decorated with sable ornaments.”<sup>80</sup> The procession in Enfield, New Hampshire included “drums muffled, other instruments of music dressed in mourning, playing a solemn march.”<sup>81</sup> Although the name of the dirge was usually not identified beyond the generic “dead march,” several military bands of music were reported to have played the “Dead March” from Handel’s oratorio, *Saul*.<sup>82</sup> The funeral procession held at Lunenburg, Massachusetts on February 22, 1800 moved to the meetinghouse to the tune of *Roslin Castle*, and a group of young men in Somerset, Pennsylvania, went around to most houses in town on the night of December 24, 1799, accompanied by musicians and singing eight lines to the memory of Washington set to the tune *Roslin Castle*.<sup>83</sup>

The bands and fife and drum corps continued playing as the processions left the site of the funeral ceremonies. Major General Hamilton’s orders specified that, at the end of the funeral rites, “the troops will then return, the music playing the *President’s March*, the drums previously unmuffled.”<sup>84</sup> Newspaper reports indicate that Hamilton’s orders for closing the ceremonies were followed precisely by military units participating in funeral ceremonies for Washington held in New London, Connecticut; Augusta, Georgia; Oxford, Massachusetts; Scotch Plains, New Jersey; and in the congressional funeral held

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<sup>79</sup> See for example the accounts of the funeral rites at Fort Sumner, Portland, District of Maine in *Jenks’ Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 13 January 1800; at Watertown, Massachusetts in the *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800; and at Newark, New Jersey in the *Newark Centinel of Freedom*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>80</sup> *Walpole (New Hampshire) Farmer’s Museum or Lay Preacher’s Gazette*, 30 December 1799.

<sup>81</sup> *Concord Courier of New Hampshire*, 1 February 1800.

<sup>82</sup> The “Dead March” from *Saul* was played in the processions in Philadelphia; New London, Connecticut; and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. References cited earlier.

<sup>83</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 19 March 1800; *Philadelphia Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>84</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette and Genera lAdvertiser*, 3 January 1800.

in Philadelphia.<sup>85</sup> According to military traditions of the time, the troops returning from funeral ceremonies marched in quickstep to the cadence of unmuffled drums that had been stripped of their mourning crape to reveal the regimental arms painted on them. These traditions were intended to convey a message that, although a soldier or officer had died, the regiment still lived and its troops would go on to fight other battles with bravery and fortitude.<sup>86</sup> Spectators at the Washington funerals would have received similar messages by hearing the unmuffled drums and seeing the soldiers marching in quickstep at the conclusion of the ceremonies, a symbol that their nation would go on despite the loss of the Father of His Country.

The important roles played by sound in shaping colonial American societies are explored by Richard Cullen Rath in his doctoral dissertation on “soundways,” the sonic cultural practices of seventeenth and eighteenth-century America that were used to extend the reach of civil society.<sup>87</sup> Rath’s dissertation argues that natural sounds (thunder), acoustical spaces (church interiors), instruments (bells, drumming), and paralinguistic vocalizations (ranting, railing, murmuring, groaning, and howling) are all important elements of the “soundways” that served to extend the range of the face-to-face communications practices that characterized the still-predominantly oral culture of early America. Of special significance to the current study of the Washington funeral rites is Rath’s discussion of the “socially important” sounds of ringing bells, gunshots, and

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<sup>85</sup> *New London Connecticut Gazette*, 15 January 1800; *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 18 January 1800; *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 25 January 1800; *Walpole (New Hampshire) Farmer’s Museum, or Lay Preacher’s Gazette*, 27 January 1800; *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 4 March 1800.

<sup>86</sup> Camus, 116; the author’s conversation at Mount Vernon on November 2, 2001 with an expert on eighteenth-century military drumming who had been in charge of the military drum corps that participated in the funeral of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963.

<sup>87</sup> Richard Cullen Rath, “Worlds Chanted into Being: Soundways in Early America” (Ph. D. diss., Brandeis University, 2001).

drums that acted as a sort of “cultural glue” to construct social order and to extend the limits of community beyond the realm of face-to-face encounters. He writes that sounds made by ringing bells, firing guns, and drumming could be socially powerful, and the louder the sound, the more force behind it and the greater its ability to push the limits of community and civil order beyond face-to-face contact. Rath believes that such sounds were immediate markers of authority and social order, and they had the power to connect local people to the community, to the imagined nation, and to the invisible realm of the spirit.<sup>88</sup> Because of the frequency with which newspapers reported the “soundways” of the Washington funeral rites, it can reasonably be argued that national leaders and local committees of arrangement for the Washington funeral rites were very much aware of the power of sound as a means of communicating authoritative messages related to the maintenance of political and social order. The sound of the ringing of muffled church bells related Washington’s death to spirituality and religion and the role of Providence in directing the affairs of men and the nation. The beat of the muffled drums, the dirges played by military bands, and the repeated discharge of guns during the processions conveyed powerful reminders to the citizens of General George Washington’s role as a military leader and the continuing importance of maintaining military strength for the defense of the young nation against foreign threats of invasion and depredations on the high seas.

### The Props

As discussed above, one of the results of Major General Alexander Hamilton’s orders for military honors to be paid to Washington was the staging of mock funerals. Consequently, one of the most symbolic stage properties used in many of the funeral

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<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 95-96, 103-113, and 131.

ceremonies for George Washington was the empty coffin, but it should be noted that the word “coffin” was rarely used in the newspaper accounts of the processions and memorial services. In the accounts of the national mourning for Washington in the forty-two newspaper runs that were examined as primary sources for this study, the word “coffin” was used only three times. In military services at the cantonment of federal troops at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, “a coffin on a bier was borne by four sergeants . . . and the ceremony closed by the infantry firing by platoons over the coffin.”<sup>89</sup> The Masonic lodge in Charleston, South Carolina held funeral honors for their Brother George Washington in their new lodge room in Tradd Street on February 22, 1800. The room’s decorations included a dome on an elevated platform, dressed with crape and Masonic funeral decorations, and supported by five columns. “Under the dome was placed a coffin, with the appropriate emblems; over the dome, a gilt urn inscribed with the name of the deceased.”<sup>90</sup> Ironically, the broadest reference to the use of coffins in the funeral processions was contained in a very critical letter, from a correspondent calling himself “Decency,” to the editor of a Republican newspaper in Boston, the *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*:

Decent and honorable respect is due to the memory of General Washington, but there is a propriety in conducting this business, which as a *Christian people*, ought carefully to be observed. Funeral solemnities are of too serious a nature to be the subject of ostentatious pageantry: a *bier* is not to be exhibited merely for parade, more especially after the many *real funerals* which have taken place in various parts of the United States within a few years past. How many of our friends have been carried unattended to the grave, immediately after their dissolution, and while Providence has thus afflicted us, it is not a pleasing sight to observe the funeral ceremonies, moving in a solemn procession preceded by the mockery of a pall over an *empty coffin*. Washington we esteem, but the propriety of such exhibitions cannot be admitted by those who consider

<sup>89</sup> *Boston Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 4 March 1800.

<sup>90</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 1 March 1800.

the scene of death too affecting to be represented in parade and pageantry.<sup>91</sup>

This letter from “Decency” will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven of this study in connection with the possible political and religious motives of the writer, but for purposes of this discussion, the letter serves to confirm that empty coffins were used in some of the funeral processions for Washington.

The term “bier” was most often used in the newspaper accounts to refer to that element of the funeral processions that represented the body of Washington. Major General Hamilton’s orders had referred to a “bier” and the “place of interment,” but no mention was made of placing a coffin on the bier. However, it seems likely that to its late eighteenth century audience, the orders’ reference to a bier implied that a coffin or urn would be placed upon it. A bier was basically a wooden platform with short legs, designed for carrying coffins to the graveyard, and biers had been used in America since the early colonial period.<sup>92</sup> A contemporary print of the congressional funeral procession in Philadelphia includes a depiction of the pall-draped bier, and a coffin is clearly being carried on the bier.<sup>93</sup>

Another term for representations of Washington’s body that appeared in several of the newspaper accounts was the word “urn,” a traditional repository for the ashes of the deceased since the time of the ancient Romans and Greeks, even though cremation was not permitted or practiced in the Anglo-American world of the late eighteenth century. The elaborately decorated urn used in the New York City funeral ceremonies was described earlier. Masonic lodges seemed especially inclined to use an urn in their

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<sup>91</sup> *Boston Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, 23 January 1800.

<sup>92</sup> Geddes, 133.



processions and lodge hall decorations. The Masonic Grand Lodge of Massachusetts carried a golden urn in their funeral procession held in Boston on February 11, 1800. The urn contained a lock of Washington's hair that had been sent to the Grand Lodge by Mrs. Washington in response to their request.<sup>94</sup>

In summary, it appears there were several terms rather than "coffin" that were used in contemporary newspaper accounts to describe the stage properties that were included in the ceremonies to represent the body of Washington. These props were alternately referred to as the "bier," the "urn," the "corpse," the "hearse," the "funeral insignia," and the "funeral relict." But regardless of the term used, they all referred to a representation of the body of Washington. As an example, the bier used at the funeral ceremonies held by the Union Brigade in New Jersey was described as an "emblem of the corpse of the departed hero."<sup>95</sup> These representations of Washington's missing body in funeral ceremonies seem to echo the medieval English practice of displaying elaborately decorated effigies of their deceased monarchs in funeral processions and for lying in state ceremonies. Of course, the republican citizens of the United States in 1799-1800 would undoubtedly have been horrified by use of such "monarchical" effigies of Washington, and contemporary religious leaders would certainly have denounced such effigies as being "blasphemous" and "idolatrous." However, with the exception of Boston's "Decency," most grieving Americans apparently had little concern about the biers, urns, and empty coffins that were paraded through their streets as representations of the missing body of Washington.

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<sup>93</sup> "High Street, from the Country Market-place, Philadelphia: with the procession in commemoration of the Death of General George Washington, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1799," engraving by William R. Birch, Philadelphia, 1800.

<sup>94</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 12 February 1800.

Gary Laderman's book, *The Sacred Remains*, begins with a discussion of the phenomenon of the "invisible corpse" at the funeral ceremonies for George Washington.

Many of the great number of obsequies, ceremonies, and observances that followed in the wake of his death . . . were simulations of a real burial. These activities suggested that ushering the founding father's body out of the social order had symbolic importance and served the social solidarity of the new nation. But, of course, the corpse was absent from the numerous rituals that swept both the northern and southern sections of the nation. Washington was at the center of these activities, and though his actual body was missing, the invocation of his presence in the local ceremonies and numerous speeches celebrating his death allowed the national community to collectively express their social unity. The human remains were inconsequential to the valorization of the spirit of the man.<sup>96</sup>

Laderman argues that the memory of Washington as a "living" symbol for national virtue and unity replaced the actual body of the deceased president in the funeral ceremonies held around the country. His corpse was secondary to his apotheosis as a unifying symbol in the collective imagination of the Early Republic.<sup>97</sup> Laderman's interpretations of the role of the "invisible corpse" at the Washington funerals seem to fit with the conclusions of this study, but he seems to fail to recognize the novelty of the mock funerals for Washington that were without precedent or sequel in America. Additionally, there seems to have been another very practical rationale for the inclusion of a representation of Washington's body in so many of the funeral ceremonies. The "theater" of the funerals required a body, a visual representation of the deceased Washington as the focal point for the entire ceremony. The writer of Hamilton's orders for military funeral honors seemed to understand this requirement for a body at a funeral, so he specified that troops should carry a "bier" in procession to the "place of interment." One of the questions that faced the committees of arrangement in planning their local

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<sup>95</sup> *Gazette of the United States and the Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, 9 January 1800.

<sup>96</sup> Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 16.

Washington funeral ceremonies was, “How do you have a funeral with no body?” We have already discussed their creative solutions to the quandary.

Many Americans have struggled with a contemporary version of this same problem, the absence of the body of the deceased, in the aftermath of the tragic terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The families of thousands of victims have been denied the closure of having the body of their loved one to bury with the traditional funeral rites of their particular religious faith. An article in the *New York Times*, “All the Trappings of a Funeral, with the Exception of One,” was illustrated by a picture of an empty, flag-draped coffin, with two New York City firefighters taking their turns standing guard over it.<sup>98</sup> This sad dilemma for the victims’ families was described in an editorial, “In the Body’s Place,” that appeared in the *Times* a few days earlier:

Their survivors . . . have had to reckon with a dying that left behind no body to weep over, no physical sign of the threshold between life and death. Their grief isn’t makeshift—it is elemental—but the families have had to ritualize their grief in makeshift ways. The very presence of a body organizes the ceremonies of mourning and remembering. . . The city is doing what it can to bring definition to this mourning by consecrating powdered debris from the trade center site and depositing it in small mahogany urns that will be given to the victims’ families at a memorial service later this month. No one pretends that this gesture, which is being conducted with the high ritual appropriate to the interment of a body, will suffice as a substitute. But it will help mark a transition in the lives of those families.<sup>99</sup>

Though the analogy of Washington’s death and funerals to those of the victims of the terrorist attacks is obviously imperfect, the mourners in both situations had to deal with the same problem of the absence of a body, and it is interesting that they came up with similar solutions—empty coffins and urns filled with symbolic objects.

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>98</sup> *New York Times*, 29 October 2001.

Many of the coffins displayed on their pall-draped lids a variety of other props intended to invoke the presence of Washington, including symbolic representations of his hat, gloves, sword, and Masonic apron. His actual coffin at Mount Vernon had borne his sword and Masonic apron, and the empty coffin used in the congressional procession in Philadelphia was topped by “the General’s hat and sword.”<sup>100</sup> The biers used in both the Trenton and Bridgetown, New Jersey processions carried an actual hat, gloves, and sword belonging to the General.<sup>101</sup> Representations of Washington’s hat, sword, and Masonic apron were displayed on the bier in the procession in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and his hat and sword were on the bier along with an urn at military services in Oxford, Massachusetts.<sup>102</sup>

The presence of these representations of Washington’s “personal” effects like his hat and sword must have been intended to appeal to the sympathies of participants and observers who viewed the black-draped, empty coffins in the funeral processions. The English heraldic funerals had included heralds or pages who carried the armor, helmet, and sword of the deceased monarch or nobleman.<sup>103</sup> The New England Puritans followed the same cultural practice in their ceremonies for deceased governors and military leaders, as exemplified by their having carried Governor Fitz John Winthrop’s armor in his funeral procession.<sup>104</sup> In funeral processions and lying in state for English monarchs, one of the imperial crowns rested on the head of the effigy or on a purple velvet cushion

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 October 2001.

<sup>100</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 January 1800; *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 27 December 1799.

<sup>101</sup> *Centinel of Liberty or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 31 January 1800; *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 3 March 1800.

<sup>102</sup> Introduction to pamphlet, *Sermon on the Death of George Washington Preached by the Reverend John Armstrong at Pottstown* (Reading, Pennsylvania: Jungmann & Bruckmann, 1800), 1-2; *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 25 January 1800.

<sup>103</sup> Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England*, 172-73.

on top of the coffin.<sup>105</sup> In the absence of a crown to display on the coffin of their deceased military and political leader, the Washington funeral organizers of the Early Republic may have thought that using Washington's hat on the empty coffins was an appropriate way to symbolize his civil authority, a "republican" substitute for the crown on the coffin that had symbolized the authority of the deceased English monarch.

Another prop used in many of the military funeral processions in memory of George Washington was a riderless horse. The procession to the tomb at Mount Vernon had included the General's "elegant old charger, properly caparisoned," and led by two of his servants dressed in mourning.<sup>106</sup> Even though Major General Hamilton's orders for funeral honors at military stations did not mention the inclusion of a riderless horse in the procession, there are many contemporary newspaper accounts of the use of a horse to represent Washington's "old charger." Though the color of the horse is not mentioned in most of the accounts, white horses were used in Baltimore, New London, Philadelphia, Providence, and Sussex County, New Jersey.<sup>107</sup>

The horses were usually described as being "dressed in mourning," or decorated in black cloth and plumes, and fitted out with saddles, holsters, pistols, and boots reversed in the stirrups. Faithfully following the script provided by the account of Washington's funeral procession at Mount Vernon, in which the riderless horse had been led by two of his "servants", or slaves, the organizers of the processions often enlisted the services of one or two "Negroes" or "black servants" to lead the horse. Black men dressed in liveries and wearing badges of mourning led the riderless horses in towns as

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<sup>104</sup> Geddes, 136.

<sup>105</sup> Fritz, 63-66.

<sup>106</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 January 1800.

geographically dispersed as New London, Connecticut, New York City, Oxford, Massachusetts, Montgomery County, New York, Sussex County and Bridgetown, New Jersey, and Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>108</sup> Black servants also carried the bier in the Richmond, Virginia procession.<sup>109</sup> Because of this desire for authenticity in emulating the Mount Vernon funeral, the institution of black slavery was consequently represented in a number of the memorial ceremonies for Washington held throughout the nation. It is significant that the planners of the congressional procession in Philadelphia used “two military men with black scarves” to lead General Washington’s horse.<sup>110</sup> This decision not to use black servants to lead the riderless horse may possibly have been an expression of the organizers’ sensitivity to the politically charged sectional issue of slavery and a means to avoid risking unnecessary controversy on an occasion that was intended to be a unifying event for the country.

Like so many of the symbolic elements of the Washington funeral rites, the use of a riderless horse in the procession had deep roots in English culture. As early as the 1200s, a further addition to a grand funeral was for the dead nobleman’s charger to follow the corpse to burial.<sup>111</sup> In his book about British military customs, Major Thomas J. Edwards traces the leading of an officer’s charger to the graveside behind the coffin to ancient times when it was the practice of burying a warrior’s horse with him for his use in the next world. This custom had been observed by the Saxons, and the chargers of great

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<sup>107</sup> *The Washingtoniana* (Baltimore: Samuel Sower, 1800), 169; *New London Connecticut Gazette*, 15 January 1800; *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799; *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 11 January 1800; *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 14 February 1800.

<sup>108</sup> *New London Connecticut Gazette*, 15 January 1800; *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 15 January 1800 and 25 January 1800; *Albany Centinel*, 14 February 1800; *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 14 February 1800 and 4 March 1800; *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 11 January 1800.

<sup>109</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, 25 February 1800.

<sup>110</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799.

military commanders were still being buried with their late masters as late as the eighteenth century in some European countries.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, the use of a riderless horse in the funeral processions for Washington was very much in keeping with the precedent established by Anglo-American cultural traditions.

The interpretation of the Washington funeral rites as cultural performance continues in the next chapter with a discussion of the Federalist political culture that shaped the national mourning for Washington and the participation of ordinary Americans as political actors in the funeral rites.

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<sup>111</sup> Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England*, 30.

<sup>112</sup> Major Thomas J. Edwards, *Military Customs*, Fifth Edition (Aldershot, Great Britain: Gale & Polden, Ltd., 1961), 204; originally published 1948.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF MOURNING: THE FEDERALISTS SEEK TO UNITE AMERICANS AROUND THE BIER OF WASHINGTON

Here then, forgetting domestic feuds and party dissensions, as children round the bier of their departed parent, let us tract the masculine features of his mind, delineate his sublime virtues, obey the precepts of his testament at his political decease, receive his legacy, and deserve the blessing. . . Illustrious shade! Our love for thee shall be the test of patriotism, and if there be one among our numbers whose bosom swells not with gratitude and pride on the recital of thine achievements—he cannot be an American.

Benjamin Whitwell, Esq., Augusta, Maine, 22 Feb. 1800

George Washington died near the close of the brief period of American history that has been called “the Federalist Era,” the decade between the commencement of the new national government created by the federal Constitution in 1789 and the election of Democratic Republican Thomas Jefferson as president of the United States in 1800. The decade that had begun in an atmosphere of optimistic political harmony among the leaders of a newly united America witnessed the development of an acrimonious political partisanship that led to the creation of the first American party system, a division of political loyalties between supporters of so-called Federalist and Democratic Republican factions. Describing the Federalist Era, Gordon S. Wood writes that the decade of the 1790s was “one of the most passionate and divisive periods in American history . . . the last gasp of an American eighteenth-century patrician world quickly lost and largely



forgotten—a world of aristocratic assumptions, heroic leadership, and powdered wigs and knee britches . . . a world soon to be overwhelmed by the most popular, most licentious, and most commercially ridden society history has ever known.”<sup>1</sup>

George Washington had been in office as president of the United States less than three years when an anti-administration, opposition faction emerged in reaction to the politically ambitious economic development measures advocated by his secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton. Richard Buel, Jr. argues that our early national politics were dominated by a disagreement among the leadership about how to secure the full benefits of the Revolution for the nation at large. Buel points to the debate in Congress over Hamilton’s “Report on Public Credit,” submitted at the opening of the second session, as the cause of a rupture in the national leadership that established the pattern for the opposing alignments that would dominate national politics for the next quarter century.<sup>2</sup> Bitter party strife raged throughout Washington’s second term, exacerbated by popular agitation stirred by opposing views on the French Revolution and the controversial Jay Treaty with England. The issues were linked, because to line up with the English monarchy was to go against the French Republic. Buel writes that it was the Jay Treaty that caused the ideological division of leading public men to spread to the people at large, the basis of the first American party system.<sup>3</sup> Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick similarly conclude that “the outpouring of popular feeling over the Jay Treaty was more directly responsible than anything else for the full emergence of political parties in America, and of clearly recognized Federalist and Republican points of view on

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon S. Wood, in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Launching the “Extended Republic” :The Federalist Era* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1996), 2-4.

all political questions.”<sup>4</sup> Although Washington looked upon political parties as one of the greatest threats to the union and consequently tried to remain aloof from party politics, his highly visible support of the Hamilton economic program linked him closely to the Federalists and made him and his administration targets of political attacks by the Democratic Republican opposition. During his second presidential term, Washington was subjected to vicious personal attacks in the opposition press that questioned his leadership ability and mocked his monarchical manners and regal bearing. His Democratic Republican critics attacked the pomp and formality of the monarchical, court-like ceremonies adopted by the Washington administration including aristocratic weekly levees and Washington’s use of liveried coachmen when he was driven through city streets in his “regal” coach and four. The annual Federalist-sponsored public celebrations of the president’s birthday were considered by his critics to be too reminiscent of pre-revolutionary observances of the king’s birthday, and President Washington’s extended tours of the northern and southern states seemed to them closely to resemble a “royal progress” with elaborate receptions, addresses, and formal ceremonies as the president entered each town on his itinerary.

Although Washington’s death on December 14, 1799 occurred on the eve of the Republican “Revolution of 1800,” the Federalists’ political hegemony appeared at the end of the eighteenth century to be firmly entrenched in the national government and in most of the state legislatures. Although the Democratic Republicans were steadily increasing their party’s representation in the legislatures of several states including New

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1972), ix.-xi., 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Virginia. Federalist John Adams had succeeded Washington as president in 1797, and the congressional elections of 1798-1799 gave the Federalists a 63 to 43 majority over the Democratic Republicans in Congress. Influenced by popular reactions following the Adams administration's release of the shocking details of the "XYZ Affair," in which representatives of the French Republic had demanded bribes from American diplomats, the elections increased the proportion of Federalists in Congress. A patriotic "war fever" gripped the nation, and the Democratic Republican faction's advocacy of American support for the French cause had become unpopular and politically unsupportable. Although retired from the national political scene, Washington's acceptance in July 1798 of President Adams's offer of the commission as lieutenant general and commander in chief of the American armies had once again strongly linked him with the Federalist party and its agenda, despite his desire to remain politically neutral.

Because of Washington's identification with the Federalists, and the close proximity of his death in late 1799 and the upcoming presidential election of 1800, historians have generally argued that the Federalists took advantage of the national mourning for Washington in order to advance their own political agenda. For example, historian Peter S. Onuf writes that immediately following the death of Washington, "countless eulogists rushed into print to memorialize the first president's life. . . Most were socially conservative and politically High Federalist preachers in prosperous port cities to the north who invoked filio-pietistic reverence for the 'father of his country' in

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<sup>4</sup> Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 415.

order to buttress the authority of the still-new federal government.”<sup>5</sup> Onuf’s argument is supported by this study’s review of three hundred of the Washington funeral orations, however, it is important to note that political comments were of secondary importance to the religious themes and effusive tributes to Washington that dominated the ministers’ sermons. Any partisan politicking in the ministers’ funeral sermons and eulogies was generally very subtle, and the eulogists’ most explicit political comments were usually limited to their endorsement of John Adams as president and their wish that he might be continued in office as Washington’s political heir. They did not attack Thomas Jefferson or the Democratic Republican party in their comments. Using a scriptural analogy to make their point, many of the eulogists referred to Adams as the “Elisha” upon whose shoulders the “mantle of Elijah” had fallen upon the death of his illustrious predecessor, George Washington. “Let us not despond,” Jacob McGaw, Jr. urged his national day of mourning audience in Merrimac, New Hampshire. McGaw asked his listeners, “Does not the mantle of Elijah fall on Elisha . . . Does not Adams, our long tried friend, still live and guide our prosperous State?”<sup>6</sup>

The newspaper coverage of the national mourning events in commemoration of Washington was generally nonpartisan. Both the Federalist and Republican newspapers devoted extensive column space to the national mourning. There were no references to the party affiliation of civic leaders and other local elites who served on the committees of arrangement that planned and organized the hundreds of funeral processions and memorial services that were held throughout the nation. In addition, the official

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<sup>5</sup>Mason Locke Weems, *The Life of Washington: A New Edition with Primary Documents and Introduction* by Peter S. Onuf (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), ix.

<sup>6</sup>Jacob McGaw, Junior, *An Eulogy on the Life of Gen. George Washington, Delivered at Merrimac [New Hampshire] on the 22d of February, A. D. 1800* (Amherst, New Hampshire, 1800), 15.

resolutions by which local governing bodies, state legislatures, and Congress authorized public mourning activities were nearly always described in the press as having been passed by unanimous votes. Rather than focusing on any political differences that may have surfaced related to commemorating the death of Washington, the printer-editors of the nation's newspapers chose to represent the national mourning as "universal" and politically nonpartisan. By their nonpartisan editorial stance, the newspapers, both Federalist and Republican, served to support the Federalists' efforts to unite American citizens of all ranks around the bier of Washington.

Despite the muting of political rhetoric in funeral orations and the nonpartisan newspaper coverage of the commemoration of Washington's death, there is ample evidence to suggest that there were in fact powerful political forces operating during that time. Federalist party politics were rampant according to the observations included in John Adams's later recollections of the national mourning for Washington. In a series of letters written nearly a decade after Washington's death, John Adams and his old friend, Dr. Benjamin Rush, exchanged their recollections of the important events in the history of the early republic that they had witnessed or in which they had participated. As he reflected on the public mourning for deceased Federalist leaders, Adams wrote to Dr. Rush that the "mock funerals" that had been held for George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Fisher Ames were striking examples of "Coupes de Theatre." He asserted that the mock funerals were primarily "theatrical exhibitions of politics," describing them as "mere hypocritical pageantry to keep in credit, banks, funding systems, and other

aristocratical speculation.”<sup>7</sup> In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, written in 1816, John Adams repeated his attribution of ulterior political motives to the national mourning for Washington. Adams wrote, “The death of Washington diffused a general grief. The old Tories, the Hyperfederalists, the Speculators, set up a general howl. Orations, prayers, sermons, mock funerals were employed, not that they loved Washington, but to keep in countenance the funding and banking systems; and to cast into the background and shade all others who had been concerned in the service of their country in the Revolution.”<sup>8</sup>

The funeral orations and newspaper accounts of memorial events that comprise the primary sources for this study provide ample evidence of the dominance of the Federalists’ worldview in shaping the public mourning activities that followed Washington’s death. To understand fully how significantly the worldview of the Federalists shaped the national mourning for Washington, Federalism must be viewed as a political culture as well as a political party. David Hackett Fischer’s seminal study of Federalism, published in 1965, explored the political and institutional dimensions of the Federalist party and examined the backgrounds of the men who were associated with the party in the 1790s and the younger generation of men who succeeded them in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Fischer argued that the cement of the Federalist political system was the deferential spirit of eighteenth-century Anglo-American society in which “the multitude” was trained from birth to submit to the subordination necessary to permit the “natural rulers” of society to govern them. Power was placed in the hands of “the wise and the good,” with the consent of the people. Fischer was unable to

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<sup>7</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 25 July 1808; 14 March, 1809; 14 May 1810; and 21 June 1811; in John A. Schutz and Douglass Adair, *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805-1813* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1966), 112-14, 134-36, 163-64, and 180-82.

identify a “tidy socioeconomic interest group” that comprised the membership of the Federalist party, but instead he found that there was considerable diversity among party members in terms of social, geographic, economic, ethnic, psychological, and religious factors. He found, however, that despite their demographic diversity, most Federalists shared a common ideology. All of these men were deeply conscious of inequalities, and they tended to think in terms of society rather than individual, and of maximal rather than minimal government. All Federalists hoped to sustain a governing elite with the consent of the people by reinforcing the deferential spirit of colonial society. They sought to strengthen social harmony rather than to institutionalize social conflict. Although there was no single pattern of allegiance to the Federalist party in 1800 in social terms, Fischer concluded that the political pattern was very clear—the established elites in most states were Federalist, and their challengers were Jeffersonian. Men who held positions of power and prominence in 1800 tended toward Federalism. Old wealth and respectable occupational callings were among the distinguishing characteristics of the American elite that tended to be Federalists. They were college-educated ministers, lawyers, merchants, and physicians from old families, and were considered to be a “natural aristocracy,” gentlemen of the “better sort” in American society.<sup>9</sup>

Social historians Linda K. Kerber and James M. Banner, Jr. published their important contributions to the historiography of Federalism in 1970. Kerber observed that “the distinction between Federalist and Jeffersonian in the latter part of the early

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<sup>8</sup> John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 3 September 1816, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, Lester J. Cappon, ed., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 2:488.

<sup>9</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 4-17; Appendix I, 201-226.

national period is as much cultural as it is political; if not more so.”<sup>10</sup> She compared the Federalist and Republican images of the social order that informed their opposing views on popular democracy. Holding an elitist view of the social order, the Federalists feared popular democracy and thought that, in spite of all its surface stability and prosperity, American society was torn by internal contradiction. They shared a “sense of the precariousness of the social order” and a “conviction of imminent disaster.” Federalists feared political disorder, disintegration, and cultural chaos, and they expected mob action, violence, and the further decline of the deferential behavior on which their elite leadership depended.<sup>11</sup> James M. Banner, Jr. focused his study of Federalism on the Federalist Party of Massachusetts, believing that it was “the most important constituent branch of the party,” where the Federalists became most deeply entrenched, enjoyed their greatest electoral triumphs, and played out its final battles.”<sup>12</sup> Banner found that harmony, unity, order, and solidarity were the basic motifs of Massachusetts Federalists’ thought. They saw society both as a structure of harmonious and mutually interdependent interests and as a collectivity in which individuals, by occupying fixed places and performing specified tasks, contributed to the health and prosperity of the whole community. Their ideas of social harmony presupposed superior and inferior roles and functions based on natural distinctions among men . . . and also “unprotesting submission to one’s place in the social hierarchy—each one learning his proper place—and keeping it.”<sup>13</sup> By the late 1790s, Banner writes, the party had become, for the Federalists, the “mainstay of public order and social harmony.” They were deeply

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<sup>10</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-181.



committed to the idea that effective government was the essential guarantor of public order and happiness. The Federalists viewed democracy as a legitimizing process, a procedure by which citizens signified their approval of the government's past actions.<sup>14</sup> Banner cautions that not all Federalists were members of the "ruling elite." He found that "ordinary men who had a mental association with established authority and an affinity for the fixed and traditional" were also among the citizens of Massachusetts who supported Federalism. These ordinary men viewed themselves as "insiders," and they enjoyed some sort of identification with men who customarily exerted moral, social, and political suasion in the Commonwealth. Such men "esteemed their betters and set great store by the dependability of fixed relationships."<sup>15</sup> Banner's analysis of the social sources of Massachusetts Federalism revealed that the party "was firmly entrenched in the better elements of society." College faculty, clergymen, principal lawyers, including the judges, and wealthy merchants were "almost universally" Federalists. The "reigning elite" was an oligarchy built upon the foundations of family, occupation, and means. Religion also was part of the Federalist culture. Banner found that conservative Congregationalists and their Calvinist allies, the Presbyterians, "were naturally inclined to identify with the party of stability and tradition, in contrast members of the dissenting sects generally joined the party which championed an end to all limitations upon the free exercise of religion." The Federalist clergy generally shared the beliefs and values of members of the party and were expected to help maintain the spirit of deference and

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<sup>12</sup> James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origin of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), vii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-55.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 65; 130-31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-69.

submission upon which the Federalist view of society was based.<sup>16</sup> It is implicit in much of this that the Federalists for the most part shared Washington's antipathy to party politics and abhorred the politics that forced them to be a "party."

Historians Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, published a comprehensive study of Federalism in 1993, focusing on the political developments in the new American republic between 1788 and 1800. They note that the opening cycle of the nation's public life, one they call "The Age of Federalism," might also with some justification be called "the Era of Washington."<sup>17</sup> Following their encyclopedic account of the history of both terms of Washington's presidency, the authors note that the year 1800 marked the end of Federalist predominance in the nation's public life, a predominance never to be reasserted at the national level. They write that "The Federalists of 1800 imagined themselves in a state of siege . . . They, the friends of order, were menaced on every side by the forces of sedition, Jacobinism, and insubordination." This is a useful description of the politically divided setting in which the Federalist political culture was operating at the time of the death of George Washington.

The rich historiography of Federalism has been enhanced by several new contributions to the literature during the last several years. In 1996, Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert edited a volume of nine essays on the social and political history of "the formidable challenges that confronted the newly formed republican polity" during the years from 1790 to 1800.<sup>18</sup> Another volume of essays containing new scholarship related to Federalism was edited by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg in 1998. The editors note that the twelve essays in their book, *Federalists Reconsidered*, "question the wisdom

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-202.

<sup>17</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 3.

of the traditional dichotomies of elitist, reactionary Federalists and democratic, progressive Jeffersonians . . . and of the wealthy and of the people.” The editors continue, “ we portray an active Federalist coalition that offered a vibrant intellectual and political alternative throughout the era of the early republic. . . We show Federalism cutting across the boundaries of region, culture, race, gender and class, and struggling with the complex problems of nation building, national identity, and economic development.”<sup>19</sup>

The scholarship of Fischer, Kerber, Banning, Wood, Elkins and McKittrick, and the authors and editors of the two new collections of essays cited above, provides the insights necessary to better understand the worldview of Federalists and to speculate about what factors motivated them as they planned and organized the national mourning for Washington. Their near-paranoia about the precariousness of the social order and what they believed to be an impending crisis of social disorder, disintegration, and cultural chaos led the Federalists, in the words of Gordon Wood, to be preoccupied with “creating social cohesiveness and making a single nation out of disparate sections and communities.” The Federalists’ “principal political problem in building an integrated national state was one of adhesion, how to keep people in such a sprawling republic from flying apart in pursuit of their partial local interests.”<sup>20</sup> Rogers M. Smith observes that “a crucial concern of the Federalists was “to foster a sense of American national identity conducive to their aims and governance.”<sup>21</sup> If we accept this premise that turn-of-the-century Federalists generally shared the related goals of the development of social and

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., “*Launching the Extended Republic*,” vii.

<sup>19</sup> Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon S. Wood, in Hoffman and Albert, eds., “*Launching the Extended Republic*,” 6-7.

political cohesion and the creation of a sense of national identity, it seems appropriate to conclude that the public mourning following the death of Washington, provided a unique opportunity for the Federalist political culture to use the universal grief for Washington as the catalyst to bring together Americans of all social ranks and political loyalties around the bier of Washington. In the terms of Benedict Anderson's conceptual framework, by purposefully creating an "imagined community" of mourners for Washington from Maine to Georgia, the Federalist political culture sought to advance their objectives of preserving social order, improving social cohesion, and fostering a sense of American national identity. By involving Americans in mourning pageants that demonstrated national unity, the Federalists used the death of Washington to bring citizens from a state of imagined solidarity to experiencing tangible representations of union. It was entirely consistent with the pursuit of these goals that the Federalist-controlled Congress declared a thirty-day period of national mourning for Washington during which time all citizens were to wear black badges of mourning on their left arms in commemoration of Washington. The Federalist majority in Congress, with the unanimous support of their Republican colleagues, created another opportunity to unite Americans around the bier of Washington by declaring a national day of mourning on February 22, 1800, a day proclaimed by President Adams on which the people of the United States were requested to assemble in order to publicly testify to their grief by suitable eulogies, orations, and discourses, or by public prayers. By their declaration of a national day of mourning, the Federalists invited Americans, on the day usually celebrated as Washington's birthday, to unite around his bier to mourn the death of their

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<sup>21</sup> Rogers M. Smith, "Constructing American National Identity: Strategies of the Federalists," in Ben-Atar and Oberg, eds., 19-39.

common national benefactor. Local and state Federalist leaders also took action in pursuit of the objectives of social cohesion and national identity by organizing official mourning activities in which they invited citizens of all ranks to join them in commemorating the death of Washington. The Federalist worldview also shaped the decisions made by local committees of arrangement that planned and organized Washington funeral processions and memorial services in towns and cities throughout the nation. Comprised of prominent representatives of the “ruling elites,” the committees endeavored to include men and women of all social ranks in their local mourning events. Unity was as important at the local level as it was within the state and throughout the nation. Consequently, thousands of ordinary American citizens were invited to become important actors in the dramas of public mourning that took place throughout the nation during the winter of 1799-1800. By their participation in the funeral processions and memorial services for Washington, Americans were given opportunities to demonstrate their personal grief for the loss of their “Father” and also to act politically by supporting mourning rituals that were organized and designed by Federalist elites to advance the objectives of their party.

Two social historians, Simon P. Newman and David Waldstreicher, have recently published their studies of the street politics of the period, examinations of the role of parades, festivals, and nationalist celebrations in the development of the national popular political culture in the early republic.<sup>22</sup> David Waldstreicher argues that nationalist celebrations during the 1790s became a key locus of the continuing battle over the nature

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<sup>22</sup> Simon P. Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

of political participation in the early republic.<sup>23</sup> The Federalists encouraged the participation of ordinary Americans in the political culture by involving citizens in fetes designed to advance the “cult of Washington,” public tributes to Washington, including annual birthday celebrations and elaborate local welcoming ceremonies and receptions for the president as he toured the northern and southern states. These celebrations of George Washington united Federalist elites and ordinary Americans in “spectacular exchanges of sentiment” that confirmed his own stature while ratifying the judgment of all those who admired his unparalleled virtues.<sup>24</sup> Waldstreicher observes that the Washington funeral rituals had a “nonpartisan yet unmistakably Federalist aura.”<sup>25</sup> Simon Newman argues that the Democratic Republicans responded to the Federalists’ strategy of involving citizens in the public celebrations of Washington by also inviting ordinary Americans to participate in fetes in honor of the French Revolution. In addition, both parties began to sponsor competing Fourth of July celebrations. Newman believes that the turbulent years between 1788 and 1801 were of tremendous significance in American political history because it was during this decade that “the first truly national popular political culture began to develop and a national political party system began to take shape.” He asserts that “in the festivals, rites and symbols of popular politics, ordinary Americans played a vital role in these processes, helping to form local and national political parties, and helping create a new way of doing politics.”<sup>26</sup> Newman writes that the Federalists enjoyed the upper hand in the manipulation of the symbolic Washington for partisan purposes by developing a “quasi-royal” political culture

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<sup>23</sup> Waldstreicher, 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>26</sup> Newman, 9.

designed to strengthen the party and its plans for the new nation. He says that throughout the decade of the 1790s, the Federalists proved themselves to be adept in organizing a variety of festive celebrations and rites to involve ordinary citizens in honoring Washington.<sup>27</sup> Newman notes that the public celebrations of Washington gradually evolved into “contested events at the heart of which lay partisan politics and the rival ideologies of the Federalists and Democratic Republicans.” He argues that Washington’s death brought to a climax the contest over and within the political culture of Washington. The commemorative rites for Washington were played out in the context of intense partisan politicking as both parties prepared for the following year’s presidential election. The Federalists were divided among followers of Adams and Hamilton, and the Democratic Republicans were suffering under the Alien and Sedition laws designed to stifle their political rhetoric and weaken their base of popular support.<sup>28</sup>

In their efforts to maximize the participation of ordinary citizens of all ranks in the national mourning for Washington, the Federalist elites throughout the country invited adult male citizens, women, and children to assemble around the bier of Washington to demonstrate simultaneously their grief for their deceased hero and also their support of Federalism. The extent and manner of participation of each of these three groups of Americans as actors in the Washington funeral dramas are examined below.

### The Citizens

Many of the funeral orations and newspapers of the day referred to grieving American citizens as children mourning the death of their father, an illustration of the widespread contemporary use of the patriarchal metaphor in connection with George

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-62.

<sup>28</sup> Newman, 68.

Washington. One account of the public mourning in Alexandria, Virginia, reported that it was “as if each family had lost its father.”<sup>29</sup> Citizens were identified as a specific group of participants in all but five of the 83 published accounts of funeral processions that comprise the basis of this analysis of actor-participants. Groups of mourning citizens marched at the end of 75 percent of the processions.<sup>30</sup> Their position was symbolic of the relative ranking of ordinary citizens in the social order of the early republic. The groups of citizens were preceded in the order of procession by persons who ranked in the upper levels of society, including civic officials, clergymen, military officers, and physicians and lawyers. By their marching at the end of the Washington funeral processions, the ordinary citizens were acting out their deferential roles and acknowledging their relative positions at the bottom of the social pyramid.

The decision of the predominantly Federalist committees of arrangement to include ordinary citizens as participants in the processions, was indicative of their post-Revolutionary civil standing that ascribed an active role in the polity to the ordinary citizens of the new republic. As Richard L. Bushman noted in comparing the passive participation of ordinary citizens in the coronation procession of George III in London to their active participation in a civic procession formed to welcome President George Washington to Boston during his tour of the northern states in 1789:

From the vantage point of the cordwainers and ropemakers in Washington’s procession, society looked much different than it did to the anonymous London workers observing the coronation procession. Society and government did not tower above the citizens of Boston to such stupefying heights. Not only were the heights reduced, but the lower orders were raised. They were given a position, a name, and an identity in the procession of state. The presence of

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<sup>29</sup> *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 7 January 1800; reprinted from “an Alexandria paper of the 20<sup>th</sup> ult.”

<sup>30</sup> Groups of citizens walked at the head of eleven percent of the 83 processions and in the middle of fourteen percent of them.



citizens in the procession instead of on the sidelines in an undifferentiated mass signified their active role in the republic. Under monarchy there were height, magnificence, and exclusiveness; republican society was level, simple, and inclusive.<sup>31</sup>

In the newspaper accounts of national mourning events following the death of Washington, the three most frequently reported characteristics of mourning citizens throughout the nation were (a) the large numbers of citizens who participated in the funeral rites, (b) the visible evidence of their personal feelings of profound grief for their loss, and (c) their orderly behavior at the public funeral rites. In an often-reprinted essay that first appeared in the *Gazette of the United States*, the Federalist intellectual Joseph Dennie, writing under his pen name, “The Lay Preacher of Pennsylvania,” described the pervasive national sorrow as follows:

It is an occurrence, not less interesting than extraordinary, that the departure of a single man should command the unaffected and indiscriminate lamentation of five millions of people. It is an event the like of which the world has never witnessed, that the death of an individual should so touch a whole nation, that “the joy of the heart should cease, and the dance be turned into mourning”. . . Most emphatically are “the tears of Cushan in affliction.” The father to his children will make known the mournful story. The veteran who fought by HIS side in the heat and burden of the day of our deliverance will know that “for this the heart is faint, that for these things the eyes are dim.”<sup>32</sup>

The universality of American citizens’ mourning for Washington, described by Joseph Dennie as “the unaffected and indiscriminate lamentation of five millions of people,” is supported by newspaper correspondents’ estimates of the large number of citizens who attended the funeral processions and memorial services around the nation. In all regions of the country, citizens turned out in unprecedented numbers to participate

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<sup>31</sup> Bushman, 242-243.

<sup>32</sup> *Jenks’ Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 6 January, 1800; reprinted from the *Philadelphia Gazette of the United States*, 21 December 1799. The article “From the Elegant Pen of the Lay Preacher of Pennsylvania” was printed in nine of the sample of 42 newspapers included in this study.

in and to watch the funeral rites for Washington. In New England, public funeral ceremonies attracted five thousand people to the United States Army post at Oxford, Massachusetts; six thousand attended the civic procession in Boston on January 9, 1800; “thousands” attended the rites in Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and “many hundreds” came to services held in Hartford, Connecticut, the “concourse of people greater than almost ever was known on any former occasion;” the funeral rites in Bennington, Vermont included “the most well-attended procession that ever was seen in Bennington.”<sup>33</sup> In funeral ceremonies held in the Middle-Atlantic states, eight thousand people attended the procession in Frederick-town, Maryland; four thousand people were seated in the congressional memorial services held in the German Lutheran Church in Philadelphia; four to five thousand citizens attended the Union Brigade’s military funeral rites at Scotch Plains, New Jersey; nearly five thousand soldiers and citizens marched in Baltimore’s funeral procession and it was reported that there were “not less than 20,000 souls in the streets at one time.”<sup>34</sup> Three thousand people heard a funeral discourse by the Reverend David Austin on Christmas Day in Elizabeth-town, New Jersey; not less than five thousand attended the funeral ceremonies held in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; upwards of two thousand people attended the Pittsburgh procession; and three thousand citizens participated in the funeral ceremonies held in Bridgeton, New Jersey; and a crowd of citizens “as numerous as has ever been assembled in this town” attended the

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<sup>33</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800 and 15 January 1800; *Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 5 February 1800; *Hartford Connecticut Courant*, 30 December 1799; *Bennington Vermont Gazette*, 2 January 1800.

<sup>34</sup> *Centinel of Liberty, or George-town and Washington Advertiser*, 30 December 1799 and 11 March 1800; *Walpole (New Hampshire) Farmer’s Museum, or Lay Preacher’s Gazette*, 20 January 1800; *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 2 January 1800.

Newark, New Jersey funeral.<sup>35</sup> In the southern states, over five thousand spectators watched the one thousand-participant procession held in Richmond, Virginia; nearly a thousand people attended the rites in Raleigh, North Carolina; not less than fifteen hundred citizens were present for the ceremonies in Charlotte, North Carolina; Alexandria, Virginia's public observance of Washington's death attracted "a far more numerous audience than ever was assembled before, in this place, on any occasion;" and Savannah, Georgia's procession "was attended by the greatest concourse ever assembled here on any occasion;" the concourse of people who attended services in Norfolk, Virginia "was such as never witnessed before in the borough;" and St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina was crowded, the aisles filled with many persons who could not be accommodated in seats.<sup>36</sup>

The grief-stricken reactions of Americans upon learning of the death of George Washington were described in virtually all of the newspaper accounts of mourning activities throughout the nation. The grief for the loss of Washington was not limited to citizens aligned with the Federalist party with which he had been associated. Laying political divisions aside, one of the most partisan of the Republican newspapers, Boston's *Independent Chronicle*, announced the death of Washington with an emotional commentary describing the afflicted sensibilities of the American people:

Although the pure spirit of this "Hero, Patriot, Sage," lent to make our nation free virtuous and happy, has winged its flight to the regions of eternal bliss; though WASHINGTON has attained the acme of his honors; yet the loss of this ornament in peace, this shield in war, has spread through every class of

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<sup>35</sup> *Elizabethtown New Jersey Journal*, 31 December 1799; *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 13 January 1800 and 4 March 1800; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, 11 January 1800; *Newark (New Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>36</sup> *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 6 March 1800; *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 25 February 1800 and 11 March 1800; *Centinel of Liberty, or George-town and Washington Advertiser*, 3 January 1800 and 14 February 1800; *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 4 March 1800; *Charleston (South Carolina) City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 24 February 1800.

citizens affliction, despondence, and woe.—No event was ever more distressing to the American people. A mind susceptible of tender emotions cannot contemplate this solemn occurrence without experiencing sensations of deep regret, and unaffected sorrow. He who delights in martial exploits, weeps o'er the HERO, who contended, not for dominion, for territory, or applause; but for the *Liberties and Independence* of THREE MILLIONS of People.—He who regards the PATRIOT-STATESMAN, as “the noblest work of God,” must bedew the tomb of WASHINGTON with sorrow’s choicest tears.<sup>37</sup>

“We weep for him and we weep for ourselves,” declared the learned Congregationalist minister and Jeffersonian Republican, the Reverend William Bentley, in his eulogy on Washington delivered to the citizens of Salem, Massachusetts on January 2, 1800.<sup>38</sup> Many of his fellow orators at the memorial services held throughout the country during the period of national mourning period for Washington commented on the audience’s tears and their sad countenances as tangible evidence of the personal grief and affected sensibilities of the citizens in attendance. Similarly, many newspapers around the nation recorded the reactions of local citizens to the announcement of the death of Washington, often mentioning their tears and grief-stricken countenances as they walked about the streets. The preface of this study, *The Old Continental*, a short sketch about the imaginary reactions of a fictional Revolutionary War veteran and his family to the news of Washington’s death, describes the emotional responses of the gray-haired corporal and his children when he came home and reported to them, “The General is dead.” Their tears, uneaten hasty pudding, prayers before an early bedtime, and black ribbons tied around their arms the next morning were probably intended by the author of the sketch to

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<sup>37</sup> *Boston Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, 26 December 1799.

<sup>38</sup> William Bentley, *Eulogy on the Occasion of the Death of George Washington, Delivered at Salem, Massachusetts, January 2, 1800* (Morrisania, New York, 1870), 25.

portray the expressions of personal grief being played out by families in the homes of most ordinary citizens of the early republic.<sup>39</sup>

However, at least one contemporary observer saw little evidence that the news of Washington's death elicited so universally the citizens' tears, sad countenances, and other expressions of personal grief. Questioning the legitimacy of the extravagant representations of grief for Washington, Charles Brockden Brown, editor of the *Monthly Magazine and American Review*, wrote the following skeptical assessment of the funeral orators' allusions to the personal grief felt by their listeners.

The oration, [by Samuel Bayard, New Rochelle, New York], like most others, opens with a somewhat needless and exaggerated picture of the *grief* which the death of Washington produced. We should be unworthy to be countrymen of him whom we commemorate, if his death actually produced the grief which is ascribed to us. Sour and malignant is that heart who does not foster the image of this great and universal benefactor with gratitude, solemnity, and reverence; but to realize the scene so glaringly depicted by his eulogies, would by no means redound to our credit, as rational, or social, or political beings. Such representations are undersigned satires on the dead and on the living, and tend to degrade, instead of exalting, *his* character and *ours*. Rhetoric, like common discourse, is best employed in telling the truth, even when the truth is disadvantageous to us; but much more so when, as in the present case, the truth is more honorable to the subject, and the hearers of the eulogy, than the fiction. We know the merits of the dead too well—we have too much reverence for our God, our country, and ourselves, actually to feel *horror, agony, despair*—to utter those *sighs*, and pour forth *tears* which more than one orator has bestowed upon us. It is not an honorable, but a childish sensibility, that should thus manifest itself; and accordingly, not one, perhaps, in one million, has felt what the orators impute to the whole community.<sup>40</sup>

Brown's disapproving observations of the emotional mourning for Washington were not repeated in other published commentaries, and he appears to have been a voice of one regarding his skepticism about Americans' emotional reactions to the death of

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<sup>39</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, Boston, 8 January 1800.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, ed., *The Monthly Magazine and American Review* (New York), Vol. II, No. 3 (March 1800): 220.

Washington. The young intellectual's account should perhaps be read as a personal reflection of Brown's rationalist philosophy on how most appropriately to deal with the death rather than as an objective report of the people's "childish sensibility" in reacting emotionally to losing the Father of His Country. In the "Monody on the Death of General George Washington" written by Charles Brockden Brown and performed at the New York Theater on December 30, 1799, the author had suggested what he believed to be an appropriate response to the death of Washington.

But why lament the close of his career?  
 No cause there is that may demand a tear;  
 Fate gives to mortal life a narrow span,  
 And he, our guide and friends was still a man.  
 Triumphal wreathes far rather ought to wave,  
 And laureate honors bloom around his grave;  
 For rather should ascend our hymns of praise  
 To heaven, who gave him health and length of days.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the published descriptions of the large numbers of citizens who attended the funeral rites for Washington and the universality of their tears and sadness, the orderly behavior of the mourners was also frequently noted in the newspaper accounts of public ceremonies. "We should do injustice to the subject, were we to conclude without a remark on the decorum and orderly conduct observed by every description of persons on this mournful occasion," wrote a correspondent for the *Newark Centinel of Freedom* in describing the funeral rites held on December 27, 1799, in Newark, New Jersey. He continued, "Not a single incident occurred but what will bear a pleasing retrospect; and in our village, the annals of this day may be transmitted to posterity

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<sup>41</sup> *New York Spectator*, 4 January 1800.

unsullied with a stain.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, a correspondent to a Raleigh newspaper included in his report a comment about the behavior of the people who attended the funeral ceremonies held in Williamsborough, North Carolina. He wrote, “In justice to the citizens of every denomination, too high encomiums cannot be paid them for their attention, sobriety, and good conduct throughout the day, which manifestly showed their respect for their much-beloved late hero and brother.”<sup>43</sup> During the Wethersfield, Connecticut ceremonies on the national day of mourning, February 22, 1800, “the deportment of all ranks of citizens evidenced both their veneration and esteem for the distinguished virtues of, and their inconsolate grief for the death of the Father of their Country.”<sup>44</sup>

It is significant that each of these published commentaries on the orderly behavior of the citizens who attended the funeral rites for Washington also includes a reference to the participation of all classes of people—using phrases like “citizens of every denomination,” “all ranks of citizens,” and “every description of person.” Other newspaper accounts included similar comments such as “the procession was composed of men of all classes,” (Hartford, Connecticut), “ a numerous assemblage of citizens of every rank and description met at the appointed hour,” (Lexington, Kentucky), and “a vast concourse of people of all classes convened on this occasion,” (Charlotte, North Carolina).<sup>45</sup> The frequency of such comments is indicative of the importance placed by the Federalist managers of the Washington funeral rites on portraying the national grief upon his death as transcending boundaries of class or rank in society. The Federalists

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<sup>42</sup> *Newark (New Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>43</sup> *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 4 March 1800.

<sup>44</sup> *Hartford Connecticut Courant*, 10 March 1800.

were eager to promote social cohesion and their political leadership as essential to the continued unity of the nation, and they saw an opportunity to use the death of Washington as a unifying event to promote their cause. During a time when the Democratic Republicans were highlighting the differences between the political interests of the upper and lower classes of Americans, it was important politically for the Federalists to promote their unity of interests with citizens of the lower ranks. The emphasis in the newspaper accounts of the orderly behavior of the citizens at the funeral ceremonies was also a message to men of the lower ranks about the behavior that would be required of them if they wished to be considered as respectable members of the polity by the ruling elites. By their proper decorum at the Washington funeral rites, ordinary citizens had demonstrated their ability and willingness to behave in a manner consistent with the requirements of an ordered society.

### Women

American women were important actors during the period of national mourning for George Washington, even though their gendered roles were shaped by prevailing attitudes and practices that governed the nature of women's participation in the public sphere of politics and the civic culture. Women had played important but politically invisible roles in the public sphere during the American Revolution, as their traditional domestic roles took on political significance. Women's roles that linked the private and public spheres during the Revolution included their participating in consumer boycotts of English goods, producing cloth and other supplies and providing services needed by the army, marching in civic processions and participating in crowd demonstrations,

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 December 1799; *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 30 January 1800; *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 11 March 1800.



encouraging their husbands and sons to join the military in support of the American cause, becoming involved in benevolent and religious activities, and managing their homes, businesses, and farms while their husbands, sons, and brothers were absent while serving in the militia or continental army.<sup>46</sup> However, some scholars have argued that women retreated once again to the private sphere of domesticity as the Revolution concluded, their status and roles in the new republic greatly limited by their gender. Susan Jester writes that “despite the recent recovery by feminist historians of the contributions of women to the revolutionary movement, both in America and France, there remains a nagging sense that women may have lost more than they gained in the transition to republican government . . . when the drama of war was past and the victorious rebels returned to their civilian lives as farmers and tradesmen, ministers and merchants, women disappeared from the public eye once again.”<sup>47</sup>

Although full citizenship and legal rights were generally defined in terms of manhood in the early republic, the American Revolution had set in motion new notions of gender roles in the political culture. Women of the post-Revolutionary era were assigned roles that later historians have labeled “Republican Mother” and “Republican Wife.” After the Revolution, wives and mothers were given the responsibility for influencing their husbands and children to become virtuous, republican citizens. Linda K. Kerber devised the term “Republican Motherhood” to describe the cultural role that became the justification for women’s political behavior in the early republic, providing a political

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<sup>46</sup> Linda K. Kerber, “History Can Do It No Justice: Women and the Reinterpretation of the American Revolution,” in Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert, eds., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1985), 3-42; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 155-227.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Jester, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 141-42.

context for the coexistence of private female virtue and civic virtue. Though women had very limited political status in the new nation, a link was forged between motherhood and citizenship by asking women to raise the virtuous male citizens on whom the future health of the republic would depend. While women were still in a deferential position to males who held political power, the concept and ideology of the “Republican Mother” identified the intersection of women’s private domain and the civic culture.<sup>48</sup> Jan Lewis argues that it was “social union,” the loving partnership of men and women in marriage, that held up the republican model for social and political relationships and created for women another important new role, that of “Republican Wife.” Affectionate, virtuous, chaste, and capable of enormous moral authority over their husbands, the good Republican Wives “seduced men into virtue” during courtship and then, after marriage, influenced their husbands to remain virtuous, republican citizens.<sup>49</sup>

More recent scholarship on women’s political roles in the early republic has attributed to women significant public roles that went well beyond their private sphere political roles of working within their homes to influence their sons and husbands to be good republican citizens. Susan Branson has “reconsidered the historical paradigms of republican womanhood and the private sphere” and concluded that the presence of elite and middle-class women in the public sphere of early national Philadelphia made it possible for them to participate actively in the political and cultural life of the nation during the 1780s and 1790s. She found that women during this period transformed their private roles into public, and often political ones, by creating benevolent organizations,

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<sup>48</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 228-29; See also Linda K. Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,” in *American Quarterly* 28 (1976), 187-205.

by participating in public celebrations and ceremonies in support of the French Revolution, and by contributing to the development of another contested political space, the American theater, as spectators, performers, and playwrights. In addition, the elite Federalist women of Philadelphia, under the leadership of Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, and other prominent Federalist women, created an American political salon culture where gender, society, politics, and society intersected. The salons provided women with access to public political space through the vehicle of social occasions for the nation's political elite. These salons, created during Washington's presidency offered elite women in the inner circles of national power a place in the political culture that they did not have prior to 1789.<sup>50</sup> The Federalist salon culture of the national capital was stripped of its court-like monarchical tone and emerged in a modified form during the Democratic Republican administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.<sup>51</sup>

Rosemarie Zagarri argues that women were more in evidence in the era of the first party system than historians have realized. Even though social and legal restrictions excluded women from politics in the early republic, yet the Federalists in particular made a point of inviting women to public meetings and celebrations. She claims that the Federalists were generally more receptive than the Democratic Republicans to incorporating women into the political process and to articulating a women's role in the polity. Zagarri reasons that because Federalist theory accepted social privilege and class

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<sup>49</sup> Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 44 (1987), 689-721.

<sup>50</sup> Susan Branson, *Those Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> See Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); and Fredrika J. Teute, "Roman Matron on the Banks of Tiber Creek: Margaret Bayard Smith and the Politicization of Spheres in the Nation's Capital," in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political*

distinctions as inevitable, they embraced the existing social hierarchy, and within the limits of this system, they felt free to explore the possibility of an informal political role for elite white women in the political culture. Consequently, Federalists acknowledged women in their midst and encouraged women's political potential by welcoming them to their public gatherings and honoring women's contributions to the polity. On the other hand, Democratic Republicans seem to have either ignored or slighted women at their fourth of July celebrations and other public functions.<sup>52</sup> David Waldstreicher writes that Federalists mobilized women in their celebrations because they completed the ideological alliance of state, religion, and nation, their participation tying together Christianity, the nation, and constituted authorities. By displaying their virtuous womanhood in public civic rituals, the Federalists hoped that women would have an influence on men by modeling virtuous citizenship.<sup>53</sup> Simon Newman concluded that women's participation in the Federalist mourning rituals for Washington seemed to have been particularly important, and many middling and upper class women who participated found themselves considered as public members of the Federalist community, with "more room in the public realm than they had ever been accorded when Washington was alive."<sup>54</sup>

The gendered roles played by women during the national mourning for Washington provide informative examples of how the private and public spheres intersected at that time to provide women with new opportunities for political expression. Women attended memorial services, wore badges of mourning, and even marched in funeral processions in a few towns and cities. However, women's mourning roles were

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*Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia), 89-121.

<sup>52</sup> Rosemarie Zagari, "Gender and the First Party System," in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 118-134.

different from, but no less important than, those of men. In keeping with the cultural conventions of the time, it can be assumed that, generally, women did not march with men in the groups of citizens who participated in the Washington funeral processions. There were only a few instances where the presence of women was specifically noted in the newspaper accounts of local funeral processions for Washington. “A large and respectable number of Ladies,” reported a newspaper correspondent from Bridgetown, New Jersey, “added greatly to the dignity of the Procession and the solemnities of the day.”<sup>55</sup> In the funeral procession held in Oxford, Sussex County, New Jersey, six “married Ladies dressed in white, with white turbans trimmed with black ribbon,” walked beside the bier, each carrying a black banner “expressive of some of the most memorable achievements of the *Great Deceased*.” The ladies “who favored the procession in form” were deemed to have “presented to their country the most affecting expression of our national loss.”<sup>56</sup> In the town of Newton, also located in Sussex County, New Jersey, “Ladies, in suitable order, in mourning habits,” walked at the end of the local funeral procession behind the “citizens in general.”<sup>57</sup> Some of the wives of prominent men of the town marched with their husbands in the procession held in East Sudbury, Massachusetts. The newspaper description of the order of procession in East Sudbury mentions the participation of “private Gentlemen, with their Ladies,” “Selectmen of the town, with their Ladies,” and “Deacons of the Church, with their Ladies.”<sup>58</sup> A St. John’s Day Masonic procession in memory of Washington, comprised of the members of several lodges in the vicinity of Norwich, Connecticut, was led by “the Ladies [who] exhibiting a

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<sup>53</sup> Waldstreicher, 168-172.

<sup>54</sup> Newman, 69.

<sup>55</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 4 March 1800.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 February 1800.

very pleasing and brilliant appearance, walked in front of the procession.”<sup>59</sup> In North Carolina, “the Ladies of Fayetteville” marched in the procession on the national day of mourning, behind the bier. They were followed by the members of the local Masonic lodge and “the citizens of the town and vicinage.”<sup>60</sup> The funeral procession that was formed at Old York, District of Maine, on January 2, 1800 included gentlemen with crape on their arms and ladies dressed in white and veiled in crape.<sup>61</sup>

The few instances cited above are the only Washington funeral processions in which the participation of adult women was reported in the forty-two newspapers that comprised the primary sources of this study, the small number of such reports appearing to confirm the supposition that in most towns women did not march with male citizens in the processions.

Although most American women seem to have willingly performed the passive roles of spectators assigned them by the Federalist elites who planned and organized the Washington funeral rites, women’s more active participation in at least one American city’s commemoration became a contested issue when the ladies of Charleston, South Carolina were not invited by the local committee of arrangement to participate in the civic funeral procession. After their not being invited by the organizers to participate in Charleston’s procession on January 15, 1800, a few activist women of the affluent southern port city took the bold initiative of publicly encouraging other women to join them in taking their rightful place in the funeral procession for Washington. The following letter from one of the ladies of Charleston to the editor of the *City Gazette*

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<sup>57</sup> *Newark (New Jersey) Centinel of Freedom*, 14 January 1800.

<sup>58</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800.

<sup>59</sup> *Norwich (Connecticut) Packet*, 2 January 1800.

<sup>60</sup> *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 11 March 1800.

appeared in the newspaper the morning of January 10, 1800, the original scheduled date of the procession that had to be postponed until January 15 due to the inclemency of the weather. The letter is important evidence that, on this important public occasion, a small group of women of the early republic asserted their right to perform an active public role in mourning Washington at a time when their legal and civil rights were generally constrained by restrictive gender-based considerations.

A number of Ladies of the first respectability in society, beg leave to suggest to the sex in general, the propriety of meeting together at the appointed hour of ten in the morning, at the Orphan-House, in order to rank themselves in the procession to take place this day. They deem it a just tribute to the greatest virtues that were ever united, the last tear due to their departed protector and friend. At the same time, they, with heartfelt sorrow, cannot refrain from observing the remissness and inattention paid to them by the committee appointed by the community at large, in not having assigned them a proper station in the procession. Should this card meet approbation, the Authoress further suggests the propriety of wearing some insignia of mourning, testifying their veneration and sorrow for their departed hero and friend. They are aware, that a measure of this nature is unprecedented and not customary; yet, when they reflect that a more worthy occasion never presented itself to form an example, they hope at least to escape censure. S. R.<sup>62</sup>

Although a group of the ladies of Charleston was not listed among the participants in the official account of the procession of January 15, the newspaper report of the event concluded with the observation that “the ladies, of which a great number attended in the church, were dressed in mourning.”<sup>63</sup> The strong desire of the “respectable” women political activists of Charleston to participate in the city’s observance of Washington’s death had first surfaced in the *City Gazette* a week before the civic procession took place. Signing her letter to the editor, “A. J.” one of the “helpless Females” of Charleston wrote:

I have waited, with some impatience, since the death of our beloved WASHINGTON was announced, in hopes of seeing from some abler pen than

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<sup>61</sup> *Boston Columbian Gazette and Massachusetts Federalist*, 15 January 1800.

<sup>62</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 10 January 1800.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 January 1800.

mine, a proposition for us Females to show our gratitude and respect to the memory of the Savior of his country, the Guardian Angel of our Virtue, the protector of our Families, our Children; the man, who, in the deep clad moments of tremendous war, stretched forth his godlike arm to save us all from ruin. Shall we, though helpless Females, be backward in showing some small token of sorrow for his irreparable loss! Far be it from us, my country women, (who have been ever distinguished in their patriotism)! Let us set the example to our sister-states ; let us step forward, like the mothers, the wives, the daughters, of the citizens, the patriots, who mean to distinguish themselves on the solemn occasion. It is true, we can summon no societies; we can form no committees; nor can we join public processions to commemorate his memory; but let us, by one general badge of sorrow, (on Friday, either crape or ribbons) testify our grief for the venerable Cincinnatus, and, in my opinion, the greatest compliment that can be paid to his departed shade.<sup>64</sup> A. J.

Another woman correspondent to the Charleston paper, using the pen name, “Camilla,” submitted a poem to the editor, exhorting women to “join my melancholy theme, and drop a tear to Washington’s great name.” She added a postscript to her letter of transmittal, writing, “Camilla does not presume to dictate, but ventures to hint, that a black sash, worn by the ladies upon this mournful event, would be a suitable appendage to their dress. For why should the sons of America show more respect for their departed hero, than her patriotic daughters?”<sup>65</sup>

What the Charleston women wanted was to be included in their city’s official mourning for George Washington. Their desire to be active participants in the public mourning ritual was to affirm an ideal of society as hierarchical and interdependent, encompassing all ranks, classes, and sexes. They did not want to be a silent, submissive audience as expected by the men who planned the Charleston mourning event. The Charleston women claimed a public role as a right, and they desired to express their patriotism by expressing their relation to the state independent of their fathers and husbands. The letter from “A. J.” blurs this objective somewhat by claiming for women

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 7 January 1800



an independent relation to the state, then by retracting that claim to suggest that women's involvement with the republic was mediated by their fathers and husbands. Despite this inconsistency, however, it is significant that the Charleston women believed that direct participation in the mourning, whether by marching or by wearing emblems of mourning, was more appropriate than by passively serving as symbols of liberty or conducting the traditional female "mourning work."

Small groups of young women participated in some of the funeral processions throughout the nation in a symbolic role, dressed in white robes and strewing laurels in the path of the men bearing the bier of Washington through the streets. Waldstreicher noted the presence of women, often dressed in white, in many of the political celebrations and processions of the early republic. He believes that both Federalists and Republicans gendered nationalism and partisanship by including women dressed in white in their celebrations to signify simultaneously "peace, a feminized virtue, liberty, and nationality."<sup>66</sup> John Higham writes that "it is an interesting historical fact that female symbols provided the chief allegorical device for evoking both the general principles and the specific, indigenous roots of the early American republic."<sup>67</sup> In need of a new symbol to affirm their parity and independence from Britain following the Revolution, Americans reached back to the iconographic heritage of classical humanism. They chose a Roman goddess, Liberty, wearing a plain, white classical gown, to epitomize both their separation from Britain and their common inheritance. The figure of Liberty, often called Columbia, served the dual purposes of symbolizing the role of the ideal woman as

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 232-35.

<sup>67</sup> John Higham, "Indian Princess and Roman Goddess: The First Female Symbols of America," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 100 (Part I, 1990), 79.

embodying and upholding fixed moral principles and also of proclaiming the permanence and purity of the political creed on which the new nation was founded.<sup>68</sup> The use of symbolic figures of women dressed in white in the iconography of the early republic is exemplified in an early nineteenth-century lithograph of a painting by Samuel Moore representing the apotheosis of Washington. Depicting the shrouded George Washington ascending to heaven surrounded by women representing the seven virtues, the images are interpreted in the text printed below the picture. Sixteen weeping women dressed in white robes who are clustered around the Washington burial urn are identified as “the orphan states, dissolving in sorrow at his tomb, and lamenting the departure of their adored friend, benefactor, and protector.” The “widowed Columbia,” a white-robed female figure standing before her throne, “looks up to [Washington] as the rock of her consolation, taking an eternal farewell of his mortal absence, but whose glory beams forever.”<sup>69</sup>

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich finds evidence of the symbolic importance of women of the early republic in the diary of Henry Sewall, the town clerk of Hallowell, Maine who helped to organize the procession held there on February 22, 1800 in commemoration of the death of Washington. Describing the procession, Sewall recorded in his diary that “at the head, following a military escort, were sixteen misses, clad in white, with black hats and cloaks, and white scarves, representative of the sixteen states of the union.”<sup>70</sup> Ulrich

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-59 and 74-75.

<sup>69</sup> A copy of this rare print by H. Weishaupt, ca. 1820, is in the author’s collection of Washington mourning memorabilia.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s introduction to her book, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 31-32.

observes that, “for the young Daughters of Columbia, it must have been an impressive occasion, a ritual identification of their own lives with the survival of the new nation.”<sup>71</sup> Young ladies in white robes participated in at least ten of the Washington funeral processions. Forty-eight young ladies, dressed in white, with white turbans trimmed with black ribbon, carried bunches of laurel in their hands in the Oxford, New Jersey procession, and it was reported that “this beautiful and affecting sight was beheld with admiration by all.”<sup>72</sup> Sixty-eight girls in white, one for each of the years of George Washington’s life, marched at the front of the procession held on January 19, 1800 in Savannah, Georgia.<sup>73</sup> Clothed in white robes and wearing proper badges of mourning, sixteen young ladies, one for each of the sixteen states of the union, chanted an occasional ode as the funeral procession entered the meetinghouse in Concord, Massachusetts on January 16, 1800.<sup>74</sup> In the New York City procession on December 31, 1799, twenty-four girls in white surplices and turbans strewed laurels immediately in front of the bier as it was carried through the streets.<sup>75</sup> Girls dressed in white frocks, with black scarves, marched in the procession at Raleigh, North Carolina, and thirty-eight young ladies in white, with white turbans trimmed with “black love,” preceded the bier in the Bridgetown, New Jersey procession.<sup>76</sup> Young women dressed in white robes also

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 14 February 1800.

<sup>73</sup> *Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 14 February 1800.

<sup>74</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 February 1800.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 January 1800.

<sup>76</sup> *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 25 February 1800; *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 4 March 1800.

performed ceremonial roles around the symbolic bier of Washington during the memorial services held in Alexandria, Virginia, Trenton, New Jersey, and Wilmington, Delaware.<sup>77</sup>

Although there appear to have been only a relatively small number of Washington funeral processions that included adult women and young ladies dressed in white as actors, thousands of American women participated in the funeral rites by performing politically and culturally important roles as mourners at the memorial services that were held in churches and public buildings at the conclusion of the funeral processions. In Augusta, Georgia, “a large assemblage of ladies, dressed in mourning, attended the address at the church . . . their countenances expressive of their keen sensibility.”<sup>78</sup> A Baltimore newspaper, the *Federal Gazette*, reported that on February 22, 1800, the national day of mourning, “we were pleased to observe all ranks, ages, and sexes mingle together in undistinguished groups, and, clad in suitable habiliments of woe, throng the temples of the Most High, and hang with rapturous admiration on the divine services of the day.”<sup>79</sup> In Burlington, New Jersey, on February 22, 1800, the ladies who had previously taken their seats in the church in advance of the memorial service were later joined by the men who had participated in the procession.<sup>80</sup> The inhabitants of Roxbury, Massachusetts, “of both sexes and of all ages, appeared to be actuated by one soul in a spontaneous show of gratitude to the memory of [Washington]” during the town’s funeral rites.<sup>81</sup> The south front gallery of the church in Worcester, Massachusetts was reserved for the ladies who attended the town’s memorial service on February 22, 1800, and “a

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<sup>77</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 12 March 1800; *Centinel of Liberty and George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 31 January 1800; and *Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 26 February 1800.

<sup>78</sup> *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 18 January 1800.

<sup>79</sup> *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 24 February 1800.

<sup>80</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 28 February 1800.

<sup>81</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 18 January 1800.

numerous and respectable assemblage of ladies” were already seated in the North Carolina statehouse when the funeral procession entered for the memorial service held in Raleigh on the national day of mourning.<sup>82</sup>

Another significant way in which women acted politically and also expressed their grief for the death of George Washington was to wear feminine versions of badges of mourning in emulation of the men who complied with the proclamation of President John Adams that all people [men] of the United States should wear crape on the left arm for thirty days.<sup>83</sup> “We hope the ladies will adopt some appropriate designs of sorrow, to be called the Washington mourning,” wrote the editor of Boston’s *Columbian Centinel* in early January 1800.<sup>84</sup> Citing a precedent from classical antiquity to legitimize the role of women in mourning the death of men of civic prominence, a correspondent to the *Centinel* submitted the following proposal that women wear appropriate symbols of mourning on the death of Washington.

The Roman Ladies mourned for Brutus a whole year. The Females of America are certainly not inspired with a less ardent attachment to their country. A Correspondent would therefore suggest the propriety of mingling with their ornaments some token of sorrow, upon the present mournful occasion.—That when the stranger passes by, he may observe and say, “Behold how they loved him.” That when the youthful warrior looks at this badge of grief, he may remember WASHINGTON and emulate his virtues. So will the spirit of our beloved Chief smile benignantly upon his daughters, and advocate their prayers at the throne of Grace!<sup>85</sup>

A Providence, Rhode Island newspaper report indicated that the churches of Philadelphia on Sunday, December 22, had been shrouded in black, and “the fair of that city, as if by

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<sup>82</sup> *Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette*, 19 February 1800; *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 25 February 1800.

<sup>83</sup> The proclamation was issued by President Adams on December 24, 1799 in compliance with the resolution of Congress of the previous day. See for example the *Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 7 January 1800.

<sup>84</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 December 1799.

common consent, laid aside their gay attire and appeared in the habit of grief.”<sup>86</sup> A local woman’s letter to the editor of *The Providence Gazette* proposed a design for a badge of mourning to be worn by all women of America:

Is there a Lady in the United States, who will not evince her patriotic sorrow by wearing a mourning badge in honor to the memory of the man of all hearts—the savior of his country—the illustrious WASHINGTON? The Badge contemplated consists of a long piece of black crape, or tiffany, fastened at the right shoulder by a button, and depending on a knot on the left side.—When this insignia is concealed by a cloak, or otherwise, a plain black knot round or through the muff is proposed.—To be worn two months at least.

In compliance with the wishes of a circle. AMICITIA.<sup>87</sup>

Women in towns throughout the nation wore badges of mourning in memory of Washington. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, it was reported that on the day of the town’s funeral rites, “mourning crapes were worn by almost every individual of any respectability. The Ladies in particular manifested those delicate attentions which refined sensibilities pay to departed heroism and virtue.”<sup>88</sup> At a town meeting, the citizens of New London, Connecticut resolved that men of the town should wear black crape on their left arm and the ladies “a black rose on the left breast” for four weeks.<sup>89</sup> By resolution of the citizens of Boston at a town meeting called to plan for the public mourning, the ladies of the town were to wear “black ribbands” from January 9 to February 22, 1800, while the men were to wear “crape or a black ribband” on their left arm below the elbow for the same period.<sup>90</sup> One of the Boston papers reported that on January 9, the day of Boston’s civic commemoration of Washington, “every Lady

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<sup>86</sup> Extract from a letter to the editor from a member of the Senate, in *The Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>87</sup> *Providence Gazette*, 28 December, 1799.

<sup>88</sup> *Boston Massachusetts Mercury*, 10 January 1800.

<sup>89</sup> *Norwich (Connecticut) Packet*, 2 January 1800.

<sup>90</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 1 January 1800.

exhibited some badge of mourning, chosen and placed by particular fancy.”<sup>91</sup> Thomas Brewer, a merchant in Boston advertised a “mourning vignette” stamped on satin ribbon for ladies to wear on their arms on public occasions, and the artist who designed the vignette also designed “a very elegant zone, or girdle,” which could be worn as a badge of mourning.<sup>92</sup> In Trenton, New Jersey, a pastor of a local church read aloud President Adams’s proclamation that the people of the United States were to wear a crape armband for thirty days, and then requested the women in his congregation to wear a badge of mourning to divine services for the next three months.<sup>93</sup>

A widely-published description of how women were to be dressed for the first of Abigail Adams’s “drawing rooms” in Philadelphia following the death of Washington served the dual purposes of legitimizing women’s participation in the national mourning and of encouraging the ladies of the United States to wear mourning dress. The ladies who planned to attend Mrs. Adams’s next drawing room on December 27, 1799 were requested to wear “white, trimmed with black ribbon, black gloves and fans.” The wives of government officials were asked to wear black dresses.<sup>94</sup> As mentioned above in the discussion of the Federalist political salon culture, Fredrika J. Teute has studied the “republican court” culture of the new national government during the 1790s. Based in the homes of government officials and supervised by women, formal receptions and salons provided opportunities for women to influence the emerging political culture of the national capital. Martha Washington held weekly levees in New York and Philadelphia, social gatherings that were attended by President Washington, other

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<sup>91</sup> *Boston Massachusetts Mercury*, 10 January 1800.

<sup>92</sup> *Boston J. Russell’s Gazette*, 16 January 1800 and 23 January 1800.

<sup>93</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 1 January 1800.

<sup>94</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799.

prominent figures in his administration, and their wives. Teute writes that these social gatherings in the national capital were presided over by “a circle of women connected to power and wealth by birth and marriage,” and they were attended by “politicians, foreign emissaries, men and women of arts, letters, and science.” When John Adams succeeded Washington to the presidency, Abigail Adams continued the weekly receptions that had been established by her predecessor, writing to her daughter that, upon her arrival in the new capital in Washington in 1800, “the ladies are impatient for a drawing room.”<sup>95</sup>

Mrs. Adams was apparently pleased with the success of her first drawing room following the death of Washington. On December 30, 1799, she wrote to her sister:

Last Friday’s drawing room was the most crowded of any I ever had. Upwards of a hundred Ladies and near as many Gentlemen attended, all in mourning. The Ladies’ grief did not deprive them of taste in ornamenting their white dresses, two yards of black mode in length, of the narrow kind pleated upon one shoulder, crossed the back in the form of a military sash tied at the side, crossed the petticoat and hung at the bottom of it, were worn by many. Others wore epaulets of black silk trimmed with fringe upon each shoulder, black ribbon in points upon the gown and coat, some plain ribbon, some black chenille, etc. Their caps were crape with black plumes or black flowers, black gloves and fans.<sup>96</sup>

In their mourning dress, many American women apparently emulated the published dress code for the ladies who attended Mrs. Adams’s drawing room on December 27, 1799.

One example of how closely her example was followed is evident in the instructions to ladies who would be attending the funeral rites in Augusta, Georgia on January 14, 1800. The women of Augusta were requested to wear “white, trimmed with black ribbon, black gloves and fans” to the town’s funeral ceremonies.<sup>97</sup> Several other examples have been cited previously in which women wore white gowns with black sashes and other similar

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<sup>95</sup> Fredrika J. Teute, in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages*, 95-96.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Olivier Bernier, *The World in 1800* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000), 169.

<sup>97</sup> *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 11 January 1800.



symbols of mourning that closely followed the prescribed dress code for the women who attended Abigail Adams's drawing room in the national capital.<sup>98</sup>

Women's gender-specific roles in mourning Washington were consistent with the contemporary culture of mourning in America in which women did the cultural "grief work." Jeffrey Steele points out that men and women were positioned differently within the pre-Civil War culture of mourning in America, and their respective roles were based on stereotypical notions of women's emotionality as opposed to men's rationality. "As the designated 'heart' of America, women were expected to perform the emotional work of mourning that helped support prevailing notions of gender difference."<sup>99</sup> Steele explains that the complex mourning rituals of the time prescribed the attire and social decorum of mourning women, on whom the burden of mourning fell primarily. Too, in both England and America, the female mourner became the most familiar symbol of grief, and representations of mourning women weeping over a tomb were duplicated in artistic images, needlework, and other graphic displays.<sup>100</sup> Evidence that American women were intended to bear primarily the burden of mourning the death of Washington can be found in many of the sermons and orations that were delivered at public memorial services around the nation. As they neared the end of their funeral discourses, the orators often turned to the women in the audience and charged them with the task of properly

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<sup>98</sup> This widespread copying of Abigail Adams's dress code for women mourning the death of Washington may be one of the earliest examples in United States history of a "first lady's" starting a fashion fad by modeling a style that is later emulated by women throughout the nation. Examples of this fashion phenomenon include the popularity of Mrs. Dolley Madison's turbans, Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower's hairstyle featuring "bangs," her pink dresses, and "Republican cloth coats," Mrs. John F. Kennedy's "princess-style" dresses and "pillbox" hats, and Mrs. Barbara Bush's ever-present necklace, a pearl "choker."

<sup>99</sup> Jeffrey Steele, "The Gender and Racial Politics of Mourning in Antebellum America," in Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 91-106.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* See also Anita Schorsch, *Mourning Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation* (Clinton, New Jersey: The Main Street Press, 1976).

mourning the death of the Father of His Country. “Ye fair! Give him the tribute of your tears! For his sword was the guardian-genius of your honor, safety, and peace,” William Pitt Beers advised the women of Albany, New York as he concluded his funeral oration.<sup>101</sup> The women of Rockaway, New Jersey were admonished, “Ye Daughters of Columbia, weep and mourn for the loss of your protector and friend—for you, he forsook his ease, endured the fatigues of the army, and hazarded the dangers of battle; and while he lived, notwithstanding his advanced age, he stood ready to meet the foe who should dare to threaten your virtue, your prerogatives, your peace. Let, then, your tender hearts be suitably affected on this mournful occasion.”<sup>102</sup> The gendered mourning roles of women and men in the early republic were differentiated clearly by the Reverend Samuel G. Bishop who appealed to the “tender sympathies” of the women in his congregation in Pittsfield, New Hampshire:

Ye fair daughters of America, whose gentler bosoms and softer hearts are better qualified for tender sympathies than ours, weep, weep over Washington, your friend and protector from lawless rage; whose virtues beam with luster, like the meridian sun; who hath not only clothed you with scarlet, with other delights, and put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel, but hath decked you with liberty, and placed on your defenseless heads the sparkling diadem of freedom, bespangled with many invaluable privileges.<sup>103</sup>

Many of the preachers and eulogists at the Washington memorial services also promoted the importance of the yet-unnamed domestic and political role of “Republican

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<sup>101</sup> William Pitt Beers, *An Oration on the Death of General Washington, Pronounced before the Citizens of Albany, on Tuesday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1800* (Albany: Printed by Charles R. and George Webster, 1800), 17.

<sup>102</sup> John I. Carle, *A Funeral Sermon Preached at Rockaway, December 29, 1799, on the Much Lamented Death of General George Washington Who Departed This Life, December 14, 1799, at Mount Vernon, in the Sixty-Eighth Year of His Age. By John I. Carle, A. M., Pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Rockaway* (Morristown, New Jersey: Printed by Jacob Mann, 1800), 22.

<sup>103</sup> Samuel G. Bishop, “*An Eulogium on the Death of General George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Armies of America. Pronounced February 22<sup>nd</sup>, A. D. 1800, at the Meeting House in Pittsfield, Rockingham County, State of New Hampshire* (Gilmanton, New Hampshire: Published for the author by E. Russell, March 1800), 15. The reference to the women’s being clothed in scarlet and gold ornaments is an allusion to the Biblical account of David’s saying to the women of Israel when King Saul died, “Ye

Motherhood” as they charged the women in their audiences with the task of raising their children to follow the example of Washington. In this manner, the national mourning played a key role in advancing the new ideal of republican motherhood, giving women a civic role through their enhanced performance of a traditional duty. For example, during his eulogy on the character of Washington, delivered in Worcester, Massachusetts on the national day of mourning, Aaron Bancroft turned his attention to the women in his audience and exhorted them to mourn the death of Washington, their protector, and to teach their children about his virtues.

Weep, ye fair Daughters of Columbia! Weep in sympathy with her, from whom is removed the greatest and best of men, whose residue of life must be dark and solitary.—Weep for yourselves, your Protector is no more! While alive he never oppressed the heart of tenderness, nor caused the tear of distress to fall from the eye of sensibility! Through lust of triumph, he never made the wife a widow, or the child an orphan: He never consumed the widow’s morsel, or the orphan’s bread. His conquests were those of humanity: His power was ever exercised in defense of innocence and virtue. Bedew then his urn with the tear of gratitude! Teach your children to lisp his praise: Instill into their minds his spirit; and cherish in them the growth of his virtues.<sup>104</sup>

Expressing similar sentiments to those of Aaron Bancroft, Doctor Daniel Adams addressed the women in attendance at a memorial service in Leominster, Massachusetts.

Ye Daughters Fair, Columbia’s Pride and Boast! Speak of his virtues, admire his excellence, extol his worth. Youth, enraptured at the thought, shall feel more heroism, and virtue extend its reign on earth. Let the Sire with sorrowing heart, and grave Matròn, whose tears on tender minds deep impress the thought, tell to their listening children the sad tale of their grief. Tell them that WASHINGTON once lived—inculcate his example, commend him for their imitation—then shall future WASHINGTONS arise, and AMERICA perpetuate her liberties, unshaken by the convulsive throws of time, so long as nations exist on Earth, or virtue finds praise in Heaven<sup>105</sup>

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daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet with other delights, and put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.”

<sup>104</sup> Aaron Bancroft, *An Eulogy on the Character of the Late Gen. George Washington, Delivered before the Inhabitants of the Town of Worcester, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, on Saturday, the 22d of February 1800* (Worcester: Printed by Isaiah Thomas, Jr., March 1800), 18-19.

Perhaps none of the orators more completely articulated the elements of historian Linda Kerber's notion of the cultural role of "Republican Motherhood" than did the Reverend John V. Weylie, the Episcopal rector of the parish of Frederick, Virginia, in a funeral sermon delivered on February 22, 1800. The twenty-three year-old Reverend Weylie was a graduate of the Academy of Alexandria, a free school for poor children in Alexandria, Virginia to which George Washington had contributed money annually for many years and had bequeathed stock worth \$4,000 in his will.<sup>106</sup> Shortly before he finished delivering his funeral oration, Reverend Weylie addressed the women of the Parish of Frederick who were in the audience, noting their exclusion from the public sphere but elevating the importance of their domestic sphere responsibility to raise their children to become virtuous republican citizens.

As for you, fair Daughters of Columbia, nature hath exempted you from the tumultuous scenes of public life. To you is consigned the pleasing and important task of *rearing the tender mind, and teaching the young idea how to shoot*. It is in your province to direct the years of infancy and childhood, and to you we are generally indebted for the first rudiments of education. You have it in your power to stamp what impressions you please on the minds of your children; and the impressions which they now receive will most probably be indelible. You may cause the gem of virtue to shoot forth with luxuriance and vigor; or by unskillful management, you may retard its growth, and fix it in a long and unprofitable sterility. It is in your power to retrieve, in some measure, the heavy loss which your country hath sustained, by instilling into your children such principles as may render them the WARRENS, the GREENES, and the WASHINGTONS of future times. The prospect of this will surely be sufficient to make you watch over your offspring with the most assiduous care, in order to guard them from every vicious propensity.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Daniel Adams, *An Oration, Sacred to the Memory of Gen. George Washington, Delivered at Leominster, February 22, 1800* (Leominster, Massachusetts: Printed by Adams & Wilder, 1800), 25.

<sup>106</sup> John V. Weylie to George Washington, 11 March 1789, in *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, 1: 386-387 and 387n.

<sup>107</sup> John V. Weylie, *A Funeral Sermon in Commemoration of the Virtues of General Washington, Delivered by the Rev'd John V. Weylie, on the Twenty-Second of February, at the Parish of Frederick, and County of Frederick* (Published at the request of the audience.) Note: This sermon was included in a bound volume of pamphlets from the personal library of St. George Tucker of Williamsburg, Virginia—in the possession of Swem Library Special Collections, the College of William and Mary.

The newspaper accounts of women's participation in the funeral rituals in commemoration of Washington and the portions of the funeral sermons directed to them provide useful evidence in support of the argument that American women performed a variety of politically and culturally important roles during the national mourning for George Washington. Even though a relatively small number of women marched with the men in the funeral processions, thousands of women attended memorial services, wore badges of mourning as testimony to their grief, and heard the charges from the funeral orators to go forth and be good "Republican Mothers" by raising future virtuous Washingtons to serve the republic. Probably though one of the most culturally unconventional and highly visible public roles played by any woman during the national mourning for Washington was that of an unidentified "Lady" who delivered a eulogy on Washington in the Old Presbyterian Church of New York City immediately after the civic procession held there on December 31, 1799. The prominent statesman, Gouverneur Morris, was selected to deliver the main public eulogy during the civic memorial service held at St. Paul's Episcopalian Church. While Morris was speaking, the New York "Lady" was also delivering a eulogy to an audience assembled at the Presbyterian Church. The newspaper announcement of this unprecedented event stated that, "As many persons cannot be accommodated with seats at St. Paul's, immediately after the procession, an eulogium on the character of the late General Washington will be delivered in the Old Presbyterian Church by a Lady, in testimony of the gratitude of the fair Daughters of Columbia for the illustrious hero."<sup>108</sup> Several other newspapers around

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted from the *New York Argus* in the *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 3 January 1800.

the nation printed the newsworthy story, reporting the shocking news that “An Eulogium on the illustrious deceased has been pronounced, at New York, by a Lady.”<sup>109</sup>

### Children and Youth

Many American children and young people were included in the public demonstrations of grief that followed the death of Washington. They marched in funeral processions, participated in memorial services, and heard eulogies and sermons in which ministers and other orators encouraged them to lead virtuous lives by following the example of their “common father,” George Washington. School children, usually accompanied by their schoolmasters, marched as a group in about half of the eighty-three processions examined in this study. In about fifty percent of the funeral processions in which they appeared, the school groups marched either in front or near the front of the parade. Both boys and girls participated in the processions, but they usually marched in separate groups. “Male youths” aged eight to fourteen marched in the procession held in Brunswick, Maine.<sup>110</sup> In Charlestown, Massachusetts, “male children” aged seven to fourteen marched as a group, followed by “young men” aged fourteen to twenty-five.<sup>111</sup> “Male youths” aged ten to fourteen, accompanied by their instructors, marched eight deep in Boston’s civic procession on January 9, 1800, and 250 “male youth,” arranged by their schoolmasters according to height, appeared in the procession in Worcester, Massachusetts.<sup>112</sup> Representing each year of Washington’s life, sixty-eight boys from the different academies of Savannah, Georgia, with their tutors, marched in the funeral

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<sup>109</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, Boston, 8 January 1800; *Portsmouth New Hampshire Gazette*, 15 January 1800; *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 9 January 1800.

<sup>110</sup> *Jenks’ Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 3 February 1800.

procession held in that city of January 19, 1800.<sup>113</sup> Over one hundred “male youths” between eight and twelve years of age marched in the procession in Medford, Massachusetts.<sup>114</sup> The orphans of Charleston, South Carolina, marched with the commissioners of the city’s Orphan House in the funeral procession of January 15, 1800.<sup>115</sup> Boys under fourteen years of age, under the guidance of their respective instructors, participated in the Roxbury, Massachusetts procession, while young men between ages fourteen and eighteen marched as a separate group. The younger boys were described as “leaning on childhood,” while those approaching fourteen were nearing their apprenticeship, their ages spanning “the space in life to receive instruction.”<sup>116</sup> The “young ladies of the Academy,” preceded by Miss Taylor, marched in the procession in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and the “young misses” of Miss Balch’s school appeared in the Providence, Rhode Island procession, “habited in the white robes of innocence, decorated with the appropriate insignia of grief.”<sup>117</sup> Most of the girls and young women who participated in the funeral rites wore white robes or gowns, symbolic of the grieving nation in the tradition of the early republic’s iconographic use of the female figure dressed in white to represent America.

Children and youth were also in attendance at some of the memorial services held around the country as evidenced by the frequency with which funeral orators addressed a

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<sup>111</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 January 1800; *Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette*, 19 February 1800.

<sup>113</sup> *Centinel of Liberty and George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 14 February 1800.

<sup>114</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 22 January 1800.

<sup>115</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 17 January 1800.

<sup>116</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 18 January 1800.

<sup>117</sup> *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Advertiser*, 11 March 1800; *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 1 March 1800.

portion of their remarks to the young people who were present.<sup>118</sup> Turning his attention to the 250 male youths between ages eight and eighteen who had participated in the Worcester, Massachusetts procession on the national day of mourning, and who were subsequently seated in the galleries of the meetinghouse, Aaron Bancroft counseled his young listeners to emulate the example of Washington.

Dwell, ye Youth, on his merits, till you rise to admiration of his character! Enkindle in your hearts the love of country: Fan in your souls the fire of patriotism: Like him reverence your Maker: Regard moral obligations: Covet his endowments: Emulate his purity, his integrity, and disinterestedness. Then shall you rise up to fill the honorable stations of society; and your country will call you blessed.<sup>119</sup>

Royall Tyler, the orator at Bennington, Vermont's memorial service on February 22, 1800, acknowledged the presence of children in his audience, saying to them:

And even, my little friends, who came with your parents to weep over the grave of your political father; though you are too young to value his worth, or know your loss; yet, if you would become the comfort of your parents, and the pride of your country, reflect, and let it excite your emulation, that this unrivalled hero, this delight of every heart, this matchless Washington was once an infant in the cradle. . . And who but the Omniscient can declare that I do not, among the smallest of you, see some future statesman who shall give energy to our public councils; some warrior who shall free our country from invasion; or some little Washington who, like his great predecessor, shall unite all talents and all hearts?<sup>120</sup>

In Providence, Rhode Island, the Reverend Doctor Enos Hitchcock, a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, interrupted his learned discourse during the memorial service for Washington to address "my little children and young friends" as follows:

Though you may never have seen the person of our beloved Washington, yet you have often heard his name, and of the good he has done; and you are

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<sup>118</sup> Twenty-three of the 300 funeral orations examined as part of this study contained remarks specifically addressed by the speakers to children and youth seated in the audience.

<sup>119</sup> Aaron Bancroft, "*An Eulogy on the Character of the Late Gen. George Washington*," (Worcester, Massachusetts: Isaiah Thomas, Junior, 1800), 19.

<sup>120</sup> Royall Tyler, *An Oration, Pronounced at Bennington, Vermont, on the 22d February, 1800. In Commemoration of the Death of General George Washington* (Walpole, New Hampshire: Printed for Thomas & Thomas, by David Carlisle, 1800), 13-14.



now enjoying the fruit of his labors, in the opportunity you enjoy for instruction. He was once young, as you now are; and when young he was diligent in learning, and amiable in conduct; and when old he reaped the fruits of sober youth. He was beloved by all; he was virtuous; he was happy. We venerate his memory now he is gone, because he was as good as he was great. Let his name be ever dear to you, and never speak, never think of him but with gratitude, respect, and affection.<sup>121</sup>

In a footnote added to the printed version of his discourse, Doctor Hitchcock defended his addressing the children by remarking that “to anyone who was present and saw the interesting and effecting exhibition of the young masters and misses, with appropriate dresses, emblematical of innocence and mourning, no apology is necessary for this address. Nor will it appear improper to anyone who considers the importance of the rising generation; or the advantages they enjoy from the freedom of their country, through its deceased patron.”<sup>122</sup>

It seems clear that the purpose of including children in the public observances of the death of Washington was to teach them about his life and character and to provide them with an unforgettable experience that would encourage their honoring and respecting the memory of Washington throughout their lives. “Let us impress on the minds of our children and youth a sense of the virtues and talents of Washington, and urge them to go and do likewise,” preached the Reverend Doctor Samuel Stillman, during his sermon delivered on Sunday, December 29, 1799, in Boston’s First Baptist Church.<sup>123</sup> The didactic value of using Washington’s life as an example for children was emphasized

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<sup>121</sup> Enos Hitchcock, *A Discourse on the Dignity and Excellence of the Human Character; Illustrated in the Life of General George Washington, Late Commander of the Armies, and President of the United States. In Commemoration of the Afflictive Event of His Death. Delivered February 22, 1800, in the Benevolent Congregational Church in Providence, and Published by Request of that Society* (Providence: Printed by John Carter, Junior, 1800), 30-31.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>123</sup> Samuel Stillman, *A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of George Washington, Late Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America, Who Died December 14, 1799, Aged 68* (Boston: Printed by Manning & Loring, 1800), 22.

by Harvard University Professor David Tappan who remarked during his oration on February 21, 1800, that “American parents and teachers of youth should use the life of Washington as a volume from which to teach children to emulate his virtues and to honor his memory.”<sup>124</sup> The special role that mothers were to play in educating their sons to follow the example of Washington was noted previously in the discussion of the cultural role of “Republican Motherhood” that was assigned to women of the early republic.

Another way in which children were involved in mourning the death of Washington was through their participation in special school activities commemorating the Father of His Country. On the national day of mourning, February 22, 1800, the children of Mr. Payne’s School on Federal Street in Boston marched in a procession, bearing a bust of Washington, and then took part in a commemorative exhibition attended by their parents and friends. The students played a number of different roles in the program. A choir of children sang an ode and a psalm, seven boys each read a portion of Washington’s farewell address, a young lady read an occasional poem, and a ten-year old boy, Master Sigourney, delivered an address in which he encouraged his fellow students to emulate the example of Washington. “This illustrious personage whose loss we mourn was our friend,” declared Master Sigourney in words that belied his youth, and “for us he fought; for us he persevered; and for us he conquered. For us he has exhibited a character unexampled in history; and for us he has left those precepts of wisdom, if duly regarded, cannot fail to give us all that human beings can hope for in a social state.”<sup>125</sup> The pupils of Mr. Biglow’s Academy in Salem, Massachusetts “lisp[ed] the praises of Washington”

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<sup>124</sup> David Tappan, *An Address in Latin, by Joseph Willard, S.T.D., L.L.D., President, and a Discourse in English, by David Tappan, S.T.D., Hollis Professor of Divinity; Delivered before the University in Cambridge, February 21, 1800, in Solemn Commemoration of General George Washington* (Boston: Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 31.

on February 22, 1800 by reading before a large audience at Concert Hall several excerpts from some of the best funeral orations that had been delivered around the country during the period of national mourning.<sup>126</sup> At the close of their elocutionary exercises on December 24, 1799, three students at the Frederick, Maryland Academy, dressed in deep mourning, spoke an “Elegiac Ode” in alternate stanzas, enticing “the tributary tear from the sympathizing audience.” The verses of the Ode were transmitted to the printers of the *Federal Gazette* by a correspondent who noted that it “must be of the highest importance to impress deeply the minds of youth with the most illustrious example of him, for whom our country now mourns.”<sup>127</sup> Signing his letter, “A. B. C. Darian,” one of the teachers at an academy for young ladies also located in Frederick, Maryland, forwarded to the *Federal Gazette* an example of a composition written by one of his students that was submitted in response to an assignment to write a “subject piece” on Washington for their weekly composition. “Look round my countrymen,” wrote the young woman, “behold the advantages you possess—see your properties secured—behold the flourishing state of your country, your fields cultivated, your cities rising, your navies spread over the ocean, and commerce riding in your ports: These are the advantages we owe to him . . . and these are the blessings which endear his remembrance in the breast of every honest American.”<sup>128</sup>

Perhaps one of the most poignant examples of children’s participation in the funeral rites was the appearance in an Alexandria, Virginia procession of the poor students “dressed in a new suit of mourning” who attended the town’s free school that

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<sup>125</sup> The account of the program at Mr. Payne’s School was contained in a letter from “A Friend to Youth” to the printer of the *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 March 1800.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 March 1800.

<sup>127</sup> *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 28 December 1799.

had been supported financially by George Washington during his lifetime and that was the beneficiary of a generous bequest in his last will and testament. Adopting the recommendation of the committee of arrangements, the town council of Alexandria on January 22, 1800 had passed a resolution to provide a suit of clothes “for each of the poor scholars educated at the expense of this Corporation, in order that they may join in the procession of citizens” on February 22, 1800.<sup>129</sup> These Alexandria, Virginia free school students wearing their new suits of mourning clothes joined the orphans of Charleston, South Carolina, the school children of Concord, Massachusetts carrying their black quills, and hundreds of other children and youth from around the country who wore badges of mourning and marched in funeral processions in commemoration of the death of their “common father,” General George Washington. What could have been a more poignant metaphor for the “orphaned” citizens of America, “children” mourning the death of their “father,” than the young school children who were invited to join in the funeral rituals held around the nation?

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 December 1799.

<sup>129</sup> *The Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 24 January 1800.

CHAPTER FIVE

FRATERNAL MOURNING: THE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI  
AND THE FREEMASONS HONOR THE MEMORY OF  
THEIR ILLUSTRIOUS BROTHER, GEORGE WASHINGTON

My Respected Friends of the Cincinnati. . . You, Gentlemen  
have a double share in the common affliction occasioned by his  
death. He was your *beloved Commander in Chief*. He was your  
*venerated President-General*.

The Reverend Enos Hitchcock, Providence, Rhode Island  
22 February 1800

*Weep, Oh Masons, your Brother is no more!*  
Inscription on memorial obelisk, Temple Lodge No. 53,  
Albany, New York

While most Americans mourned the death of George Washington as their  
“father,” thousands of Freemasons and members of the Cincinnati mourned the death of  
their “brother.” As an indication of the importance of fraternal mourning following the  
death of Washington, numerous accounts of the mourning activities of the fraternal  
orders of the Society of the Cincinnati and the Freemasons filled the columns of the  
nation’s newspapers during the period of national mourning. Publicly identified with  
both fraternal organizations, Washington had been the most prominent member of both  
the Society of the Cincinnati and the Masons. Both troubled organizations sought to

capitalize on their brotherly ties to Washington by their conspicuous participation in public and fraternal mourning events, hoping to advance their causes by further linking their organizational identity to their illustrious Brother, George Washington.

### The Society of the Cincinnati

At the time of his death, George Washington was the president-general of the Society of the Cincinnati, a fraternal order of former Revolutionary War officers that was founded at the close of the war in 1783. When Washington died sixteen years later, the organization was struggling for survival, its membership base shrinking as a result of the deaths of many of the aging former continental army officers. However, notwithstanding the weakened status of their order, the state chapters of the Society of the Cincinnati rallied their dwindling memberships to take an active role in mourning the death of their former commander in chief and president-general of their fraternal order. In his introduction to a funeral oration before fellow citizens and the members of the Society of the Cincinnati of the State of Delaware in Wilmington on February 22, 1800, Edward Roche, secretary of the state society, acknowledged the decline of the organization as evidenced by their weakness and small numbers:

The Society of the Cincinnati of Delaware advance to contribute their part in the public testimonials of sorrow for the death and honor the memory of the late illustrious Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States. Though our numbers are few, and our means may be weak, yet when it is remembered that the distinguished HERO whose death is deplored, was our Leader in War, our President in Peace; and the practical illustrator of those virtues which we profess to cherish and inculcate—we trust it will be allowed, however deficient we may be in expressions, that our feelings are strongly interested.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Roche, *Funeral Oration on the Death of Gen. George Washington: Prepared at the Request of the Society of Cincinnati of the State of Delaware, and pronounced at Wilmington on the 22d Day of February, 1800. By Edward Roche, Secretary of the Society* (Wilmington: Printed at the Franklin Press by James Wilson, 1800), 3.

The Society of the Cincinnati was founded at Fishkill-on-Hudson on May 13, 1783 when a small group of army officers adopted an “institution” (constitution) based on a draft that was drawn up by General Henry Knox the month before. On June 19, 1783, the founding officers of the society elected Washington as president.<sup>2</sup> The Society of the Cincinnati took its name from the Roman citizen-soldier Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus who was twice called from his farm to save Rome in 458 and 439 B.C. Voted dictatorial powers by the Roman Senate, Cincinnatus both times relinquished power and returned to his plow when the crisis had passed. The proposed name of the society seemed especially appropriate since the officers of the American army were contemplating their return to their plows after the successful war of independence, much like Cincinnatus had done hundreds of years before in ancient Rome.<sup>3</sup> The objectives of the fraternal society were to provide a means of perpetuating wartime friendships, to establish a charitable fund to benefit impoverished officers and their survivors, and, though not stated, to continue the struggle for proper compensation for the officers after the army had been disbanded. Disgruntled by the inadequacy of their pay and the dim prospects of receiving a pension at the conclusion of the Revolution, some of the officers had even considered mutiny as they sought a way to influence Congress to fund “half pay for life” as they returned to their homes and plows. But what had begun as a potential mutiny over officers’ pensions moderated into the formation of the Society of the

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<sup>2</sup> W. W. Abbot, ed., *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 1:329n.

<sup>3</sup> Minor Myers, Jr., *Liberty without Anarchy: A History of the Society of Cincinnati* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 16-18; Mark M. Boatner III, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1994), 229-231.

Cincinnati, a constructive alternative to the desperate measures contemplated by some officers at Newburgh, New York.<sup>4</sup>

General George Washington had taken no part in the organization of the society and had attended none of its early meetings, but he was known to be “warmly in favor” of the society. By November 1783, societies had been formed in each of the thirteen states. Under the constitution of the Society of the Cincinnati, the state societies were to be “supreme,” meeting once a year on the Fourth of July, admitting and expelling members, and administering charity to needy officers, their widows, and orphans. A general meeting of the society’s state chapters was to be convened every three years.<sup>5</sup>

Controversy over the founding of the Society of the Cincinnati began almost immediately. The most contentious issues were the organization’s provisions for periodic national meetings, its hereditary and honorary memberships, and the admission of former French officers who had served in the Revolution. To many citizens of the egalitarian early republic, hereditary societies such as the Cincinnati smacked of nobility and aristocracy, mainstays of the English social and political system from which they had so recently fought a long and bloody war to secure their independence. Critics believed that the Society of the Cincinnati would derive its real power from its association with Washington, and they feared that the fraternal organization of former officers had the potential to form the basis of a powerful new order of military aristocracy in America.<sup>6</sup> Fears of the potential creation of an American aristocracy were focused on the provisions of the constitution of the Society of the Cincinnati that stated that membership in the

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<sup>4</sup> Myers, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Garry Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984), 140; Myers, 49-56; James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington and*



order was to pass to the eldest male descendants of the founders, former Revolutionary officers who had served for three years or who were in the army when the war ended. Though generalized opposition to the Cincinnati was manifested throughout the nation, New England quickly became the center of debate over issues related to the propriety of public funding of pensions for the former officers and the creation of a “badge of distinction” within the community by the granting of special privileges because of military service and ancestry.<sup>7</sup> The controversy surrounding the Cincinnati was exacerbated by the appearance in 1783-1784 of a widely-reprinted pamphlet entitled *Considerations on the Society or Order of the Cincinnati . . . Proving That It Creates a Race of Hereditary Patricians or Nobility, Interspersed with Remarks on Its Consequences to the Freedom and Happiness of the Republic*. The pamphlet was signed “Cassius” and is generally attributed to Aedanus Burke, chief justice of South Carolina. Burke charged that the stated purposes of the Society of the Cincinnati, the perpetuation of wartime friendships and the establishment of a charitable fund, were in reality only thinly-veiled disguises for their real intent of creating a hereditary peerage in America. He believed that the only solution to the threat to the republic was to abolish the society altogether.<sup>8</sup>

Washington was alarmed by the Cincinnati controversy because of its politically divisive nature at a critical time when national unity was essential and also his concerns about the potential negative impact on his personal reputation.<sup>9</sup> On April 8, 1784 the retired General Washington, preparing to go to the first general meeting of the Cincinnati

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*the New Nation, 1783-1793* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 63-68; John E. Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 347-48.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace Evan Davies, “The Society of the Cincinnati in New England 1783-1800,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. Ser., V (1948), 3-25.

in Philadelphia, wrote to Thomas Jefferson, then serving as a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress in Annapolis, soliciting his personal opinion of the society and the sentiments of Congress on the matter.<sup>10</sup> Jefferson replied to Washington a week later and confessed that he hoped the general would disassociate himself from the Society of the Cincinnati because of its divisiveness and its implicit denial of the natural equality of all men. Jefferson expressed concern about several of the principles of the society, including its plan of hereditary memberships, its honorary membership provisions, and the national meetings which could lead to public controversy. Jefferson also feared that the hereditary military organization would become “ingrafted into the government,” leading to the establishment of a government based on the privileges and prerogatives of a select group of men who were deemed to be preeminent by birth. Informing Washington that he was unable to find any support for the Society of the Cincinnati among non-military members of Congress and noting the widespread public disapproval of the fraternal order of military officers, Jefferson proposed several radical organizational changes that he thought would be required in order to make the society more acceptable to the public, especially the elimination of the hereditary membership provisions and the plan to hold periodic general meetings.<sup>11</sup>

Convinced of the need for drastic action, George Washington presided over the first general meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati in May 1784. When the meeting convened in Philadelphia on the fifth of May, Washington mounted an effort to abolish the society. He rose and declared the “violent and formidable” opposition that had been

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<sup>8</sup> Flexner, 63-64.

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

<sup>10</sup> George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 8 April 1784, in W. W. Abbot, ed., *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 1:275-76.

expressed in Virginia, and then he asked the delegates of other states to summarize the public's opinion of the Cincinnati in their states. When a movement to disband the society did not materialize as hoped, Washington threatened to resign if fundamental changes in the constitution were not approved.<sup>12</sup> Washington advocated the discontinuance of hereditary and honorary memberships, the turning over of the administration of the society's charitable funds to the respective state legislatures, and the elimination of the provisions to hold periodic general meetings.<sup>13</sup> After vigorous debates under the strong leadership of Washington for nearly two weeks, the delegates to the general meeting finally approved the changes that had been promoted by their president-general.<sup>14</sup> Several of the state chapters of the society, however, delayed implementing the new provisions over the next two years, and Washington's attitude regarding the Society of the Cincinnati seems to have been ambivalent from that time on. He stopped wearing the insignia of the order and did not attend the second national meeting in Philadelphia in 1787, although he was re-elected to the position of president-general and retained that titular post until his death.<sup>15</sup> The seven-year period following Washington's death marked the end of an era for the Society of the Cincinnati as the organization declined and became nearly dormant. The state societies had begun to collapse in the late 1790s, and by 1802 the North Carolina, Georgia, and Delaware chapters had dissolved. The Connecticut society abolished itself in 1804.<sup>16</sup> As the deaths of the former Revolutionary War officers continued to erode the membership base of the Society of the

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 16 April 1784, *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, 1: 287-91; Wills, 141-42.

<sup>12</sup> "Winthrop Sargent's Journal," in *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, 1: 333-335.

<sup>13</sup> "Observations on the Institution of the Society," Washington's personal notes from the general meeting, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, 1: 330-332.

<sup>14</sup> "Winthrop Sargent's Journal," 335-349; and Myers, 58-62.

<sup>15</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, 348.

Cincinnati, hereditary succession to membership was restored at the society's general meeting in Philadelphia in May 1800. Alexander Hamilton was elected at the same meeting to succeed the deceased Washington as president-general of the organization. The Society of the Cincinnati continued its decline during the first decade of the 1800s, and representatives of only four states appeared at the general meeting in 1812. A general period of dormancy at the national level ensued, and it was not until the early 1870s that a general interest in a revival of the Cincinnati began, and triennial meetings began again in 1899.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of their declining membership and weak organizational structure as the eighteenth century came to a close, as soon as the news of Washington's death was received, most of the state chapters of the Society of the Cincinnati convened special meetings of their officers or standing committees and issued resolutions that prescribed the manner in which its members were to mark the passing of their president-general. At least ten of the state chapters resolved that their members should wear crape armbands or other badges of mourning for periods ranging from one to six months. The state chapters of the Society of the Cincinnati of Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island designated a mourning period of six months, while Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia established a mourning period of three months. The Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati designated a period of only one month for its members of the Cincinnati to wear a badge of mourning.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Myers, 198-200.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-232.

<sup>18</sup> All members of the "Cincinnati Society" residing in Connecticut were to wear crape on their left arms, especially on public occasions, until July 4, 1800, the next anniversary of American independence (*Hartford Connecticut Courant*, 13 January 1800); members of the Delaware State Society of Cincinnati were requested to wear for six months a crape on the left arm and a small black rose placed at the top of the ribbon of the order (*Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 18 January

The most highly visible roles played by the Society of the Cincinnati in the national mourning for Washington were as pallbearers and chief mourners in the funeral processions. This role was first performed by the six former Revolutionary War colonels who served as pallbearers at Washington's burial at Mount Vernon on December 18, 1799. The role of Washington's pallbearers was reprised by members of the Society of the Cincinnati in about twenty percent of the 83 processions that were examined as part of this study. Six former Revolutionary War officers, dressed in their military uniforms, carried the pall over the bier of Washington in the congressional procession in Philadelphia on December 26, 1799, and a group of members of the society marched behind the bier.<sup>19</sup> The Society of the Cincinnati of New York played a leadership role in organizing the New York City funeral procession on December 31, 1799. Six Revolutionary War colonels and two generals served as pallbearers, each of them accompanied by a fellow member of the Cincinnati wearing full mourning and carrying a

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1800); the society of Georgia resolved that its members were to wear black crape in their hats and around the left arm for three months (*Savannah Georgia Gazette*, 16 January 1800); the Maryland Society of the Cincinnati resolved to wear until July 4, 1800, a stripe of black, passing along the center of the ribbon of the order (*Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 30 December 1799); the Standing Committee of the Society of Cincinnati of the State of Massachusetts recommended that members wear during the ensuing month of January a black crape on the left arm below the elbow, interwoven through the center with a deep green tassel (*Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799); a special meeting of the Society of the State of New York resolved unanimously that members will wear full mourning, "as for a Father" for six months, during which time they would also wear the badge of the Society, covered with black crape (*New York Spectator*, New York, 25 December 1799); the Pennsylvania State Society of the Cincinnati unanimously adopted a resolution that members would wear mourning, connected with the badge of the Society, for six months—a strip of black ribbon passing along the center of the ribbon of the order (*Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 28 December 1799); The Standing Committee of the Rhode Island State Society of the Cincinnati resolved unanimously that members wear black crape or ribbon on the left arm, below the elbow, until June 30, 1800 (*Providence Gazette*, 18 January 1800); at an extra meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati of South Carolina, it was resolved unanimously that the Society would go into mourning for three months, each member to appear every Sunday in full uniform, with the insignia of the society, a crape on the left arm, and their swords dressed with love-ribbon, and all other days during the three months, a crape on the left arm (*Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, South Carolina, 3 January 1800); a special meeting of the State Society of the Cincinnati of Virginia convened in Richmond on December 18, 1799 resolved unanimously that those in attendance would wear a black crape on the left arm for three months, "and they cannot suppress their expectations that the same mark of sorrow and respect will be shown by every other member of the society in Virginia (*Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 20 December 1800).

black banner denoting one of Washington's important achievements. The pallbearers and members of the committee of arrangement all wore the badges of the Society of the Cincinnati and black scarves with white roses on the bows. Other members of the Cincinnati also marched as "chief mourners" behind the general's horse near the end of the procession.<sup>20</sup> The pallbearers in the funeral procession held in Newport, Rhode Island on January 6, 1800 were also members of the Cincinnati. They wore white scarves tied in a bow on the left shoulder, and in the center of the bow was a rose of black ribbon with a badge of the society.<sup>21</sup> Other towns and cities in which members of the Society of the Cincinnati served as pallbearers, chief mourners, or marched as a group in the funeral processions included Boston, Wilmington, Savannah, Baltimore, Washington and George-Town, Charleston, Providence, Richmond, Pittsburgh, Bridgetown, New Jersey, Stratford, New York, and East Greenwich, Rhode Island.<sup>22</sup>

The members of the Cincinnati who marched in Boston's funeral procession on January 9, 1800, were preceded by a group of three very distinguished veterans of the Revolutionary War who, as non-commissioned officers, were ineligible for membership in the Society. The account of the procession printed in the *Columbian Centinel* mentioned that the Cincinnati were "preceded by three veteran non-commissioned

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<sup>19</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>20</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 15 January 1800.

<sup>21</sup> *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 18 January 1800.

<sup>22</sup> (Boston), *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800; (Wilmington, Delaware), *Wilmington Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 26 February 1800; (Savannah, Georgia), *Centinel of Liberty, or George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 14 February 1800; (Baltimore), *The Washingtonian*, Baltimore: Samuel Sower, Printer, 1800, 167-180; (Washington and George-Town), *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 13 March 1800; (Charleston, South Carolina), *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 17 January 1800; (Providence, Rhode Island), *Providence Gazette*, 11 January 1800; (Richmond, Virginia), *Richmond Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, 25 February 1800; (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), *Pittsburgh Gazette*, 11 January 1800; (Bridgetown, New Jersey), *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 4 March 1800; (Stratford, New York), *The Spectator*, 8 January 1800; (East Greenwich, Rhode Island), *Providence Gazette*, 18 January 1800.

officers in their uniform, bearing their badges of merit.”<sup>23</sup> “Two Continental veterans, in uniform, with their badges of merit,” also marched in the Masonic procession in Boston organized by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts on February 11, 1800.<sup>24</sup> Based on these newspaper descriptions, it seems highly probable that these veterans bearing their badges of merit were the original recipients of a military honor established by Washington during the Revolutionary War that was to be the forerunner of the modern Purple Heart medal that is awarded to military or civilian nationals who are wounded or killed while serving with one of the United States Armed Forces. Instituted by General Washington on August 7, 1782, the “badge of military merit,” was to take the form of “the figure of a heart of purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding.” The badge was awarded only three times during the Revolution, and the recipients were non-commissioned officers of three Connecticut units, Sergeant Elijah Churchill, Sergeant William Brown, and Sergeant Daniel Bissell. General Washington presented their badges of military merit to the men at his headquarters in May-June 1783.<sup>25</sup>

The state chapters of the Society of the Cincinnati in Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, and South Carolina sponsored public memorial services that featured eulogies on the life and character of George Washington. In a letter transmitting the manuscript of

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<sup>23</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 11 January 1800.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 February 1800.

<sup>25</sup> Washington’s General Orders of 7 August 1782 announced to the army the establishment of the Badge of Military Merit which was to be awarded to soldiers and non-commissioned officers who performed singularly meritorious action in the line of duty. See John C. Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), 24: 487-88. The badge was awarded to Sergeant Elijah Churchill of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Light Dragoons and Sergeant William Brown of the 5<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Regiment on 3 May 1783; *Ibid.*, 26: 363-64 and 26: 373-74. It was awarded to Sergeant Daniel Bissell of the 2d Connecticut Regiment on 10 June 1783; *Ibid.*, 26: 481-82. With the American Revolution over and the army disbanded, the Badge of Military Merit fell into disuse but was restored as the Purple Heart for use by the United States Army by General Douglas MacArthur, War Department Chief of Staff, on February 22, 1932, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington’s birth. Eligibility for the award was subsequently expanded to include members of all the United States Armed Forces, civilian or military, who

his eulogy for publication to the New York State Society of the Cincinnati, the Reverend Doctor William Linn remarked, "He was your leader in war and the President of the General Society. The only objection to your claim as chief mourners is that none can be the chief where all our citizens so deeply lament . . . so largely partake in the grief."<sup>26</sup> In several other memorial services, the orators addressed a portion of their remarks to the members of the Society of the Cincinnati who were in attendance. At the Benevolent Congregational Church in Providence, Rhode Island on the national day of mourning, the Reverend Doctor Enos Hitchcock, himself a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, said to his brothers:

My Respected Friends of the Cincinnati. To these imperfect lineaments of the character of the illustrious man who led you to victory, to glory and freedom, your knowledge can add many more. Often you have braved the dangers of the field and the hardships of the camp, in obedience to his command. Your obedience was always cheerful, because imposed by duty and affection. Your dangers and sufferings were always ameliorated by the example of your General voluntarily sharing them with you. You, Gentlemen, have a double share in the common affliction occasioned by his death. He was your *beloved Commander in Chief*. He was your *venerated President-General*. The best evidence of your profound respect for his memory, and your best improvement of this mournful occasion, will be to preserve in your minds his amiable and excellent virtues as a model for conduct in peace, as you did his example of fortitude in war. May your life, like his, be virtuous; and may its end, like his, be triumphant and happy.<sup>27</sup>

Although the surviving members of the Society of the Cincinnati were getting older and fewer in numbers, their participation in many of the funeral rites for their deceased commander in chief, General George Washington, served as an important

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are killed or wounded under a specific set of circumstances; "Revolutionary War Badge of Merit," Thomas Publications, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>26</sup> William Linn, D. D., in a letter to the officers and members of the New York State Society of the Cincinnati transmitting for publication the manuscript of *A Funeral Eulogy Occasioned by the Death of General Washington, Delivered February 22, 1800, before the New York State Society of the Cincinnati* (New York: Printed by Isaac Collins, 1800); reprinted in Manning and Loring, *Eulogies and Orations* (Boston, 1800), 158-175.

<sup>27</sup> Enos Hitchcock, 30.



reminder of the nation's Revolutionary War past. Performing their roles as pallbearers and chief mourners, the position of the Society of the Cincinnati in the order of procession was usually next to or immediately behind the bier of Washington, symbolizing their close association with the man who had been both the leader of their society and the Father of His Country. Dressed in their military uniforms and wearing badges of mourning and the eagle insignia of their order, the grieving veteran officers of the Revolution embodied the "Spirit of Seventy-Six" that was already on its way to becoming an important part of the national mythology. Doctor William Linn closed his eulogy in New York by turning to the members of the Society of the Cincinnati in the audience and asking them, "Ye Cincinnati, his companions in arms, and sharers in his glory, what scenes does this day bring to your remembrance?" Answering the question for his listeners, Linn had said, "In imagination you suffer all the toils and fight the battles all over again . . . Seek not to restrain your tears, 'tis soldier-like now to weep . . . your General, your Father, and your Friend is no more."<sup>28</sup>

#### Freemasons

"Weep, Oh Masons, your Brother is no more!" This inscription appeared on one side of a ten feet high obelisk erected by Temple Lodge No. 53 in their Masonic lodge room in Albany, New York as a monument "dedicated to perpetuate the memory of that illustrious and worthy Brother, George Washington." The melancholy motto was illustrated by a transparent painting of Time resting on his scythe reversed, weeping over the body of Washington and pointing to an hourglass with the sand run out. On another side of the structure was a transparent painting of an American eagle shedding tears of

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<sup>28</sup> William Linn, 175.

blood over the name of Washington, holding in its beak a scroll with the inscription, “A Nation’s Tears.” Other paintings on the obelisk included a bust of Washington encircled with a laurel wreath, trophies of war, and emblems of peace and plenty.<sup>29</sup> The description of the Albany Masons’ monument to their deceased brother provides a revealing material culture text that illustrates how the Freemasons during the national mourning period sought to influence the public’s opinion of their organization by purposefully combining the images of Washington, the nation, and their fraternity. In their mourning of the death of Washington, Masons publicly expressed their grief in ways that were intended to enhance their benevolent fraternity’s reputation and earn the respect of their fellow countrymen. These objectives were stated by several eulogists including a Danville, Vermont minister, the Reverend John Fitch, who advised his Masonic audience that “If you make the example of your illustrious brother your pattern and endeavor to walk in his footsteps, your institution will not only be considered as useful, but will even command the respectful attention of your country.”<sup>30</sup>

George Washington had become a member of the Freemasons as a young man, and he was to be identified with the fraternal organization throughout the remainder of his lifetime. Consequently, Freemasons were among the most numerous and highly visible groups of actors participating in the funeral rites for Washington following his death in December 1799. Published accounts of the eighty-three funeral processions from which this study is drawn indicate that Masons participated in forty-seven, or nearly sixty percent, of them. Of the 300 eulogies and orations that were read and analyzed for

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<sup>29</sup> *Albany Centinel*, 21 January 1800.

<sup>30</sup> John Fitch, *A Sermon Delivered at Danville, at the Request of Harmony Lodge; as a Tribute of Respect for the Memory of the late Gen. George Washington; February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1800* (Peacham, Vermont: Printed by Farley & Goss, 1800), 22.

this study, forty-four, or about fifteen percent of them, had Masonic elements. Of these Masonic-related orations, twenty-three were delivered by ministers and members of the fraternity to Masons and their guests, and an additional twenty-one were pronounced publicly before mixed groups of citizens and included remarks that were specifically addressed by the eulogists to the Masons in the audience.

There were over five hundred Masonic lodges and perhaps 25,000 members of the fraternity in 1800, approximately three percent of the adult white male population of the United States.<sup>31</sup> Sociologist Mary Ann Clawson focused on British and American Freemasonry in her study of fraternalism as a mode of social organization. Brought into being by ritual and based upon the social metaphor of brotherhood, as was the Republic implicitly, Masonry emerged as an institutional force in eighteenth-century British society when English and Scottish gentlemen sought admission into the lodges of practicing stone masons. From this peculiar practice that had begun in the seventeenth century, Clawson argues that the Masonic system was to become distinguished by its remarkable combination of social prestige and class diversity. She writes that “at a time when differences of rank were almost universally accepted as basic to the social order, gentlemen and even nobles joined with merchants and craftsmen in a rite of leveling that ended in their symbolic elevation to the idealized status of Master Mason.”<sup>32</sup> Clawson believes that Freemasonry grew because it offered a set of ideas, values and social relations that were congruent with the needs of emerging capitalist society. By rejecting the importance of ascribed characteristics, Freemasonry created a brotherhood among

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<sup>31</sup> John L. Brooke, “Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies,” in Hoffman and Albert, eds., *“Launching the ‘Extended Republic’: The Federalist Era*, 274.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3.

men of different ranks, classes, and religions, thus presenting a model of class structure and social mobility in a capitalist society.<sup>33</sup> Masonry played a significant role in shaping the social order of the early American republic as noted by the historian Gordon S. Wood who observes that “it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Masonry for the American Revolution.” He argues that Freemasonry transformed the social landscape of the early republic by bringing people together in new ways, thus creating a new social order that was based on “real worth, personal merit, brotherly affection, and sincerity.”<sup>34</sup> Steven C. Bullock, one of Professor Wood’s doctoral students, expands on this argument in his comprehensive study of early American Masonry entitled *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840*. He develops the thesis that, during the century after 1730, Freemasonry helped Americans remake their social order by shaping and symbolizing the transition from the aristocratic hierarchy of the eighteenth century to the democratic individualism of the next century.<sup>35</sup> Bullock notes the popularity of Masonry among officers during the American Revolution, indicating that eight military groups met in Continental army camps and that at least forty-two percent of the generals commissioned by the Continental Congress, including Washington, were or would become Freemasons.<sup>36</sup> He argues that the fraternal ties among the officers removed barriers between higher and lower grades of officers and helped to create and sustain the sense of common purpose among men from all the former American colonies that was required to ensure the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>34</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 223-224.

<sup>35</sup> Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-22.

survival of the army during the Revolution.<sup>37</sup> Bullock writes that Masonry and the Society of the Cincinnati shared many of the same members and similar ideologies, but after the Revolutionary War, the Freemasons experienced unparalleled growth in size and prosperity while the Cincinnati provoked so much angry criticism directed at their “aristocratic pretensions” that their Society was soon made a marginal institution. He believes that because it balanced Revolutionary demands for inclusiveness and exclusivity, Freemasonry soon was viewed as a republican institution and, by its celebration of morality and individual merit, the fraternity came to exemplify the ideals of virtue and liberty that were deemed necessary to build a new republic.<sup>38</sup> Although the colonial members of the so-called “modern” Masonic lodges were mostly elites of eastern seaboard cities, after the middle of the eighteenth century, another order of “ancient” lodges drew members from groups of urban artisans and men from the interior who were claiming increased political participation. These men, who generally ranked below the elites in the established social order, broke the elites’ monopoly on status and position by claiming their rights of participation based on their republican ideologies. Subsequently, the primary purpose of post-Revolutionary Freemasonry became the spread of civic virtue, and the fraternity provided moral training that was deemed essential to ensure the success of the early republic.<sup>39</sup>

Although Masonry had experienced unprecedented membership growth in the years following the American Revolution, the fraternity came under public attack in 1798-1799 stemming from a widely-reprinted series of three political sermons by High Federalist Jedidiah Morse, the prominent American geographer and a Congregationalist

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-138.

minister in Charlestown, Massachusetts. Basing his charges on arguments from a book by Scottish professor John Robinson, *Proofs of Conspiracy against All the Governments and Religions of Europe*, Morse claimed that the government and religion of the United States were targets of a vast French conspiracy originating in a shadowy European group called the Bavarian Illuminati.<sup>40</sup> Robinson's book linked the origins of the French Revolution to the secret meetings of continental Freemasons whose fraternity had been corrupted by the teachings of the Bavarian Illuminati, a short-lived atheistic secret order that opposed the Roman Catholic Church and advocated the spread of infidelity.<sup>41</sup> Morse claimed that there were seventeen "Illuminated" lodges of Masons in the United States, all linked by charters and correspondence to France and the Bavarian Illuminati.<sup>42</sup> Historians John Brooke, Steven Bullock, and Richard Moss agree that the real target of Morse's three sermons was probably not the Freemasons at all. It seems evident that the primary purpose of his attack from the pulpit was to denounce the Jeffersonian Republicans, a growing political faction that Morse and his fellow High Federalists believed to be insidious "Jacobins" who represented the American manifestation of French political principles and atheism and who had become the enemies of order and stability in the United States.<sup>43</sup> John Brooke argues that it was the growing Republican influence in Masonry that may explain Jedidiah Morse's accusations against the Illuminati.<sup>44</sup> According to Brooke, the Masons were strongly affiliated with Federalism in the late 1780s and early 1790s, but Freemasonry increasingly came to be connected

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108 and 138-39.

<sup>40</sup> Richard J. Moss, *The Life of Jedidiah Morse: A Station of Peculiar Exposure* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>41</sup> Bullock, 173-74.

<sup>42</sup> Brooke, 319-320.

<sup>43</sup> Brooke, 320-21; Bullock, 173-74; Moss, 68-70.

<sup>44</sup> Brooke, 284.

with Jeffersonian Republicanism as their broadening membership diluted the original Federalist cadre.<sup>45</sup> Morse's charges against the Masons were printed in newspapers throughout the nation, and other prominent pro-Federalist ministers in New England like Yale's Timothy Dwight and Harvard's David Tappan echoed Morse's charges.<sup>46</sup> Soon much of the nation was debating the ties between the Illuminati and Freemasonry. The alarmed fraternity responded by preparing loyalty addresses to President John Adams and by defending themselves in sermons and public orations for the next two years. The underlying issue, according to Bullock, was that the attacks were expressions of popular concern about Freemasonry that had developed in the 1790s as the fraternity spread into new social and geographic territories, evoking suspicions, public questions, and private anxieties.<sup>47</sup>

The death of George Washington occurred while the negative publicity around the Illuminati controversy was still damaging the image of Freemasonry in America. The leaders of their lodges seem to have realized quickly the potential advantages of exploiting the national mourning as an opportunity to demonstrate their strong fraternal ties to their deceased Brother by actively participating in the public mourning rituals in the weeks that followed Washington's death. Accused of being secretive conspirators and subversive infidels, the Masons donned their regalia and took to the streets of America to demonstrate their openness, patriotism, religious fidelity, and close fraternal ties to the Father of His Country. They also used the newspapers to disseminate accounts of their Masonic mourning rituals and to publish extracts from their eulogies and orations in tribute to Brother Washington. In the spirit of their newly-found openness, local

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-329.

<sup>46</sup> Brooke, 321; Moss, 68.

Masonic lodges invited the public to visit their elaborately decorated lodge rooms that were draped in black cloth and filled with mourning emblems to mark the death of Washington. Identifying clusters of Jeffersonian Republican Masons who were centrally involved in the funeral rites for Washington throughout the country, Brooke argues that Republican Masons leveraged their involvement in the mourning events for Washington to “quietly break the Federalist monopoly on the cult of Washington.”<sup>48</sup>

Freemasons mourned the death of Washington as though he had been the “Grand Master” of American Masons, although his ties to the fraternity during his lifetime had been in reality far more irregular and tenuous than the image they sought to convey in their attempts to make him the virtual embodiment of Masonic ideals and teachings. George Washington’s nearly lifelong connections to Freemasonry began a few months before his twenty-first birthday when he paid his initiation fee on November 4, 1752 as an Entered Apprentice in the newly formed lodge in Fredericksburg, Virginia. He passed his Fellow Craft degree March 3, 1753 and was raised to Master Mason on August 4, 1753.<sup>49</sup> Washington’s later involvement in Masonry was somewhat irregular and obscure, and historians do not appear to be in agreement regarding their assessments of the extent of his participation in fraternal activities. For example, Steven Bullock concludes that after becoming a Master Mason, Washington limited his later involvement in Masonry to participation in selected Masonic functions upon public occasions only, and that after his earliest visits to the lodge in the 1750s, he perhaps never again witnessed degree ceremonies.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, in a carefully researched book

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<sup>47</sup> Bullock, 174-75.

<sup>48</sup> Brooke, 355-56.

<sup>49</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington, A Biography*, 1: 267.

<sup>50</sup> Bullock, 257-59.



published in connection with the bicentennial of Washington's initiation by the Fredericksburg, Virginia lodge, the Masonic historian, Dr. William Moseley Brown, relied on the use of contemporary documentary sources to write an account of Washington's Masonic career that attempted to separate the facts of his fraternal involvement from the traditional, legendary, and fictional statements that had obscured the historical record.<sup>51</sup> Brown says that there were ten American military Masonic lodges operating in Continental Army camps during the Revolution and that documentary evidence records Washington's involvement in many of the public and private activities of some of those lodges during the War. In addition to published accounts of Washington's participation in public Masonic events, Brown cites contemporary letters indicating that the General often attended private meetings of the military lodges, coming "without ceremony as a private brother."<sup>52</sup> Further contemporary comment on Washington's Masonic involvement during the Revolution was provided by Worshipful Master Amos Maine Atwell, the orator at a February 22, 1800 meeting of the Mount Vernon Lodge of Providence, Rhode Island, who said that "in the course of the Revolutionary War, [Washington] frequently visited a lodge where a Sergeant presided as Master."<sup>53</sup> William Halsey, Esq. informed the brothers of St. John's Lodge of Newark, New Jersey during his oration on February 22, 1800, that "so sensible was [Washington] of [Masonry's] happy effects in drawing closer the ties of human nature, in harmonizing its discordant passions, and in uniting and cementing in one friendly band, men of different principles, societies and nations, that he not only recommended it to the

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<sup>51</sup> William Mosely Brown, *George Washington: Freemason* (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett & Massie, Inc., 1952), xii.-xiv.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-48.

attention of his Army, but excited by his example, an observance of all its rites and ceremonies.”<sup>54</sup>

Washington’s active involvement in Masonry during the Revolution is further suggested by the fact that, when the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania proposed the creation of a “national grand lodge” of Masons in 1780, it was proposed that General Washington fill the office of “national grand master.” The idea of a national Masonic organization was opposed by the Massachusetts Grand Lodge whose officers believed that such a major change should be deferred until peace had been declared, therefore the proposal was not pursued further at that time.<sup>55</sup> Washington was also approached about assuming the leadership of the Freemasons of Virginia during the Revolution. In their study of the history of Freemasonry in Virginia, Richard A. Rutyna and Peter C. Stewart write that when the Grand Lodge of Virginia was formed in 1777-1778, Washington was asked to serve as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia but declined, “being preoccupied with the Revolutionary War.”<sup>56</sup> Having returned to his home at Mount Vernon at the conclusion of the war, Washington was later named the Worshipful Master of the nearby Alexandria Lodge No. 22, newly chartered by the Grand Lodge of Virginia on April 28, 1788. Washington was re-elected to the office on December 20, 1788, but after departing for New York to assume the presidency in 1789, he was succeeded as Worshipful Master by

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<sup>53</sup> Amos Maine Atwell, *An Address Delivered before Mount Vernon Lodge, on Their Anniversary Election of Officers, February 22, 1800* (Providence, Rhode Island: Printed by Brother John Carter, 1800), 16.

<sup>54</sup> William Halsey, *An Oration, Delivered the Twenty-Second of February, MDCCC, Before the Brethren and a Select Audience, in the Hall of St. John’s Lodge, No. 2, Newark, New Jersey* (Newark: Printed by Jacob Halsey, 1800), 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> Brooke, 298-99; Brown, 50-53.

<sup>56</sup> Richard A. Rutyna and Peter C. Stewart, *The History of Freemasonry in Virginia* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1998), 45-47; see also Brown, 229-230.

a lodge brother who, coincidentally, was later to be one of his three deathbed physicians, Doctor Elisha Cullen Dick.<sup>57</sup>

Probably the most public of Washington's Masonic activities was his participation in the laying of the cornerstone of the United States Capitol in the District of Columbia on September 18, 1793. Wearing white gloves and a ceremonial Masonic apron, President Washington marched with his brothers in the procession and descended into a trench with other Masons where he was handed a silver plate which he placed into a recess under the cornerstone. The stone was then maneuvered into place and leveled, after which Masonic officers poured corn, wine, and oil over it.<sup>58</sup> For the Masons, the laying of the cornerstone of the Capitol was "an obvious coup," and it "helped to establish their role as a kind of republican priesthood, who alone possessed the secret knowledge and spiritual authority for endowing architectural rituals with patriotic significance."<sup>59</sup>

Although the burden of Washington's public duties may have precluded his regular participation in Masonic lodge activities, he apparently maintained an interest in the fraternity and offered his endorsement and support in several letters written in response to addresses sent to him by several Masonic organizations. When President Washington visited Newport, Rhode Island in August 1790, the Masons of King David's Lodge presented him with a welcoming address. Responding to the address in a letter dated August 18, 1790, Washington wrote: "Being persuaded that a just application of the

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<sup>57</sup> F. L. Brockett, *The Lodge of Washington: A History of the Alexandria Washington Lodge, No. 22, A.F. and A.M. of Alexandria, Virginia, 1783-1876* (Alexandria, Virginia: George E. French, Publisher, 1876), 22-23 and 30; see also Brown, 143-144.

<sup>58</sup> Len Travers, "'In the Greatest Solemn Dignity,' The Capitol Cornerstone and Ceremony in the Early Republic," in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1999), 155-56.

principles, on which the Masonic fraternity is founded, must be promotive of private virtue and public prosperity, I shall always be happy to advance the interests of the Society, and to be considered by them a deserving Brother.”<sup>60</sup> Washington’s comments to the Newport Masons serve to illustrate Steven Bullock’s argument that post-Revolutionary Masonry was linked to the success of the new republic through its mission of promoting virtue and morality among the members of the fraternity.

The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts sent President Washington a letter in March 1797 expressing their gratitude for his public services and its regrets upon the loss to the nation of his leadership as he retired from the presidency. Washington responded on April 24, 1797 in a letter addressed to Grand Master Paul Revere, Senior Warden Isaiah Thomas, and other Grand Lodge officers, writing that “my attachment to the Society of which we are members will dispose me always to contribute my best endeavors to promote the honor and interest of the Craft.”<sup>61</sup> On his way to Philadelphia in November 1798 for meetings with Major General Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of War James McHenry, and others related to planning the mobilization of an American army in the event of possible war with France, Lieutenant General Washington passed through Baltimore and was presented a letter and a copy of a book of the “Constitutions of Masonry” by several officers of the Grand Lodge of Maryland. Washington acknowledged the gift in a letter dated November 8, 1798, writing to his Maryland Brothers, “So far as I am acquainted with the principles and doctrines of Free Masonry, I

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>60</sup> George Washington to the Masons of King David’s Lodge, Newport, Rhode Island, 18 August 1790, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, 6: 287.

<sup>61</sup> George Washington to Paul Revere et al., 24 April 1797, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, 1:117-118.

conceive it to be founded in benevolence, and to be exercised only for the good of Mankind; I cannot, therefore, upon this ground, withhold my approbation of it.”<sup>62</sup>

Joining in the public expressions of the national sorrow following the death of Washington, the Freemasons of America mourned the death of their Brother by wearing badges of mourning, marching in public funeral processions, convening special meetings of their local and state lodges, and by organizing their own processions and memorial services to commemorate their deceased fellow member. The involvement of Masons in the national mourning for Washington began in Alexandria, Virginia, where the members of local Masonic lodges were invited to participate in his funeral ceremonies at Mount Vernon on December 18, 1799. To make arrangements for Washington’s interment, a funeral lodge was convened by Worshipful Master Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick in Alexandria on Monday, December 16, 1799. During the special meeting, a four-man joint committee consisting of representatives of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 and Brooke Lodge No. 47 (also of Alexandria) reported the arrangements for the funeral, and one of the brothers was appointed to invite the Federal City Lodge of the city of Washington to unite in the funeral procession at noon on Wednesday, December 18 at Mount Vernon, “if fair, or on Thursday at the same hour.”<sup>63</sup> At the funeral at Mount Vernon on Wednesday, December 18, fifty-six members of Alexandria Lodge No. 22, fifteen members of Brooke Lodge No. 47, and an unrecorded number of brothers from Federal Lodge No. 15 walked as mourners behind Washington’s coffin in the procession from the house to the tomb. All of the six pallbearers were Revolutionary War officers, and five of them were also Masons, brothers of Lodge No. 22. Philip G. Marsteller, the son of the only non-Masonic

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<sup>62</sup> George Washington to Maryland Masons, 8 November 1798, *Ibid.*, 3: 188-189.

<sup>63</sup> Brockett, 97-98.

pallbearer, Col. Philip Marsteller, attended the funeral as a member of the Lodge.<sup>64</sup> On arriving at the family vault, the services of the Episcopal Church were performed by Reverend Thomas Davis, Rector of Christ Church, Alexandria, and the ceremonies of the Masonic fraternity were led by Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, Worshipful Master of Lodge No. 22 and Reverend Doctor James Muir, Chaplain of the Lodge.<sup>65</sup>

Widely-reported in newspapers throughout America, the participation of the Alexandria and Federal City Masonic lodges in the funeral ceremonies at Mount Vernon established the precedent and provided a highly visible model for the involvement of Masonic lodges throughout the nation in their state and local observances of Washington's death. Several of the Masonic Grand Lodges, the state governing bodies of the fraternity, issued directives to their constituent lodges to guide their local mourning activities. The Grand Lodge of New York met on December 23, 1799 and subsequently issued a letter to the lodges under its jurisdiction formally announcing the death of their "illustrious much beloved Brother George Washington, late President of the United States and Commander in Chief of the Army." Resolutions of the Grand Lodge were enclosed directing that all lodges in the State of New York were to be "clothed in mourning for the space of six months, and that the Brethren wear mourning for the same period." A "monumental memorial to the virtues of our illustrious Brother" was to be erected in the Grand Lodge meeting room, and a committee was appointed to meet with representatives of other organizations in New York City to plan public testimonials of respect and veneration to the memory of their departed Brother. The secretary of the Grand Lodge of New York was directed to write circular letters of condolence to all the Grand Lodges in

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99, (includes a listing of the names of the members of the two Alexandria lodges who attended the funeral).

the United States.<sup>66</sup> The Grand Lodge of the Ancient York Masons in South Carolina resolved on January 8, 1800 that all members should wear a black crape in their hats for three months and that symbols of the lodge were to be dressed in mourning for six months. In addition, letters of condolence were to be sent to the “Sister Grand Lodges of the United States.”<sup>67</sup> The Most Worshipful Peleg Clarke, Grand Master of the State of Rhode Island Lodge, required all Masons under his jurisdiction to wear a black scarf on the left arm for nine days “as a token of regret for the loss of our illustrious Brother, George Washington.”<sup>68</sup> Brothers of lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts were advised to wear for six months a crape on their left arm, “interwoven with a narrow blue ribbon running direct.”<sup>69</sup> Officers and members of the lodges in North Carolina were directed to wear a black crape for sixty days, beginning on February 22, 1800.<sup>70</sup> In Maryland, the Grand Master recommended to the Freemasons of the state to wear a white ribbon attached to the button hole on the left side of the coat for the fifteen days between February 22 to March 9, 1800, on which day all Maryland lodges were to conduct a Masonic funeral service “according to the ancient customs and usages of Masonry, in commemoration of the wisdom, strength and beauty of the works of the great Washington.”<sup>71</sup> At a meeting called by the Grand Master of Pennsylvania on December 27, 1799, the day after members of the Grand Lodge had participated in the congressional funeral procession in Philadelphia, resolutions were passed unanimously calling for Masons of Pennsylvania to wear black crape on their left arms and to cover

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Spectator* 25 December 1799.

<sup>67</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, South Carolina, 10 January 1800.

<sup>68</sup> *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>69</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>70</sup> *Halifax North Carolina Journal*, 24 March 1800.

<sup>71</sup> *Philadelphia Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, 10 February 1800.

with black the emblems on their aprons for six months.<sup>72</sup> The newspaper publication of the resolutions of the grand lodges appears to have been an integral part of the Masons' strategy to capitalize on the death of Washington in order to shore up their weakened institutional image as a result of the Illuminati controversy.

Some of the Masonic mourning rituals for Washington were performed in their private lodge rooms where attendance was limited to members of the fraternity and their invited guests, often including their wives. However, the accounts of many of these Masonic funeral rituals were published in local newspapers to acquaint a wider audience with the nature and extent of the Freemasons' mourning for Washington. In addition to participation in their private funeral rituals, the Masons of America also frequently acted out their grief for the death of Brother Washington by participating with other citizens and groups in public mourning events. The Masonic mourning rites for Washington began less than two weeks after his death and were made a part of the Masons' annual observance of the anniversary of the nativity of their patron, St. John the Evangelist. Many of the fraternity's initial mourning rituals were conducted on St. John's Day, Friday, December 27, 1799. The Festival of St. John was celebrated by the Portland, District of Maine, Lodge of the Free & Accepted Masons in their hall which had been shrouded in black to commemorate the loss of their "illustrious Brother, General Washington."<sup>73</sup> The Hiram Lodge in Westmoreland County, Virginia, birthplace of Washington, celebrated the Festival of St. John on December 27 with a eulogy of Washington delivered by the Reverend Brother James Elliott.<sup>74</sup> A St. John's Day procession was organized in Wilmington, Delaware, where the Masons of the city formed

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<sup>72</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>73</sup> *Jenk's Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 30 December 1799.



at their lodge rooms and were followed by the military and citizens who walked to the beat of muffled drums playing the dead march to the Presbyterian meetinghouse to hear a eulogy given by one of their brothers, General Gunning Bedford.<sup>75</sup> Escorted by the military, the brothers of the two Masonic lodges in Alexandria, Virginia marched in procession on St. John's Day from the courthouse to the Presbyterian meeting house where the traditional charity sermon, interspersed with pertinent reflections about Washington, was preached by the Reverend Brother William Maffit. Each of the brethren wore a crape around his arm, and members of Washington's Lodge No. 22 were dressed in full mourning.<sup>76</sup> As so many Masonic lodges around the nation appear to have done on their annual festival day, the Masons of Franklin, Connecticut and Warrenton, North Carolina also conducted memorial services for Washington on St. John's Day, December 27, 1799.<sup>77</sup>

As mentioned, although the Masonic funeral honors conducted in their private lodge rooms were generally attended only by members of the fraternity and invited guests, a number of accounts of their fraternal mourning rituals were published in local newspapers. The *Columbian Centinel* reported that the Rising States Lodge in Boston had paid their funeral honors to Washington on Monday evening, December 30, 1799 "in ample form," apparently meaning that the members were fully clothed in the ceremonial regalia of the fraternity. "The habiliments of mourning shrouded all the jewels, implements, and columns. The Light in the East was extinguished when an Ode, composed by Brother Jenks, was sung with due solemnity, after which the Brethren in

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<sup>74</sup> *Hartford (Connecticut) American Mercury*, 23 January 1800.

<sup>75</sup> *Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>76</sup> *Alexandria (Virginia) Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, 30 December 1799; see also Brockett, 101.

humble posture surrounded the Lodge,” the Rev. Mr. Murray praying to the “Almighty Architect of the Universe” for the wisdom and strength to accept the death of their beloved Brother George Washington.<sup>78</sup>

Like the lodge room of Albany’s Temple Lodge No. 53, many of the Masonic meeting rooms were elaborately decorated during the period of national mourning for Washington. The funeral decorations in Warren Hall, the lodge rooms of the Charlestown, Massachusetts Society of Freemasons, were described as follows in the *Columbian Centinel*.

The walls, the pedestal, the tables, and the regalia of the Lodge were shrouded. In the East was a striking portrait of the late GEORGE WASHINGTON, surrounded by a display of bright rays in every direction. In the North stood the figure of a very large Eagle, with his eyes directed to the picture, banded in black; and from its bill was suspended a label with the following inscription: “*All Judea and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death.*” In the South was a portrait, in mourning, of the President of the United States. The light in the room was no more than sufficient to display those affecting objects, and the Hall was visited in the evening by every description of the inhabitants [of Charleston], whose grave deportment and propriety of behavior denoted a just estimation of the transactions of the day.<sup>79</sup>

A lodge of French émigrés in Philadelphia, L’Amenité, under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, distinguished themselves by the “elegant and expensive” decorations of their lodge room and the “dignified and scientific” manner in which they paid the last tribute of veneration to their deceased brother George Washington.<sup>80</sup> The room was covered with sable hangings, and in the center was a raised platform, accessed by five steps, that bore a “superb bier” raised about ten feet and

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<sup>77</sup> *Norwich Packet*, 2 January 1800; *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>78</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 4 January 1800.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 6 January 1800.

surrounded by several urns and appropriate Masonic and military decorations and insignia. Black festoons and knots were suspended from the ceiling, interspersed with suitable emblems, and over three hundred candles illuminated the scene.<sup>81</sup> A notice published in the *Aurora* announced that, “A desire having been generally manifested to see the decoration of the French Lodge upon the melancholy death of George Washington, the public are informed that the Lodge room will be opened on Saturday, the 4<sup>th</sup> instant from 10 o’clock A.M. for the inspection of decent and orderly people.”<sup>82</sup> A similar funeral tableau was created by the Lodge of Friendship in Charleston, South Carolina in their new lodge rooms on Tradd Street. The room was shrouded in black and “strewed with tears, death heads, etc.” In the center was a dome supported by five columns, dressed with crape and Masonic funeral decorations, and resting on an elevated platform under the dome was a coffin with appropriate emblems. A gilt urn inscribed with the name of Washington was placed over the dome, and “many other emblems and inscriptions were displayed in a style adapted to the occasion.”<sup>83</sup> The Masonic brothers of St. John’s Lodge in Newark, New Jersey, decorated the altar in their lodge room with an obelisk, about three feet in height, consisting of a base and pyramid of accurate proportions made to represent black marble. The front of the monument exhibited a likeness of Washington in white bas relief, above which were Masonic emblems in pearl. The remaining three sides contained white bas relief representations of three Christian characteristics, Faith, Hope, and Charity. The base carried an inscription bearing Washington’s name and the dates of his birth and death. A laurel wreath encircled the top of the monumental obelisk. The monument had been carried by two of the oldest and

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, and *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 3 January 1800.

<sup>82</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 4 January 1800.

most respected members of the Masonic lodge in Newark's public funeral procession on December 27, 1799, and it was displayed on the desk below the pulpit in the church during the memorial services conducted that day.<sup>84</sup>

The most common way in which Freemasons participated in the national mourning was to join with other citizens and groups by marching together in their local funeral processions and attending as a body the public memorial services that followed. The Grand Lodge of New Hampshire published a resolution that encouraged their affiliated lodges to join with the general public to participate in funeral rites for Washington, the state Masonic officers declaring that they were unanimous in the belief "that to mourn with our fellow-citizens at large would be more respectable to our late illustrious Brother, and more honorable, than particular society lodges of mourning." The resolution continued: "The loss is deep and universal—so ought to be our respect, and uniform throughout the United States—but in our Lodges will be the seat of sorrow."<sup>85</sup>

Freemasons marched in the public funeral processions for Washington in towns and cities throughout America including the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania's appearance in the congressional procession held in Philadelphia and local parades held in Hingham, Massachusetts; Warrenton, North Carolina; Providence, Rhode Island; Bridgetown, New Jersey; Richmond, Virginia; New York City and Albany, New York, and many other locations.<sup>86</sup> A representative description of Masonic participation in the public funeral

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<sup>83</sup> *Charleston City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 1 March 1800.

<sup>84</sup> *Newark Centinel of Freedom*, 31 December 1799.

<sup>85</sup> *Portsmouth New Hampshire Gazette*, 8 January 1800.

<sup>86</sup> (Philadelphia, Pa), *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799; (Hingham, MA), *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 15 January 1800; (Warrenton, NC), *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Advertiser*, 4 March 1800; (Providence, RI), *Providence Gazette*, 11 January 1800; (Bridgetown, NJ), *Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, 4 March 1800; (Richmond,

processions is provided by the published account of the fraternity's appearance in the mourning rites held in Montgomery County, New York on January 28, 1800. Marching behind the cavalry, a band of music, a detachment of light infantry, clergymen, and civil officers, the brothers of the Franklin Lodge of Charleston, New York and St. Paul's Lodge of Canajoharie appeared in the following order: "The Tyler [guard], with drawn sword, the handle covered with black crape; the members, two and two; Secretary and Treasurer; Past Master; Senior and Junior Wardens; a Master Mason dressed in deep mourning, carrying the Warrant of the Lodge on a black cushion; Junior Deacon—Master—Senior Deacon." The citizens of Montgomery County marched behind the Masons at the end of the procession, moving from Minden to the church at Fort Plain where a memorial service was conducted. The sermon was preached by the Rev. John F. Ernst of Cooperstown who closed with a "well-adapted address to the Masonic brethren, in which it was enjoined on them to imitate the virtues of their deceased brother Washington."<sup>87</sup>

In addition to their participating with other citizens and groups in public mourning rites for Washington, the Freemasons also organized a number of funeral processions around the country that were comprised of only members of the Masonic fraternity and their invited guests. Exclusive Masonic processions such as these served the dual purposes of providing the brothers with an occasion to mourn their fraternal loss and to demonstrate their patriotic and religious ideals and the strong connections between George Washington and Freemasonry. The elaborate staging of these Masonic

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VA), *Philadelphia Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1800; (New York, NY), *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 15 January 1800; (Albany, NY), *Albany Centinel*, 18 February 1800.

<sup>87</sup> *Albany Centinel*, 14 February 1800.

processions suggests that they had been carefully designed to attract the attention of large crowds of onlookers as the members of the fraternity, dressed in mourning and bearing exotic Masonic insignia and emblems, wound their way through the public streets.

The largest and most spectacular Masonic funeral procession held in the United States during the national mourning period for George Washington was undoubtedly the elaborate parade organized by the Massachusetts Grand Lodge and held in Boston on February 11, 1800. The procession was described by the *Massachusetts Mercury* as the “most splendid ever seen in this town,” and the “concourse of spectators” standing along the streets of Boston was “immense.”<sup>88</sup> Over 1,600 Freemasons marched in the funeral procession, forming at the Old State House and moving through several of the principal streets of Boston to Old South Meeting House.<sup>89</sup> The Masonic memorial service that followed the procession featured a eulogy of the life, character, and services of Brother Washington delivered by the Honorable Brother Timothy Bigelow, of Groton, Massachusetts, “before the most numerous and respectable assembly of the Fraternity ever convened in this Commonwealth.”<sup>90</sup>

According to the *Columbian Centinel*'s account,<sup>91</sup> written by its printer-editor, Brother Benjamin Russell, who said that he had participated in the event all day, the order of procession of the Boston Masonic parade began with the appearance of two “Grand Pursuivants” [an officer of arms ranking below a herald but having similar duties] clad in sable robes and weeds and mounted on elegant white horses. The two riders

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted from the *Boston Massachusetts Mercury* in the *Hartford Connecticut Courant*, 17 February 1800.

<sup>89</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 12 February 1800.

<sup>90</sup> Timothy Bigelow, *Eulogy on the Life, Character, and Services of Brother George Washington, Deceased.—Pronounced before the Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, by Request of the Grand Lodge, at the Old South Meeting-House, Boston, on Tuesday, February 11, 1800. Being the Day Set Apart by Them to Pay Funeral Honors to Their Deceased Brother* (Boston: Printed by I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, No. 45 Newbury Street, 1800).

carried between them a fourteen-foot-high elliptical mourning arch with the sacred text in silver characters, "*Blessed are the Dead which die in the Lord—For they do rest from their Labors.*" The Pursuivants were supported by two uniformed continental veterans, bearing their badges of merit.<sup>92</sup> Nine lodge stewards followed, bearing shrouded wands, and leading hundreds of Freemasons who marched in three separate groups according to the Masonic degree they had attained—Entered Apprentices, Fellow Crafts, and Master Masons. The brothers were followed by the lodge officers, grouped according to the offices they held—stewards, deacons, secretaries and treasurers, current and past junior and senior wardens, past masters, and worshipful masters of lodges. An elderly Mason bore a banner displaying an elegant figure of Minerva, the emblem of "Wisdom." Nine sons of Masons, about eleven years old, carried sprigs of cassia [leaves from the acacia tree, a Masonic symbol of everlasting life] and bore a banner emblematic of "Strength." Another son of a Mason bore a banner emblematic of "Beauty," and nine daughters of Masons carried baskets of flowers. All of the children were clad in "funeral uniforms." A full band of music preceded the masters of the three oldest lodges, bearing three candlesticks with candles, the right one extinguished. Members of the clergy who were also Masons marched in front of a Master Mason who carried a black cushion bearing the Bible and a Grand Master's jewel. Immediately after the clergymen and bearer of the "Holy Writings" had passed in the order of procession, an elaborate symbolic representation of the body of the deceased Brother George Washington came into view. A funeral urn was supported by six pallbearers, including Brother Paul Revere, a past

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<sup>91</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 12 February 1800.

<sup>92</sup> As indicated in an earlier discussion of the Society of the Cincinnati's participation in Boston's civic funeral procession on January 9, 1800, these men were probably two of the three original recipients of the

Grand Master of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge. The decorated pedestal which held the urn was described as follows:

The Funeral Insignia—A Pedestal, covered with a Pall, the escutcheons of which were characteristic drawings on satin, of Faith, Hope, Charity, Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. The Pedestal beside the Urn, which was upwards of three feet in length, and which contained a relict of the illustrious Deceased, bore also a representation of the Genius of Masonry, weeping o’er the Urn, and other suitable emblems. The whole of white marble composition. On the Urn was this inscription: “Sacred to the Memory of Brother GEORGE WASHINGTON; raised to the ALL PERFECT Lodge, Dec. 14, 1799—Ripe in years and full of glory.”

Paul Revere, the Revolutionary War patriot and master craftsman, had made the golden urn that was used in the procession to carry the “relict” of Washington, a lock of his hair. Brothers Revere, John Warren, and Josiah Bartlett had written to Martha Washington on January 11, 1800, expressing the condolences of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts and attaching a copy of an order of the Grand Lodge that “a golden urn be prepared as a deposit for a lock of hair, an invaluable relic of the Hero and the Patriot, whom their wishes would immortalize; and that it be preserved with the jewels and regalia of the Society.” On behalf of the widow, Washington’s former secretary Tobias Lear responded to their letter on January 27, 1800, enclosing a lock of Washington’s hair and assuring the Massachusetts Masons of Mrs. Washington’s gratitude for “the tributes of respect and affection paid to the memory of her dear deceased Husband.”<sup>93</sup>

The pedestal bearing the golden urn was followed by a riderless horse, led by two Masonic brethren. Near the end of the procession marched the grand marshal, and the chief mourner, the Most Worshipful Brother Samuel Dunn, Grand Master of

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badge of military merit during the Revolutionary War, the forerunner of the Purple Heart medal that since 1932 has been awarded to members of the armed services who are wounded or killed in the line of duty.

<sup>93</sup> The two letters are included as an attachment to the Masonic eulogy given by Timothy Bigelow, cited above; the inscribed golden urn made by Paul Revere is pictured in William Mosely Brown, *George*



Massachusetts, accompanied by several officers of the grand lodge including the Grand Deacons, Grand Sword Bearer, the Deputy Grand Master, Grand Wardens, Grand Chaplain, the orator, Brother Timothy Bigelow, Past Grand Officers, and the Grand Treasurer and Secretary. Three Grand Stewards concluded the order of procession, bearing an arch with the inscription, "And their works they do follow them." The Grand Master, Pallbearers, and Grand Officers were dressed in full mourning, with scarves and weeds, and each Mason wore a sprig of cassia and appropriate badges of mourning. After the conclusion of the memorial services at Old South featuring Brother Timothy Bigelow's eulogy, the procession moved to the Stone Chapel where the flowers and cassia were deposited, and appropriate Masonic funeral services were performed by the Grand Chaplain, the Reverend William Bentley of Salem, Massachusetts.<sup>94</sup>

Another spectacular Masonic procession was held in the national capital on February 22, 1800, when between 300 and 400 Freemasons marched through the principal streets of Philadelphia from the Pennsylvania Grand Lodge Room to the Zion Church, one of the churches of the German Lutheran congregation. Grouped by their respective lodges, the brethren marched in pairs in the procession, wearing crape armbands, their emblems and insignia covered with black. A bier covered with black cloth was carried by four members of the Washington Lodge No. 59, and it bore an elegant gilded urn about four feet high, on top of which was a drooping golden Eagle.

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*Washington: Freemason*, between pages 224-225. At the time of the book's publication (1952), the urn still containing a lock of Washington's hair was reported to be in the Masonic Temple, Boston.

<sup>94</sup> According to an earlier announcement reprinted in *Jenk's Portland (Maine) Gazette*, 20 January 1800, the "funeral relict" was to have been deposited under the Stone Chapel at the conclusion of the services; the account in the *Boston Columbian Centinel* does not mention any interment at the Stone Chapel but reports that Masonic funeral services were performed there by Grand Chaplain Bentley. It seems doubtful that the golden urn containing Washington's hair would have been deposited under the chapel, but perhaps all or some part of the bier on which the urn was carried could have been left there to symbolize the burial of the remains of Washington.

The memorial service that followed the procession featured solemn funeral odes sung in the German language to the accompaniment of a full orchestra, and a Masonic eulogy was delivered by the Reverend Dr. Samuel Magaw.<sup>95</sup>

Masonic orations and eulogies provided the central focus of the efforts by the Freemasons to enhance their image by claiming “Grand Master” George Washington as their own and capitalizing on the ties between him and their organization. The orations at Masonic funerals for Washington generally were constructed using a common format. Opening their discourses with emotional lamentations about the death of George Washington, the eulogists presented biographical sketches of their deceased Brother that described his achievements and services to his country and praised his “sublime” Masonic virtues and character. Washington’s lifetime membership in the Masons was recalled, and his close affiliation with Freemasonry was used to refute the charges of those who had recently attacked the fraternity as being irreligious and subversive to orderly and stable government. Fellow Masons were urged to follow Washington’s example in their lives and to emulate his piety and private virtues so as to improve the reputation of Masonry and to merit their own ultimate admission to the heavenly “Grand Chapter” when they died.

“Washington! O, Washington! Our Master, Our Brother, Our Father, Our Friend, Washington Is No More!” lamented George Blake as he began a Masonic eulogy before his brothers at St. John’s Lodge in Boston’s Concert Hall on the evening of February 4, 1800. “That stone . . . on which rested the main pillar of our fabric is torn away and

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<sup>95</sup> Samuel Magaw, *An Oration Commemorative of the Virtues and Greatness of General Washington; Pronounced in the German Lutheran Church, Philadelphia: Before the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, on the Twenty-Second of February, Eighteen Hundred. Published at the Request of the Grand Lodge*

removed by the resistless arm of Death; the strength of our building is decayed; its beauty and ornament are obliterated forever; the Grand Architect in heaven has recalled from his embassy a being who was sent to us as a light to our designs, a model for our labors. Pure spirit of Masonry! Thy loss is irreparable.”<sup>96</sup> Washington “shone the brightest star in the Masonic firmament . . . under the patronage of so great and good a man the institution has flourished,” declared Solomon Blakslee, the orator at a public memorial service held in East Haddam, Connecticut on the national day of mourning.<sup>97</sup> The Reverend Abraham L. Clarke told the brethren of Mount Vernon Lodge and the congregation of St. John’s Church in Providence, Rhode Island that “we cannot refrain from exulting in the thought that Washington lived and died a Mason—Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, Faith, Hope, and Charity, were all united, exemplified, and shone resplendent in his dignified character. . . Forever sacred be his memory in the Temple of Masonry.”<sup>98</sup>

At the conclusion of his public funeral oration, the Reverend John Fitch, pastor of the Congregational Church in Danville, Vermont, turned to the Masons in his audience and indicated that he would not take this opportunity either to justify or condemn the principles of their institution. However, he told the members of the fraternity that, because it could not be denied that their organization received a “real luster” from the

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(Philadelphia: Printed by J. Ormrod, 1800); a detailed description of the procession and the memorial service is appended to the text of Dr. Magaw’s oration.

<sup>96</sup> George Blake, *A Masonic Eulogy on the Life of the Illustrious Brother George Washington, Pronounced Before the Brethren of St. John’s Lodge, on the Evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> Feb. 5800. At their particular Request* (Boston: Printed by Brother John Russell, 5800), [1800].

<sup>97</sup> Solomon Blakslee, *Oration, Delivered at East-Haddam, Feb. 22, 1800, Agreeable to the Proclamation of the President of the United States; on the Death of the Late General George Washington* (Hartford, Connecticut: Printed by Hudson and Goodwin, 1800), 14.

<sup>98</sup> Abraham L. Clarke, *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington, at Mount Vernon, Dec. 14, 1799. Delivered before the Right Worshipful Master and Brethren of Mount Vernon Lodge, and the Congregation of St. John’s Church, in Providence on Saturday the 22d of February, A. L.*

name of Washington, it was incumbent upon them to behave in such a way that the institution does not eventually disgrace him. “How much so ever you may pride yourselves in his virtues, it is still a truth which you ought to feel, that the nature and tendency of your institution will be judged in part by the characters which you sustain.”

The candid pastor then cited a number of the common criticisms of Masonry and prescribed a pattern of behavior for all Masons to follow to ensure that they would bring no further stigma upon Washington’s beloved fraternity.

If, from your mouths the language of profaneness should often be heard; if your social meetings should be devoted to bacchanalian revels; if they should be prostituted to the base purposes of political intrigue; if your names should be enrolled among the dissolute disturbers of domestic felicity; if you should be found favoring each other at the expense of the rights of your fellow citizens; if there should be in you an apparent contempt of the cross of our divine Redeemer . . . Should such characters as these be indulged amongst you, you may possibly think that the reputation of Masonry is safe, while shielded by the virtues of an illustrious brother. But it is an affront to humanity to demand that the virtues of the dead can be made to protect the vices of the living. These things are not meant to reproach your society or to depreciate it in the view of your fellow citizens. Receive them rather as testimonials of regard for the memory of your common defender, and as proofs of a real desire to have the respectability and usefulness of your order supported. Flattering encomiums are here useless. For you cannot be insensible that while the veil of concealment is industriously thrown over your peculiar concerns, suspicion will be watching you in the most critical manner; that every action and word will be severely criticized, and that the character and tendency of your institution will be judged of, rather by the character of the individuals who compose it, than by anything that may be said respecting it.<sup>99</sup>

After describing Washington’s close fraternal ties and his patronage of Masonry during his lifetime, several of the Masonic orators addressed directly the timely issue of the public criticism of their organization that had been recently brought about by the Illuminati controversy. These comments provide some of the strongest evidence that

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5800. *By Abraham L. Clarke, A. M., Rector of St. John’s Church, Providence* (Providence: Printed by John Carter, 1800), 23-24.

<sup>99</sup> Fitch, 20-21.

Masons were seeking to use the death of Washington to enhance their image by claiming close ties to their deceased Brother and declaring their institutional objectives to support the republic by training men in the moral virtues needed to ensure the success of the nation. The Reverend Brother Thaddeus Mason Harris told the members of the Union Lodge of Dorchester, Massachusetts that Washington's love of the order, his zeal in promoting its interests, and his testimonials in support of Masonry had given the fraternity "new consequences and reputation in the world." Addressing the issue of the Illuminati controversy, Rev. Harris said that Washington's affiliation with Masonry "has been peculiarly serviceable at the present day, when the most unfounded prejudices have been harbored against Freemasonry, and the most calumnious impeachment brought forward to destroy it." He continued, "But our opposers blushed for the censures when we reminded them that Washington loved and patronized the institution. When the Order was persecuted by religious fanaticism and political jealousy, his unsullied virtue was its apology, and his irreproachable life its pledge."<sup>100</sup> To prevent further criticism of their fraternity, Harris encouraged his brothers to model their behavior after Washington's social and moral virtues that had served so well to illustrate the principles and benevolence of Masonry to the world.<sup>101</sup>

Speaking to his brothers of St. John's Lodge in Newark, New Jersey, on the national day of mourning, William Halsey asked how anyone could doubt the purity of Masonry's principles in light of Washington's endorsement of the ancient order. "Shall the specious labors of apostate [John] Robinson, or the vain imaginations of the ignorant

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<sup>100</sup> Thaddeus Mason Harris, *The Fraternal Tribute of Respect Paid to the Masonic Character of Washington, in the Union Lodge, in Dorchester, January 7<sup>th</sup>, A.L. 5800* (Charlestown, Massachusetts: Printed by Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 11.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

of our mysteries, justify calumny and reproach? Or shall not the name of Washington enrolled among its patrons, shield our institution from the poisoned arrows of their malevolence, and his approbation stamp falsity on all their pretensions?" Using the architectural metaphors of Masonry, Halsey characterized the virtues of Washington in the symbolic language of the fraternity, a common trope of many of the Masonic eulogists.

He was *master* of himself. By the *gavel* of his reason, he commanded his tumultuous passions into obedience and taught them to know his will. He broke from their strong hold the vile excrescences of human nature, and reduced to the fine polish of purity the *temple* of his heart. By a wise method he *gauged* the various duties of his busy life, into just proportions, ever maintaining the order with a rigid observance. He met all mankind on the *level* of equality; by strict justice were his actions *squared*; his carriage was *plumbed* by perfect rectitude; and in humble reliance on the *Supreme Architect*, he lived within the *compass* of every moral and social duty.<sup>102</sup>

"I need not tell you that Masonry has received of late some serious wounds, howbeit not mortal," the Reverend Brother Robert G. Wetmore said to the Masons in his audience toward the end of his public oration in the Lutheran Church in Schoharie, New York on January 15, 1800. He observed that "while Washington lived he added great respectability to our plans and operations, on every occasion he was ready to manifest that the order had nothing more in view than the establishment of Universal Friendship and a peculiar fraternal esteem and attachment." Reverend Wetmore concluded that he hoped that many people would be willing to entertain a sincere regard for Masonry "merely because so dignified a character as Washington pronounced it not only harmless and inoffensive but good and beneficial to the community." Washington, said the clergyman and Mason, knew the worth of an honest Mason and knew that the ancient order was "calculated to promote, in a gentle, direct, absolute, and yet pleasing manner,

morality and social virtues.”<sup>103</sup> In these comments, Wetmore directly linked Washington and Freemasonry to the fundamental task of promoting the kind of morality and virtues among men that would be necessary to ensure the success of the new republic. Similar sentiments were expressed eloquently by the Reverend Samuel Worcester in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, who said to the “Gentlemen Masons” in his audience:

You, this day, mourn the death of a Brother, than whom no one more virtuous or illustrious was ever enrolled as a member of your ancient and honorable Fraternity. While you cherish his memory as a sacred deposit in your bosoms—while in obedience to the laws of your order, and impelled by the feelings of your hearts, you condole with the bereaved and afflicted widow and her connections, and drop the involuntary tear on his sacred urn; will you not esteem it your highest ambition to tread in his steps and to transcribe his excellencies and virtues into your own characters. His benevolence, you cannot but remember, was not confined within the walls of a lodge, but diffusive and unbounded as the vital warmth of the noontide sun. Whenever he saw a man, he saw and acknowledged a brother. To do good to all around him—to seek the welfare of his country, and, so far as within his power, of the whole human kind, was the study, the delight, and the business of his life. Behold the MAN.—Your brother, and the acknowledged pattern of a good Mason. And as it was his, so may it be your professional business to build the glorious temple of true liberty and virtue.<sup>104</sup>

The virtues and character of George Washington, Father of his Country and Master Mason, were held up by his Masonic eulogists as the example to be followed by all members of the fraternity. By their emulation of his sublime virtues and adherence to the teachings of the ancient order, his surviving brothers could restore the reputation of Freemasonry and ensure that the order’s goals of teaching morality and virtue to the citizens of the early republic would be realized. As Junior Grand Warden, Seth Paine, of the Friendship Lodge of Charleston, South Carolina, told his assembled brothers, “We

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<sup>102</sup> William Halsey, 13-14.

<sup>103</sup> Robert G. Wetmore, *An Oration, Occasioned by the Death of Lieutenant General George Washington. Delivered at the Lutheran Church in Schoharie, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 1800* (Cooperstown, New York: Printed and Sold by Elihu Phinney, 1800), 16-17.

have great reason, my brethren, to felicitate ourselves, that [Washington] lived and died one of us, especially at the present period when the designing and wicked tools of the powers of darkness are uncommonly assiduous in endeavoring to rouse the unjust suspicions of the blind and ignorant. . . . What a duty is imposed on mankind to copy so bright an example! What an obligation upon Masons in particular to benefit from it! We all know, brethren, that by a due observance of the principles upon which our great moral building is established, that the Masonic Fraternity becomes a light to the world.”<sup>105</sup>

In this manner, the Freemasons of America mourned the death of Washington. Like other actors during the period of national mourning, the Masons used their association with the Father of his Country to promote their status in the theater of public opinion and to advance the goals of their organization.

Perhaps no other organization was more assiduous in using the death of Washington to promote its own objectives than was the American military establishment under the direction of Major General Alexander Hamilton. The role of military actors in mourning the death of their fallen commander in chief, Lieutenant General George Washington, is described and analyzed in the chapter that follows.

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<sup>104</sup> Samuel Worcester, *An Oration, Sacred to the Memory of Gen. George Washington, Pronounced at Fitchburg, on the Day of National Mourning, February 22, 1800* (Leominster, Massachusetts: Printed by Adams & Wilder, 1800), 19.

<sup>105</sup> Seth Paine, *An Eulogy on General George Washington. Pronounced in the Friendship Lodge, No. (, Ancient York Masons, in Presence of the Grand Lodge of South Carolina, and a Numerous Assemblage of the Brethren, on the 22d of February, 1800* (Charleston, South Carolina: Printed by Freneau & Paine, 1800), 18, 24.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN MOURNING

#### THE DEATH OF THEIR COMMANDER IN CHIEF

If the sad privilege of pre-eminence in sorrow may justly be claimed by the companions in arms of our lamented Chief, then affections will spontaneously perform the dear, though painful duty. . . While others are paying a merited tribute to ‘THE MAN OF THE AGE,’ we in particular, allied as we were to him in a chosen tie, are called to mourn the irreparable loss of a kind and venerable Patron and Father!

Major General Alexander Hamilton, Philadelphia, 21 December 1799

The deceased American patriarch, George Washington, had been first and foremost a military figure, and the national ceremonies in observance of his death celebrated his martial contributions to the early republic. Washington had played prominent roles in the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, and the mobilization of the United States army during the “Quasi-War” with France. It is significant that Major General Henry Lee, his military subordinate, longtime friend, and Federalist orator in the congressional memorial service held in Philadelphia, chose to begin his now famous, three-part eulogy of Washington with the descriptive phrase, “first in war.”<sup>1</sup> Lee’s ordering of the relative importance of Washington’s contributions to his

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<sup>1</sup> “First in war—first in peace—and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life . . .” Henry Lee, Philadelphia, 26 December 1799, from the

country, giving priority to his martial achievements over his role as a statesman, serves to illustrate the way in which the funeral rites held throughout the nation emphasized the primary importance of his military role in the new nation and relegated to a lesser status his role as civil magistrate. Virtually all of the funeral processions, with the exception of those arranged primarily as Masonic events, had a distinctive and dominant military tone. Thundering cannons, the sharp reports of minute guns, muffled drums, and the slow dirges of military musicians provided the background sounds that accompanied the somber processions. Most of the parades were led by uniformed military men appearing in the roles of trumpeters, mounted dragoons with swords drawn, armed soldiers marching in formation, and as fifers and drummers and members of "bands of music." In those processions that included a bier bearing a coffin or urn representing the body of Washington, the fallen commander in chief, the bier was always carried by uniformed soldiers, and the honorary pallbearers were usually either active senior military officers or men who had served as officers in the Continental Army during the Revolution. Marching slowly to the somber dirges played by their company musicians, the soldiers observed traditional Anglo-American military mourning customs by reversing their usual order of march by platoons and reversing their arms by pointing the barrels of their muskets toward the ground. The boots were also reversed in the stirrups of the riderless horses, and pistols displayed on the saddles were reversed in their holsters. The drums of the military bands were muffled, cloth placed under the snares to produce the dull, hollow beat of mourning. Black cloth was wrapped around the sides of the drums, covering

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official edition of his eulogy, published by order of Congress, Philadelphia, 1800. (Early American Imprints, 1<sup>st</sup> series, no. 37797.)

regimental insignias painted on them, to symbolize that the military unit was in mourning for one of its fallen soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

The predominant representation of Washington in the processions as a military leader, rather than as a civil magistrate, was due largely to significant social and political issues surrounding the status of American foreign relations and domestic politics at the time of his death. As the eighteenth century came to a close, Americans were embroiled in bitter partisan debates about domestic and foreign policy, and these divisive political issues had a profound influence on the manner in which the nation mourned the death of its patriarch, George Washington. When Lieutenant General George Washington died at Mount Vernon on December 14, 1799, the nation was still involved in an ongoing undeclared naval war with France, a foreign relations crisis that John Adams called the “Half War,” and that historians would later name the “Quasi-War” with France.<sup>3</sup>

Relations between France and the United States had deteriorated following the 1795

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<sup>2</sup> British military funeral customs, the model for early American military mourning practices, are described by Major T. J. Edwards in *Military Customs*, 202-205. He indicates that military funerals customarily reverse the order of things from what they are normally. For example, when the body is being taken to the place of burial, arms are reversed, the precedence of those who follow the coffin is reversed, and if a horse follows bearing the dead warrior's boots, they are reversed in the stirrups. The custom of reversing things during mourning is very ancient and was carried out by the Greeks in civil funerals as well as military. There is documentation of arms reversed in English military funerals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and muskets were carried in reverse by British soldiers participating in the Duke of Marlborough's funeral in 1722.

<sup>3</sup> This discussion of the military and political dimensions of the Quasi-War with France is based in part from a portion of my earlier study of the history of George Washington's military rank. That study was included in an unpublished paper, “George Washington's Posthumous Promotion: Post-Vietnam Revisionists Burnish the General's Service Record,” by William P. MacKinnon and Gerald E. Kahler, prepared for Louisiana State University in Shreveport's multi-disciplinary conference on “George Washington: Life, Times, and Legacy,” Shreveport, Louisiana, September 17-19, 1998. The following discussion is a synthesis of the work of several scholars of the Federalist Era including: Manning J. Dauer, *The Adams Federalists* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797-1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966); Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993); John E. Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Stephen G. Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams: The Collapse of Federalism, 1795-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957); and John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era, 1789-1801* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

ratification of the Jay Treaty, an agreement between Britain and the United States that was viewed by France and also by Jeffersonian Republicans as being pro-British and a violation of the Franco-American commercial and military alliance of 1778. France retaliated by announcing its intention to seize neutral vessels, including those of the United States that were found to be carrying English goods, a policy that was in response to Britain's orders-in-council of 1793 that had authorized the capture of all neutral vessels carrying goods to and from French possessions in the West Indies. President George Washington had immediately proclaimed the neutrality of the United States when France had declared war on Britain in early 1793, but deteriorating relationships between the United States and France had reached the crisis stage by the time John Adams succeeded Washington as president in March 1797. Washington's last attempt to improve the situation with France was to recall James Monroe, minister to that country, and to appoint Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to replace him.

The fundamental question of John Adams's entire presidential term of office from 1797 to 1801 was how to regain a neutral position with France, thus avoiding war between the two nations. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, authors of *The Age of Federalism*, underscore this point with their observation that "the whole of Adams's single term was absorbed to a degree unequalled in any other American presidency with a single problem, a crisis in foreign relations."<sup>4</sup> The creation of an expanded army in 1798-1799 to defend the nation in the event of war with France was a matter of major political disagreement in the United States, and the army issue was to become, in the words of historian Stephen G. Kurtz, the "bete noir" of the Federalist party, the first decisive

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<sup>4</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 529.

symptom of a schism in the party that would accomplish its overthrow and bring an end to Adams's presidency.<sup>5</sup>

John Adams began his presidency with full intentions to maintain Washington's neutrality policy; however, the French Directory's decision to refuse to accept Charles Cotesworth Pinckney as James Monroe's replacement as American minister to France, coupled with its decree of March 2, 1797 abrogating the Franco-American treaties of 1778, pushed the two countries closer to war. Hoping to avert war with France, Adams decided to dispatch a new team of emissaries to Paris to negotiate a settlement with the Directory, giving the French the same commercial rights that had been extended to Britain in the Jay Treaty. In return, France would be asked to honor the rights of the United States as a neutral nation to trade with whomever it pleased.<sup>6</sup> Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall, and Elbridge Gerry were approved by the Senate to go to Paris in an attempt to negotiate an agreement with France, but their efforts were thwarted when French Foreign Minister Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord's three secret agents, later referred to in diplomatic dispatches as "X, Y, and Z," approached the Americans asking for bribes, loans, and an official apology for Adams's allegedly anti-French remarks in his May 1797 address to Congress. When word of the treachery of the French secret agents reached the United States in March 1798, the "XYZ Affair" triggered a public reaction in support of an immediate declaration of war in retaliation for the insult to the American government. Former secretary of the treasury in the Washington administration, Alexander Hamilton, having resigned as a federal officeholder but still the influential leader of the High Federalist faction, called for the creation of an

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<sup>5</sup> Kurtz, 307-333.

<sup>6</sup> Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 342-45.

American army of fifty thousand men to be led by General Washington. Sensing the public's desire for a militant policy and riding on the crest of a sudden surge of popularity, President Adams began to make increasingly bellicose statements and, as commander in chief, began to appear in public wearing a full military uniform with sword.<sup>7</sup> Responding to the leadership of Alexander Hamilton, and the hawkish High Federalists, Congress passed twenty laws for waging the Quasi-War in the period between the end of March and the middle of July 1798, putting the country on a war footing by creating an enlarged army and new navy. These laws were enacted in the midst of the patriotic fervor of the "Black Cockade," a black ribbon worn on the hats of men who supported the High Federalists' desire for a declared war with France. The black cockade was first worn by members of the Federalist party in Congress and was subsequently derided by Republican sympathizers as the "British Cockade."<sup>8</sup>

As the nation drifted closer to war, John Adams weighed the issue of military leadership and the political advantages that might accrue from having George Washington identified with the war mobilization effort. Adams wrote to Washington on June 22, 1798 asking for the former president's agreement to allow his name to be proposed to Congress as general of the army.<sup>9</sup> However, unknown to Adams, Alexander Hamilton was already usurping the President's constitutional role as commander in chief. Operating independently from his home in New York, rather than trying to channel his recommendations through Adams, Hamilton had corresponded directly with members of the President's cabinet and High Federalist leaders in Congress, and the result was

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 357-58.

<sup>8</sup> DeConde, 89-90; Dauer, 151.

<sup>9</sup> John Adams to George Washington, 22 June 1798, in W. W. Abbot, ed., *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 2:351-52.

congressional authorization of a new army that was far greater in size than anything Adams had asked for or wanted. One of the underlying reasons for Adams's reservations about a great expansion of the United States army was his fear that the new army would be effectively commanded by Hamilton, "the one man in the world he trusted less than any other."<sup>10</sup> In a letter written in 1805 to Benjamin Rush, Adams reflected on the congressional adoption of Hamilton's proposed war measures in 1798, including the major expansion of the army. He wrote to Rush, "The army was none of my work. I only advised a few companies of Artillery to garrison our most exposed forts that a single frigate or Picaroon Privateer might not take them at the first assault. Hamilton's project of an army of fifty thousand, ten thousand of them to be horse, appeared to me to be proper only for Bedlam. His friends however in the Senate and the House embarrassed me with a bill for more troops than I wanted."<sup>11</sup>

Alexander Hamilton's post-Revolutionary War vision for creating a strong central government in America, and for assuring that the new nation would be recognized as a major power in the eyes of the world, had included the establishment of a small peacetime federal army that could be supplemented as necessary if called into service in case of war or invasion. He had first proposed such an army in 1783, but the idea was opposed at that time on the basis of funding issues and the traditional republican fears that a standing army could too easily become a tool of tyranny over the citizenry at the whim of despotic rulers. "No principle of government was more widely understood or more completely accepted by the generation of Americans that established the United States than the danger of a standing army in peacetime," writes Richard H. Kohn in *Eagle*

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<sup>10</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 593.

<sup>11</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Rush, August 23, 1805, quoted in Dauer, 212.

*and Sword*, his seminal study of Federalist militarism and the birth of the military establishment in America.<sup>12</sup> However, following the adoption of the Constitution and the establishment of the new federal government, Congress had authorized an expanded regular army of 5,000 men after General Arthur St. Clair's defeat by the Indians in the Northwest in 1791. After General Anthony Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794, the principle of a peacetime army was established by a congressional act of 1796 that authorized a regular force of about 3,400 men organized into four regiments of infantry, a corps of artillerists and engineers, and two companies of light dragoons.<sup>13</sup> During the war fervor of the spring and summer of 1798 that followed the publicizing of the "XYZ Affair," Congress passed legislation that dramatically increased the size of the military establishment in preparation for the possibility of war with France. On July 16, 1798, an act of Congress created an "Additional Army" that increased the authorized strength of the Army from about 4,200 to 14,400 officers and men. The Additional Army was to be organized into twelve regiments of infantry and six troops of light dragoons. Although the additional twelve regiments provided by this act were part of the Regular United States Army, they were treated as a separate and distinct part of the army for recruiting and administrative purposes. Most of the troops of the old regiments, called the "old army," were garrisoned in the West. The additional regiments were usually referred to by Alexander Hamilton and his contemporaries as the "new army." Hamilton held his commissions as inspector general and major general under the act of July 16, 1798, and during the remainder of 1798 and all of 1799, as second in command to Washington, he

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<sup>12</sup> Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 595-95; Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 22:384-85.



devoted a major portion of his time and attention to raising and staffing the officer ranks of the twelve additional regiments authorized by Congress.<sup>14</sup>

On May 28, 1798 Congress had passed an act creating a “Provisional Army,” a force of up to ten thousand men to be enlisted and called into active service by the President in the event of a declaration of war against the United States or an invasion of their territory by a foreign power. This act was designed to give Adams the power to raise an army in the event that circumstances so required while Congress was in recess. However, Adams did not use this authority during the ensuing months; consequently, the President lost his authority to raise a Provisional Army when Congress reconvened on December 3, 1798. Even though the so-called Provisional Army was only a paper organization that was never raised or took the field, a few officers were appointed under the provisions of the act, including Lieutenant General George Washington as commander in chief of all armies raised and to be raised by the United States. Revolutionary War hero, Henry “Lighthorse Harry” Lee, was also commissioned as a major general under the provisions of this legislation, although he was not called to active duty since the army was not raised.<sup>15</sup> Washington’s commission differed from Lee’s in that the commander in chief’s authority was not limited to the Provisional Army but extended over all armies to be raised by the United States.

Significantly, however, one important provision of the congressional act of May 28, 1798 regarding the Provisional Army was implemented during the summer and fall of 1798. Section Three of the act authorized the organization of volunteer companies of private citizens who were to provide their own arms and equipment. These private

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<sup>14</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 22: 385.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 22: 387.

companies of volunteers were intended to be the nucleus of the Provisional Army and could be accepted into the service of the United States by the President at any time within three years of the passage of the act. Although many such volunteer companies were formed in 1798-1799, the only ones that saw active duty were a few companies that were commanded by Brigadier General William Macpherson of Pennsylvania in the suppression of insurgent taxpayers in the so-called Fries's Rebellion.<sup>16</sup> Historian David Waldstreicher argues that the mobilization of young men into these volunteer companies was the "cutting edge political phenomenon of the late 1790s." As "stylish and refined" young Federalists banded together in patriotic military organizations in support of President Adams after the release of the XYZ dispatches, they demonstrated their unity with older patriots, dispelling the notion that Americans were not united in their resistance to the French. The festive and martial gatherings of these affluent young volunteers blunted the Jeffersonians' "class-infected campaign against aristocrats."<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after the passage of the legislation to expand the army, some of the hawkish High Federalist politicians in Congress began to pull back from their demands for a declaration of war, sensing that public opinion was not in support of war with France. The growing opposition to declaring war centered in President Adams, who probably never believed that France would invade the United States. There was no support for a declaration of war among Republicans, even though some of them, especially southern congressmen, had supported the war measures for purposes of defending the nation in the event of an invasion. In addition, many Americans continued

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:388; Dauer, 168.

<sup>17</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style," in Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 111-114.

to oppose the establishment of a standing army because of its high cost to taxpayers and their fear that such an army could be used as an instrument of tyranny.<sup>18</sup> Alexander Hamilton, despite his role in orchestrating the congressional authorization of the new army, was not among those High Federalists who had been calling for a declaration of war against France. A champion of strong central government and a proponent of the policy of military preparedness in the event of war, he believed that the army should be expanded as a defensive measure that would send a strong message to France and other foreign powers that Americans would firmly resist any attempt on their part to invade the United States.<sup>19</sup> Hamilton was pleased, however, with the congressional war-preparation measures, and having been instrumental in drafting and securing the passage of the legislation that authorized the mobilization of an expanded army, he now turned his attention to lobbying for the senior command position under Washington. Symbolically, on the Fourth of July, 1798, President John Adams, with the advice and consent of the Senate, commissioned George Washington as “Lieutenant General and Commander in Chief of all the Armies raised or to be raised for the service of the United States.”<sup>20</sup> Adams asked Secretary of War James McHenry to go immediately to Mount Vernon to carry the commission to Washington and to obtain his advice on the organization of the army and the appointment of other high-ranking officers.<sup>21</sup> One of the carryover members of Adams’s cabinet from the Washington administration, James McHenry had been Washington’s last secretary of war and appears to have been totally under the

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<sup>18</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 594-98.

<sup>19</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 584; Jacob Ernest Cooke, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1982), 190-93; Forrest McDonald, *Alexander Hamilton: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 333-34; Broadus Mitchell, *Alexander Hamilton: The National Adventure, 1788-1804* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 423-24.

<sup>20</sup> *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, 2: 404n.

<sup>21</sup> DeConde, 96-97; Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 358-59.

influence of Alexander Hamilton at this time, giving priority to directions received from him, even if contradictory to the wishes of the President. McHenry, Hamilton, and Washington had been exchanging letters about the command of the army well before Adams wrote to Washington to offer him the post. The three men had agreed that Hamilton should be named second in command, but this information had not been shared with Adams. With his customary diffidence, Washington reluctantly accepted the commission as the nation's first lieutenant general in a letter to Adams dated July 13, 1798. He accepted the appointment as commander in chief of the armies of the United States with the reservation that he not be called into the field until the army was in a situation to require his presence or it became indispensable by the urgency of circumstances.<sup>22</sup> He intended to oversee the work of his major generals from Mount Vernon as they planned and implemented the recruiting and training of the new army.

With Washington's acceptance of the command, there began a wrangling over the appointment of major generals that not only challenged President Adams's constitutional authority to appoint military officers but also laid the groundwork for a split between Adams and Hamilton that would eventually bring down the Federalist party. Hamilton had been very open with Washington that he wanted to be his second in command in the event of war with France.<sup>23</sup> Washington's letter of July 14, 1798 to his former aide-de-

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<sup>22</sup> George Washington to John Adams, 13 July 1798, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, 2: 402-404.

<sup>23</sup> In a letter to Washington dated May 19, 1798, Hamilton had expressed his belief that there was great probability that the nation would have to go to war with France, despite expected opposition from the Republicans. Hamilton also suggested to Washington that, in the event of war, "the public voice will again call you to command the armies of your country." Washington's reply to Hamilton on May 27, 1798 expressed his personal reservations about returning to military command but asked Hamilton whether, if war came, he would be disposed to take an active part as one of "my coadjutors." Hamilton responded to Washington's query in a letter dated June 2, 1798 in which he indicated his willingness to enter the military service "if I am invited to a station in which the service I may render may be proportioned to the sacrifice I am to make. I shall be willing to go into the army. If you command, the place in which I should hope to be

camp and treasury secretary committed him to full support of Hamilton's wishes.

Washington wrote to Hamilton that he had accepted the commission with two reservations—"that the principal officers in the line, and of the staff, shall be such as I can place confidence in; and that I shall not be called into the field until the Army is in a situation to require my presence, or it becomes indispensable by the urgency of circumstances." Washington concluded his letter to Hamilton by passing along the information that the pending bill in Congress authorized the appointment of two major generals, an inspector general with the rank of major general, and three brigadiers. Washington advised Hamilton that Secretary of War McHenry was aware of his sentiments on the appointments, including awarding the inspector general position to Hamilton and placing him second in command. Washington's choices for the other major generals were Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and Henry Knox with Henry Lee being an alternate candidate if either of the other two declined to serve.<sup>24</sup>

President Adams did not share Washington's enthusiasm for Hamilton's serving as second in command, suspecting that his arch-rival planned to use the position to run the army while Washington stayed in the background in a titular role only. In order to avoid appointing Hamilton to inspector general, Adams argued that the candidates' Revolutionary War seniority should be used to determine their relative rank on Washington's staff. This approach would place General Henry Knox in the second in command position, followed by Pinckney, then Hamilton. The wrangling continued for four months until Adams finally conceded after hearing that Washington would resign

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most useful is that of Inspector General with a command in the line." *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, 2: 279-81, 297-300, and 309-310.

<sup>24</sup> George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, 14 July 1798, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, 2: 407-409.

rather than have anyone but Hamilton in the position of inspector general. Adams signed all three of the major generals' commissions the same day, September 30, 1798, delegating authority to Lieutenant General Washington to determine their relative rank. General Knox was greatly offended that Hamilton, who had been only a lieutenant colonel during the Revolution, would outrank him, and he refused to serve in a position subordinate to Hamilton.<sup>25</sup> Because Washington had accepted his commission as commander in chief on the condition that he would oversee the raising of the new army but not take the field unless required by compelling circumstances, his authority over day-to-day military operations was divided between major generals Alexander Hamilton and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. In addition to his responsibilities as inspector general, which included serving as Washington's second in command and directing the recruiting service for the entire new army, Hamilton was given the command of all "old army" troops in garrison in the Northwest Territory and on the Mississippi River. He was also awarded command of all the troops and posts in Maryland and all states north and east. Major General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a South Carolinian, was given command of all troops and posts within the southern states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.<sup>26</sup>

On July 16, 1798, the second army expansion bill creating the "Additional Army" was passed by Congress with substantial Republican support, due partly to growing apprehension in slave-holding southern states that any planned invasion of America by France would probably target the southern coast. They feared that such an invasion might be launched from Santo Domingo with an army of blacks led by Toussaint

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<sup>25</sup> Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 359-63.

Louverture or by a force led by the French Directory's commissioner in the West Indies, Victor Hughes, with the intention of inciting a slave insurrection.<sup>27</sup> The congressional legislation of July 16, 1798 was of great significance because, in the words of historians Elkins and McKittrick, "Alexander Hamilton now had his army." Major General Hamilton began to organize the army without any overt interference from the President, but with no assistance from him either. Adams's loss of the struggle over the appointment of the three major generals and the implications for future curbs on his authority over military matters may have triggered a turning point in the way he viewed the French crisis. At about this time, the President began to think about the possibility of negotiating a peaceful settlement of the issues that divided the two countries.<sup>28</sup> When it became apparent to Adams that the war would provide Hamilton with a vehicle to ride to military glory and possibly the presidency, the President avoided actions that would hasten the mobilization of the army. Believing that a strong navy was far more critical than an expanded army during the undeclared naval war with France, Adams delayed recruiting for the army. Consequently, the Additional Army never attained more than a third of its authorized strength of 10,000 men.<sup>29</sup>

President Adams, effectively stripped of his constitutional powers as commander in chief, could only watch as McHenry, Washington, Hamilton, Pinckney, and their associates proceeded in their efforts to raise and organize the new army. Hamilton drafted reports for Lieutenant General Washington's signature that increased the size of the army, and he continued to correspond directly with Federalist leaders in Congress

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<sup>26</sup> James McHenry to Alexander Hamilton, 4 February 1799, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 22: 459.

<sup>27</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 598-99.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 605-606.

rather than working through the President. Hamilton drafted war-related bills that were introduced in Congress in January 1799 and wrote letters to Congressmen proposing to move the army to Louisiana and Florida to prevent any intentions by France to take possession of those provinces. Perhaps the final blow for the President came in February 1799 when the High Federalist Speaker of the House of Representatives, Theodore Sedgwick, informed him that the military reorganization bill pending before the Senate would propose giving Washington the new title, “General,” a military rank never before conferred in America. Adams regarded this proposed action as potentially annihilating the essential powers given by the Constitution to the president as commander in chief, and he feared that Hamilton would replace Washington and use the army to proclaim a “regal government” and make the United States a province of Great Britain.<sup>30</sup> Seven years later, in a letter written to John Marshall approving Marshall’s request to use in his Washington biography some of Adams’s correspondence with Washington during the Quasi-War, John Adams reflected on this difficult period in his presidency. Adams wrote, “It is a period which must however be investigated but I am confident will never be well understood. A first Magistrate of a great Republic with a General Officer under him, a Commander in Chief of the Army, who had ten thousand times as much influence, popularity, and power as himself, and that Commander in Chief so much under the influence of his second in command, the most treacherous, malicious, insolent, and

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<sup>29</sup> Miller, 218.

<sup>30</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 615-617.



revengeful enemy of the first Magistrate is a picture which may be very delicate and dangerous to draw. But it must be drawn.”<sup>31</sup>

The Quasi-War took a dramatic turn in February 1799 when President Adams decided that the best course of action would be to send an envoy to Paris to negotiate a peace settlement, rather than to pursue a declaration of war. Adams had received reassurances from William Vans Murray, American ambassador to The Hague, that Foreign Minister Talleyrand feared war with the United States because it would only drive the Americans into the arms of the British and would probably doom France’s remaining colonial toehold in North America. Consequently, Talleyrand had sent word to Murray through Louis Andre Pichon, a member of the French delegation to The Hague, that France would receive a peace delegation from the government of the United States. Sensitive to President Adams’s insistence that the United States be treated as a first-rate power, Talleyrand committed that the American envoys would be treated “with the respect due the representatives of a free, independent, and powerful country.”<sup>32</sup> George Washington’s advice to Adams was timely and reassuring when the ex-president forwarded a letter from Joel Barlow, an American poet living in Paris, who had written to Washington that the French wanted peace. Washington added his personal advice to President Adams that the friends of America also wanted peace, which was in his opinion, essential for the best interests of “this rising empire.”<sup>33</sup>

Because of his growing awareness that several members of his cabinet were little more than puppets of Hamilton, Adams did not bother to consult them when he sent a

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<sup>31</sup> John Adams to John Marshall, July 17, 1806, in Charles F. Hobson, ed., *The Papers of John Marshall*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, in association with the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1990), 6: 453-54.

<sup>32</sup> Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 374-75.

message to Congress on February 18, 1799 that he wished to send an envoy to Paris to negotiate a peace settlement. The hawkish High Federalists in Congress were “thunderstruck,” but they continued their war-related legislative program. On March 3, 1799 Congress passed the bill that Theodore Sedgwick had mentioned to Adams in February, providing “that a Commander of the Army of the United States shall be appointed and commissioned by the style of General of the Armies of the United States and the present office and title of Lieutenant General shall thereafter be abolished.” As commander in chief of all military forces under the terms of the United States Constitution, President Adams simply declined to act on this authorization, thus making the legislation moot. By this time, Republicans and moderate Federalists in Congress were supporting Adams in his pursuit of peace.<sup>34</sup> They approved a three-man peace delegation whose efforts resulted in the Convention of Mortefontaine, a treaty between France and the United States that was ratified by the Senate in December 1801.<sup>35</sup> The High Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, retaliated by pulling their support from John Adams for a second presidential term, and the split in the party opened the way for the Republicans to elect Thomas Jefferson as the next president.<sup>36</sup> John Adams was later to defend his presidential decision to negotiate with the French rather than to declare war. He referred to his decision as “the most disinterested and meritorious actions of my life” and “the most splendid diamond in my crown.” The decision may have been Adams’s defining moment in American history, and his handling of the Quasi-War crisis with France showed that he was a president who could rise above political faction in behalf of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 377; George Washington to John Adams, February 1, 1799, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, 3: 350-51.

<sup>34</sup> Ferling *John Adams: A Life*, 379-380.

<sup>35</sup> DeConde, 351-372.

the nation's best interests. Adams even went so far as to request that his tombstone contain only one inscription: "Here lies John Adams who took upon himself the responsibility of peace with France in the year 1800."<sup>37</sup>

The death of Lieutenant General George Washington triggered action to do away with the Additional Army and reduce the size of the military establishment. Even before the general's death, many Federalists knew that its days were probably numbered, although Hamilton continued to reject any compromises that might reduce the size or cut the funding of the new army.<sup>38</sup> In a letter written in the fall of 1799 to Jonathan Dayton, United States Senator from New Jersey, Hamilton expressed his belief that "our military force should for the present be kept upon its actual footing, making provision for a reenlistment of the men for five years in the event of a settlement of differences with France."<sup>39</sup> The Federalist leadership in Congress, however, was aware of the political risk of continuing to build a standing army as the threat of war diminished. They feared that the party held responsible for the cost of maintaining this unemployed military force would become as unpopular as the army itself. With the death of the army's nominal commander, Lieutenant General Washington, and with the reluctance of Adams to appoint Hamilton to succeed Washington and to expand the army, a combination of Republicans and moderate Federalists in Congress passed an act on February 20, 1800, just two days before the day of national mourning for Washington, which suspended further enlistment in the Additional Army until the next session of Congress or a declaration of war. The act was followed by a supplementary law authorizing the

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<sup>36</sup> Kurtz, 374-408; Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 396-413; DeConde, 259-93.

<sup>37</sup> Ellis, 75-78.

<sup>38</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 716.

discharge, at an early date, of officers and men who had already enlisted. President Adams signed the act on May 14, 1800, the last day of the congressional session, in light of favorable news from Paris on progress in the peace negotiations. Among other things, this act specifically authorized President Adams to suspend any further appointment to the office of general of the armies of the United States “having reference to economy and the good of the service.” These actions marked the end of Hamilton’s aspirations to command an expanded military force, and the controversial Additional Army was disbanded soon thereafter.<sup>40</sup>

Elkins and McKittrick argue that in supporting Hamilton’s proposed war measures, “the Federalists were exploiting an immediate crisis for the momentum needed to fashion a permanent institutional structure that might ensure the strength and stability of the national government.” While there has been much speculation among historians about the specific uses the Federalists may have had in mind for their army—including using it to repel an expected French invasion of the United States, to move American soldiers into Latin America with British naval support to aid Francisco de Miranda’s revolutionary efforts to liberate the Spanish colonies, to occupy Louisiana and Florida, to bring military glory to Hamilton, and to use the army to quash domestic political opposition—“what it came down to was that the Federalists did not know what they wanted of this army, in particular. About all they did know was simply that they wanted an army. It represented something out of another time and another country: authority, and the reassurance of authority—that, and little more.”<sup>41</sup> By insisting on such a major

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander Hamilton to Jonathan Dayton, October-November 1799, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 23: 602.

<sup>40</sup> DeConde, 264-266.

<sup>41</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, 714-716.

expansion of the military establishment, Hamilton and the Federalists “were challenging a traditional and widely nurtured suspicion among Americans toward the very principle of standing armies.” Contemporary Americans understood that the officers of the new army were to be none but reliable Federalists, and many feared that the army could become an instrument of Federalist tyranny. One of the primary reasons for the failure of Hamilton’s plan for expanding the army during the Quasi-War with France was the lack of widespread popular support. The new army was a failure primarily because “this society did not want this army.”<sup>42</sup>

The impending collapse of “Hamilton’s Army” in late 1799 and early 1800 suggests a likely explanation for the high visibility of the military establishment in the Washington funeral rites and their portrayal of Washington as a military leader rather than as civil magistrate. As mentioned above, this may explain Hamilton’s extraordinary idea of making every commemoration of Washington’s death a simulated funeral with military honors. Sensing that their plan to expand the army was in danger of collapsing, Major General Alexander Hamilton and his High Federalist associates in late December 1799 may have been still trying to convince the American people of the critical importance of maintaining a standing army to ensure the security and stability of the republic. To this end, the timing of Washington’s death and the national mourning that ensued played into the hands of Hamilton and the supporters of an expanded military establishment by providing them with a strategic opportunity to display publicly the strength of the army and to indoctrinate the citizens about the potential benefits to be derived from continued support of the military. Following the death of the army’s

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 716-17.

commander in chief, Lieutenant General George Washington, Major General Hamilton was given a last, unexpected window of opportunity to demonstrate to the nation that he was willing and able to assume command of the army and that only his leadership could ensure that the mobilization of the new army would continue in order to protect Americans in this time of grave national crisis.

In order to assess the extent to which Hamilton may have been motivated to exploit the death of Washington to promote his military and political objectives, it is necessary to examine closely his official actions as second in command of the army following Washington's death. As discussed previously, Hamilton's orders detailing the funeral honors to be accorded Washington at all United States Army posts provided one of the most popular scripts used by committees of arrangement in planning both military and civil funeral ceremonies in the first stage of mourning the death of Washington. It seems especially significant that the issuance of Hamilton's orders strictly followed the military chain of command, legitimized by the authority flowing from President Adams, the constitutional commander in chief, through Secretary of War James McHenry, to Major General Hamilton, the officer highest in command of the army following the death of Lieutenant General Washington. Hamilton's strict adherence to military protocol in this instance is in marked contrast to his repeated bypassing of the President during the preceding months as he orchestrated the creation of the new army and his own appointment as second in command of that army by communicating directly with Washington, McHenry, and several High Federalist congressmen. But in this case it was of critical importance to Hamilton, in order to shore up the legitimacy of his command and to ensure the viability of his new army, that his actions be viewed as having the full

endorsement of President John Adams. Hamilton and his associates linked their project to Adams by the way in which they used the newspapers to promulgate the orders to the army directing that funeral honors be conducted at all military stations in the United States. The following announcement from the War Department appeared in newspapers throughout the nation shortly after the announcement of Washington's death.

The President with deep regret announces to the army, the death of its beloved Chief, General GEORGE WASHINGTON. Sharing in the grief which every heart must feel for so heavy and afflicting a public loss; and desirous to express his high sense of the vast debt of gratitude which is due to the virtues, talents, and ever-memorable service of the illustrious deceased, he directs that FUNERAL HONORS be paid to him at all military stations. And that the Officers of the Army, and of the several corps of volunteers wear crape on the left arm, by way of mourning, for six months. Major General HAMILTON will give the necessary orders for carrying into effect the foregoing directions.

Given at the War Office of the United States, December 19, 1799.

JAMES McHenry, Secretary at War<sup>43</sup>

The following announcement was issued from Philadelphia on December 23, 1799, confirming the link between Hamilton's orders to the army and the directions he had received from President Adams through Secretary of War James McHenry.

Major General Hamilton has received through the Secretary of War, the following order from the President of the United States. [Repeated the same message from James McHenry quoted immediately above, and then proceeded with the following preface by Hamilton.]

The impressive terms in which this great national calamity is announced by the President could receive no new force from any thing that might be added. The voice of praise would in vain endeavor to exalt a character, unrivalled on the lists of glory. Words would in vain attempt to give utterance to that profound and reverential grief, which will penetrate every American bosom, and engage the sympathy of an admiring world. If the sad privilege of pre-eminence in sorrow may justly be claimed by the companions in arms of our lamented Chief, then affections will spontaneously perform the dear, though painful duty. 'Tis only for me to mingle my tears with those of my fellow soldiers, cherishing with them the precious recollection, that while others are paying a merited tribute to "THE MAN OF THE AGE," we in particular, allied as we were to him in a chosen tie,

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<sup>43</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 28 December 1799.

are called to mourn the irreparable loss of a kind and venerable Patron and Father!

In obedience to the directions of the President, the following funeral Honors will be paid at the several stations of the army. . .<sup>44</sup>

Several key provisions of Hamilton's orders, quoted in full in Chapter Three, lend credence to the theory that his intention was to use the military funerals for Washington as a propaganda media for conveying messages to the American people soliciting public support of his continued leadership in the expansion of the military establishment as authorized by Congress in 1798. Most significantly, his orders encouraged the combination of military and civilian observances of Washington's death, thereby ensuring that the audiences for the funeral pageantry would not be limited to members of the military alone. If the civilian and military ceremonies were combined, an ample audience of citizens would be on hand to view the army's display of power and its close ties to Washington. To encourage the fusion of military and civil funeral rites, Hamilton's orders directed that "at places where processions of unarmed citizens shall take place, it is the wish of the Major General that the military ceremonial should be united. And the particular commanders at those places are authorized to vary the plan, so as to adapt it to the circumstances." To beef up the military presence, and to blur distinctions between the militia and the standing army, a political issue dividing Federalists and Republicans, Hamilton directed that the uniform companies of militia were to be invited to join in arms the volunteer corps. Because the local militias were comprised of citizen-soldiers, their participation would imply the consent of the people to Hamilton's leadership in the continuing build up of the federal standing army.

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<sup>44</sup> *Richmond Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 3 January 1800.



In his description and analysis of the procession held in Washington in connection with the laying of the cornerstone of the United States Capitol in September 1793, Len Travers observes that “the structure of all processions is of the first importance; order and place shape the desired message.”<sup>45</sup> Hamilton’s orders demonstrate this principle in their use of order and place to shape the intended message of the military funeral rites. The orders specified that, “where a numerous body of citizens shall be united with the military in the procession, the whole of the troops will precede the bier, which will then be followed by the citizens.” This order of procession, placing civilians behind the military and the bier, was designed to subordinate symbolically the citizens to the protection and leadership of the military, whose close relationship to the deceased commander in chief was emphasized by the troops preceding Washington’s bier as principal mourners. The citizens from their vantage point at the rear of the procession were taught their relative position in an ordered social structure that ranked them below the authority of their government and under the protection of its military establishment.

Hamilton’s orders also invited the participation of the clergy who were to march in the procession immediately behind the bier, but ahead of the citizens. By placing the clergymen close to the bier of Washington and in front of the people, their religious authority and relative rank in the social hierarchy were asserted and linked to the national government and its standing army. The governments of the American colonies had often called upon ministers to preside at public services of thanksgiving and prayer in connection with civil matters, and the Federalists had continued this practice by declaring

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<sup>45</sup> Len Travers, “‘In the Greatest Solemn Dignity,’ The Capitol Cornerstone and Ceremony in the Early Republic,” in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1999), 168.

national days of thanksgiving and prayer during the Washington and Adams administrations.

Major General Hamilton also made sure that his name and President Adams's endorsement of his orders would be intimately associated with the Washington funeral honors by specifying that both the orders of the President and the preface to his orders should be read aloud to the troops during the ceremonies. Hamilton also arranged to play a highly visible role in the national mourning for Washington by appearing personally in two of the largest and most important funeral processions in the nation. In Philadelphia on December 26, 1799, Hamilton rode immediately ahead of the bier in the congressional funeral procession,<sup>46</sup> believing that observers would regard him as the principal mourner and successor to Washington because of his proximity to the bier bearing the empty coffin that represented the body of the commander in chief. Because he did not participate in the funeral procession but instead waited with Mrs. Adams inside the German Lutheran Church for the memorial services to begin, John Adams was in effect excluded from playing the role of chief mourner in the national funeral rites. By abdicating the public role of chief mourner that should have accrued to him as the president, Adams provided his rival Hamilton an opportunity to be seen by thousands in that important symbolic role. Only five days later in New York City's funeral procession, Hamilton and his staff rode on horseback immediately behind the troops of the Sixth Regiment and officers of the United States Army and Navy. The citizens of New York marched immediately behind Hamilton,<sup>47</sup> once again visually symbolizing his leadership role as the successor to Washington and intermediary between the military

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<sup>46</sup> *Philadelphia Aurora General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799.

<sup>47</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 15 January 1800.

establishment and the people who were under its protection. The propaganda impact of the highly visible presence of Major General Hamilton and the absence of President Adams in these two important funeral processions was enhanced by the accounts of the two events that were reprinted in newspapers throughout the nation. These accounts cast Hamilton in the active role of Washington's principal mourner in both Philadelphia and New York, and implicitly placed President Adams in an inferior, passive role as he waited for the performance to begin in the comfort of his pew in Philadelphia's German Lutheran Church. In the language of the theater metaphor used in this analysis of the Washington funeral rites as cultural performance, Alexander Hamilton had cast himself in a "starring role" and had taken "center stage" in the performances of funeral rites for Washington in Philadelphia and New York. President Adams was in effect "upstaged," and he blended into the background in a minor "supporting role" and blended into a sea of thousands of mourners who waited in the German Lutheran Church for the memorial services to begin. His presence was not even noted in many of the newspaper accounts of the congressional funeral rites in Philadelphia.

The geographical dispersion of the United States Army during the winter of 1799-1800 also served to support Hamilton's strategy of using the Washington funerals to communicate his martial and political messages to a wide audience of American citizens. The new army had moved into winter headquarters, and several regiments were sharing cantonments at military posts in New England, the Middle Atlantic, and the South. Recruited from Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware, the troops of the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth regiments were encamped at Scotch Plains, New Jersey, near Perth Amboy. The New England troops of the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and

Sixteenth regiments had been recruited in Massachusetts, the District of Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. These three regiments had moved into winter quarters at Oxford, Massachusetts, near Worcester. Major General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney was with his Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth regiments encamped at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. These troops had been recruited primarily in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Pinckney's other three regiments, the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh, had been recruited in South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, and were originally destined to share winter quarters at Augusta, Georgia, but Hamilton had recommended to Pinckney that they stay in their respective states.<sup>48</sup>

The funeral ceremonies at Oxford, Massachusetts were held at the cantonment near Worcester on January 15, 1800, following closely the orders that had been issued by Hamilton. It was estimated that five thousand people were in attendance, the U. S. troops garrisoned there being joined for the ceremony by citizens of neighboring Worcester and vicinity. Members and officers of the militia, an independent company of cavalry, several clergymen, members of the Society of the Cincinnati, and the brethren of four Masonic lodges joined in the procession. The eulogy was delivered by Captain Josiah Dunham of the 16<sup>th</sup> regiment of the United States Infantry. As required, the orders of General Hamilton and the President were read to the troops before they were dismissed.<sup>49</sup>

The Union Brigade consisting of the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth regiments of United States Infantry stationed at Green Brook, near Scotch Plains, New Jersey performed their funeral honors to Washington at their cantonment on December 26, 1799. The correspondent who wrote the newspaper account of the ceremonies estimated that

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<sup>48</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 22: 385-86 and 23:469, 480, 508, 512-13, and 553.

<sup>49</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 25 January 1800.

four or five thousand citizens walked behind the bier, “the emblem of the corpse of the departed Hero, their beloved General and Chief commander.” Before being dismissed at the conclusion of the funeral ceremonies, the troops garrisoned at Scotch Plains were praised by their commander, Lieutenant Colonel William S. Smith, son-in-law of President Adams. He praised their “steady soldier-like conduct in the discharge of the solemn duties of the day” and expressed his “high grounded expectation that in future military scenes, whatever these scenes may be, the soldiers of the Union Brigade would by a steady and correct conduct, be entitled to the applause of their country and the affection of their officers.”<sup>50</sup>

The Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth regiments under the command of Major General Pinckney performed their funeral honors to Washington’s memory on the national day of mourning, February 22, 1800. Their ceremony was held at their winter cantonment at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. The rites followed Hamilton’s orders closely, including a military procession featuring a coffin on a bier borne by four sergeants. According to the newspaper account of the ceremony, “the concourse of people from the adjacent country was immense.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, in all three reports of the funerals conducted at the winter quarters of the new army, it appears that Hamilton’s objective of maximizing the participation of American citizens was realized. Similar funeral honors were conducted at other United States Army posts such as Fort Independence (Boston), Fort Fayette (Pittsburgh), Fort Adams (Natchez, Mississippi Territory), and Forts South West Point and Tellico (Knoxville, Tennessee). In the newspaper accounts of each of these ceremonies, the large number of citizens attending was always noted. The geographic

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<sup>50</sup> *Walpole (New Hampshire) Farmer’s Museum, or Lay Preacher’s Gazette*, 27 January 1800.

<sup>51</sup> *Boston Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 4 March 1800.

dispersion of Hamilton's Army had permitted him to draw large audiences to Washington's funeral honors at strategic locations throughout the country, maximizing the number of citizens who were exposed to these public displays of military power.

As indicated earlier, the state militias were also highly visible in the national mourning for Washington. Most governors, in their roles as commander in chief of their state's militia, had issued orders requiring officers and members to wear badges of mourning for periods ranging from one to six months. Many of the newspaper accounts of funeral processions indicated that the local companies of militiamen participated in them. In small towns and villages that boasted no volunteer companies or nearby federal army posts, the militia provided the only military presence in the processions, firing the minute guns, playing the fifes and drums, and carrying their standards. The historian Len Travers interprets the presence of a company of volunteer artillery in the procession held in connection with the laying of the cornerstone of the United States Capitol as signifying the volunteer military's traditional role of supporting the government. He writes:

In a government where the soldiers are also the citizens, the volunteer soldier represents the consent of the people in their government. Moreover, the honored place of the military in the procession was only fitting, since it was the citizen-soldier who, theoretically at least, had secured American independence and made this event possible.<sup>52</sup>

The independent companies that had been formed after Congress authorized them in July 1798 as part of the "Provisional Army" were also highly visible in the funeral rites for Washington. In Providence, Rhode Island, Colonel Henry Smith's Light Dragoons and Colonel Howell's Independent Volunteers, their standards and music in mourning, led the funeral procession down Broad Street on January 7, 1800.<sup>53</sup> Volunteer

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<sup>52</sup> Travers, 168-69.

<sup>53</sup> *Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 11 January 1800.

companies of artillery, infantry, and cavalry marched in the procession held in Augusta, Georgia on January 14, 1800 and performed all the usual military functions including firing minute guns, escorting the bier, providing the music, and firing three volleys over the bier at the conclusion of the funeral ceremonies.<sup>54</sup> In Portsmouth, New Hampshire on December 31, 1799, Governor Gilman's Blues, a volunteer company under the command of Captain S. Larkin, joined with detachments and full companies of militia and federal troops in the funeral procession to St. John's Church. The Blues were singled out in the following newspaper account of the Portsmouth funeral rites:

Captain Larkin's company in particular, composed of very young gentlemen, who had not appeared in public but once before, was remarked by every spectator as exhibiting the genuine traits of the veteran soldier who pays the last funeral honors to a beloved Commander. Their appearance in entering the church was the most picturesque we ever saw, although duty and inclination have led us to many a solemn scene where martial heroes wept the war-worn chief laid low.<sup>55</sup>

Because of the combined participation of the militia, independent volunteer companies, and federal troops in the funeral rites for Washington, most of the processions took on a military character. Virtually all of the newspaper accounts of Washington funeral processions held throughout the nation mentioned the participation of at least one military unit. This universal military presence must have seemed natural and appropriate to the people who performed as actors in the funeral rituals and to those who stood along the streets to watch the pageantry. Washington's role as commander in chief of the Continental Army and his active status at the time of his death as lieutenant general of the armies being raised during the Quasi-War with France had earned him the affection and gratitude of most Americans, and it was most appropriate to recognize his military achievements in memorializing him during the period of national mourning following his

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<sup>54</sup> *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 18 January 1800.

death. However, this study suggests that perhaps the single most influential factor in shaping the predominant military character of the Washington funeral rites was the role of Major General Alexander Hamilton in orchestrating the combined military and civil funeral ceremonies. It appears to have been primarily because of Hamilton's efforts that Washington's military achievements were emphasized in the funeral pageantry across the country, relegating the former president's accomplishments as civil magistrate to a less prominent role.

However, Hamilton was not successful in realizing his objective of using the Washington funeral rites to build public support for the Additional Army and his leadership of it, and Congress repealed its authorization of the expanded military force shortly after Washington's death. Hamilton's final task as Inspector General and the highest ranking army officer after the death of the commander in chief was to issue general orders thanking the troops for their services as the new army was being disbanded. His final orders reflect Hamilton's sense of personal disappointment as well as his continued belief in the importance of a standing army as an essential tool of a strong central government.

Adjutant General's Office, New York, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1800.

Major General Hamilton cannot permit the troops, which are about to retire from the Field, to depart without carrying with them the assurance of the highest sense which he entertains of their highest merits. The zeal with which they came forward in defense of their country, when the signal of danger was given by the government does great honor to their patriotism and spirit. Their conduct in service has corresponded with the laudable motives which led them into it. They have deserved the esteem of their fellow-citizens, and the warm approbation of their generals. They have exemplified how speedily American soldiers can be prepared to meet the enemies of their country.

The affection of the Major General will accompany his fellow soldiers

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<sup>55</sup> *Boston Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 8 January 1800.



wheresoever they may go—nor will any thing give him more pleasure than opportunities of testifying to them, individually, by actions as well as words, the high regard which he cherishes for them.

William North, Adjutant General<sup>56</sup>

On the first day of July 1800, Alexander Hamilton closed his headquarters in New York. The next day he submitted his final accounts to the secretary of war and notified him that he considered his military service at an end.<sup>57</sup> Hamilton's visions of military glory had died with Lieutenant General George Washington. In a letter of sympathy written to Martha Washington, Hamilton had candidly revealed his sense of personal loss and frustration to the grieving widow of the man who had been his mentor for the past quarter of a century. Hamilton wrote, "There can be few who equally with me participate in the loss you deplore. In expressing this sentiment, I may without impropriety allude to the numerous and distinguished marks of confidence and friendship, of which you yourself have been a witness; but I cannot say in how many ways the continuation of the confidence and friendship was necessary to me in future relations."<sup>58</sup> The embittered Hamilton turned his attention to ensuring that John Adams would not receive the support of the High Federalists in the upcoming presidential election of 1800. The military historian Richard Kohn describes Hamilton's last days as Inspector General of the New Army as follows:

Denied fame as a great general in battle, Hamilton wanted to leave the military establishment as a personal memorial to his military genius. But the effort was useless. By early 1800, it was obvious that the army could not survive the pressure of public opinion in an election year; the New Army would be disbanded and its generals released from service. As an added insult (although Hamilton always denied any wounded feelings,) Adams refused to promote the New Yorker to Lieutenant General and Commander in Chief after Washington's death in

<sup>56</sup> *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 24:586.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, 466.

<sup>58</sup> Alexander Hamilton to Martha Washington, 12 January 1800, in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 24: 184.

December 1799. By January 1800, Hamilton was sunk in depression, restless, his mood a strange mixture of anger, resignation, and embarrassment. Increasingly he turned his energy to the coming presidential election, to his festering hatred for the man who had shattered the dream of power and glory, and to a revenge that could heal Hamilton's injured pride, even if the party and the principles for which he had so long labored were destroyed in the process.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 255.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
WASHINGTON IN GLORY:  
THE RELIGIOUS CULTURE OF MOURNING

The sudden manner in which this man has been snatched from us, in the midst of his usefulness, and at this dangerous crisis of our public affairs, when his presence with us seems to be so much needed, denotes the special displeasure of God against the people of this land.

The Reverend Ira Condict, Pastor of the Low Dutch Reformed Church,  
New Brunswick, New Jersey, 31 December 1799.

The organizers of the nationwide funeral rites in commemoration of George Washington cast American clergymen in leading roles as the actors who, in their funeral sermons and eulogies, gave a voice to the national mourning. Nearly two-thirds of the 300 eulogies included in this study were delivered by Christian ministers. Other eulogies were given by men in secular professions such as physicians, lawyers and judges, statesmen, federal officeholders, and military officers. The content of the secular eulogies, like those of the clergymen, focused on Washington's character and his lifetime of achievements in the service of his country. The major difference in the secular and religious orations was that the ministers' orations were dominated by theological discussions of the religious themes of the national covenant, jeremiads, the religious "improvement" of Washington's death, and evidence of Washington's exemplar

Christianity. The clergymen who eulogized Washington were affiliated with all the major religious denominations of the period including Congregational (56%), Presbyterian (16%), Episcopalian (11%), Baptist (4%), and Dutch Reformed, Roman Catholic, Universalist, and Methodist.<sup>1</sup> The study's preponderance of printed eulogies by Congregational ministers, nearly all from New England, reflects that region's tradition of printing their ministers' occasional sermons, the high concentration of printing presses in New England, and the relatively higher incidence of Washington memorial services held in High Federalist New England as compared to other regions of the United States.

That clergymen should perform as the most prominent voices of national mourning for George Washington was consistent with their traditional role as the most frequent public speakers in their towns and parishes.<sup>2</sup> The Washington funeral orations continued the New England tradition of the local ministers' addressing the public on days specially appointed by civil authorities to be devoted to prayer, fasting, and humiliation. As discussed in Chapter Four of this study, many of the clergymen who eulogized Washington, especially those from New England, were political supporters of the Federalists, and their funeral orations attributed the nation's peace and prosperity to acts of providence and the wisdom of Washington's enlightened policies during his two terms as president. By endorsing Washington's presidential administration, the eulogists were

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<sup>1</sup> It has been estimated that in 1790 the distribution of major religious denominations in America was Baptist (27%), Congregational (23%), Presbyterian (23%), Methodist (22%), and Anglican/Episcopalian (5%). See Stephen A. Marini, "Religion, Politics, and Ratification," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds. *Religion in a Revolutionary Age* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994), 190.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the role of ministers as the primary public speakers and writers in colonial New England, see Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1999). See also Jon Butler's discussion of the public ceremonial role of ministers, in his *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990).

also endorsing the Federalist party and its program. Conservative Calvinist denominations like the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians were inclined to identify with the Federalists, the party of stability and tradition. Consequently, the Federalist clergy generally shared the beliefs and values of members of the party and were expected to help maintain the spirit of deference and submission upon which the Federalist view of society was based. Robert Wiebe argues that it was the Federalists' commitment to the ideal of social cohesion that caused them to side with the social authority of religion.<sup>3</sup> Wiebe writes that Calvinism and Federalism formed a "particularly zealous alliance" in New England, and the cohesive role of religion also infused Federalism from New York down the coast. He says that few Federalist leaders anywhere failed to maintain visible ties with a church.

As the nation's clergymen eulogized Washington's character and his achievements and portrayed him as a devout Christian, they fused the symbolism of Washington with Christianity and patriotism, an important development in the creation of an American civil religion. The sociologist Robert N. Bellah argues there are "certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. . . that have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and which still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life."<sup>4</sup> Calling this public religious dimension "civil religion," Bellah claims that it is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals which reaffirms, among other things, the religious legitimization of the highest political authority, attributing implicitly, and often explicitly,

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<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 84.

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in his *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 168-189.

the ultimate sovereignty to God. He writes that “a theme that lies very deep in the American tradition is the obligation, both collective and individual, to carry out God’s will on earth.”<sup>5</sup> Catherine L. Albanese’s study of the civil religion of the American Revolution argues that George Washington epitomized the emergent religious identity of the new nation, a covenant symbolized by the “twin sacraments of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.” During the Revolution and in the early national period, Washington became a living tribal totem for an emerging nation-state. “As the American “holy man,” George Washington’s image became a mirror that reflected the picture of the folk he represented, their values and expectations.”<sup>6</sup>

An example of the way in which Washington’s symbolism was merged with religious imagery during the national mourning period is found in the following newspaper description of the patriotic funeral decorations in the Episcopal Church of Providence, Rhode Island, an eye-catching display of symbols of Washington’s death, Christianity, and the grieving nation. The crape hung in the church in mourning for George Washington, the savior of his country, was intertwined with the evergreen Christmas decorations that had been hung in late December in celebration of the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. The symbolism of the two saviors, one divine and the other human, are implicitly linked by the metaphor, and Washington is raised to a level with Christ. Seemingly bordering on religious heresy and idolatry, it can be argued that this example of the deification of Washington was an early statement of the American “civil religion,” a blending of the sacred and the secular into a patriotic image. The *Providence Gazette* reported:

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

On Sunday the 11<sup>th</sup> instant the Episcopal Church of this town exhibited a solemn and truly affecting scene of mourning, which forcibly impressed the feeling heart with exalted veneration for the melancholy cause. The pulpit and canopy bore the sad habiliments of mourning. The gallery, organ loft, and urns thereon, were shrouded in black. The sable weeds which involved the chancel, altar and urn, produced a gloomy and awful solemnity, suited to the occasion. The evergreen, entwined there for the celebration of our Saviour's birth, contrasted with the sable hangings, bearing the melancholy signals of death—the death of the illustrious Saviour of his Country, impressed the mind with reverential awe. The east end of the church, south of the chancel, was decorated with a white obelisk on a black ground; the pedestal of which was handsomely adorned with trophies of war. From the top of the obelisk, Fame spread her wings, bearing a never-fading wreath—smiling cherubs hovered around their sacred trust. On the pedestal was inscribed—“SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF WASHINGTON,” under it the following elegiac lines:

*Around the sacred Urn shall laurels bloom,  
And peace and genius hover o'er the tomb;  
Oft shall Columbia's tears be seen to flow,  
And distant nations join the general woe.<sup>7</sup>*

The position of clergymen as authoritative spokesmen for society had come under increasing challenge during the Revolutionary Era, and they faced increasing competition for moral leadership from other claimants for popular attention from the mid-eighteenth-century on. Consequently, through their eulogies of Washington the ministers hoped to shore up their standing and to strengthen the role of religion in the republic. A dramatic example of one minister's perceptions of the imminent challenges to his religious authority is reflected in the words of the Reverend James Bowers, an Episcopal priest at St. Ann's Church in Pittston, Maine, on the national day of mourning. As he finished his inspiring description of Washington's exemplar Christian faith, asserting that Washington had been a man “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,” Rev. Bowers looked out warily over his congregation and observed, “When I reflect on the prevailing indifference to

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 143-181.

<sup>7</sup> *The Providence (Rhode Island) Gazette*, 25 January 1800.

everything sacred in this corner of our country, I can hardly believe myself surrounded at this moment with a sufficient number of the friends of Jesus to shield me from obloquy, should I enlarge on this topic.”<sup>8</sup> Reverend Bowers was perhaps reflecting the circumstances of his denomination in the nation rather than the overall situation in New England, or more likely he may have been expressing the awareness of challenges to revealed religion that were coming from the followers of Paine and the spread of deism.

Although by the time of Washington’s death at the close of the eighteenth century the traditional role of ministers as authoritative spokesmen with absolute moral authority in their communities may have eroded significantly, their congregations or local committees of arrangement did not hesitate to ask them to deliver funeral orations in memory of Washington. Many of them delivered memorial sermons to their own congregations shortly after arrival of the news of Washington’s death. In fact, some ministers who chose not to deliver an appropriate occasional sermon immediately following Washington’s death were criticized for failing to perform what was perceived as their sacred public duty. In the city of New York, “A Friend to Religion and to Propriety” penned the following letter to the printer of the New York *Spectator*.

Great expectations had been raised yesterday(Sunday) morning in the religious part of the Community, that they should hear a discourse from the sacred desk, appropriate to the solemn occasion, on which “All Columbia mourns,” but sad and surprising to relate, there were found clergymen in our city, who paid no sort of regard to this solemn and momentous event. Their churches were hung with black in compliance with the public recommendation of our Common Council; but while these mourning weeds thus met the eye , and made a deep impression on the heart of every spectator, not a word was heard from the Pulpit, either of condolence, or what was still more to have been expected, of the practical morality, which the life and death of this great and good man afforded so fair an opportunity of enforcing. . . How could any clergyman avoid the exhortation at

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<sup>8</sup> James Bowers, *A Discourse on Occasion of the Death of General George Washington, Delivered in St. Ann’s Church, Pittston, Saturday, 22d February, 1800. Published by request of the Wardens and Vestry of the Episcopal Parish in Said Town* (Hallowell, District of Maine: Printed by Peter Edes, 1800).



least a “Go and do thee likewise.” Those who passed by the occasion in sullen or indolent silence may rely upon it that their conduct has given occasion not only to surmise, but to censure.<sup>9</sup>

The ministers’ funeral sermons and orations delivered at Washington’s memorial services were grounded in the Judeo-Christian doctrine of covenant theology. The ministers took the idea of a national covenant with God, rooted in the Puritan tradition of New England, and translated it to the United States as a whole. Clearly this practice had begun during the Revolution, but the national mourning for Washington appears to have advanced it decisively.<sup>10</sup> The doctrine of a national covenant with God constituted the underlying theology for most of the ministers’ eulogies of Washington. The typical rhetorical approach used by the ministers relying on covenant theology was to interpret American history as that of a nation and people chosen by God for a special mission to achieve his purposes on earth. The Old Testament history of the Hebrew nation and the children of Israel provided the metaphors most often used to support their arguments. Several selected examples follow to illustrate the manner in which the “American Israel” was portrayed by ministers in their funeral sermons and eulogies of Washington.

The Reverend Samuel Wood, preaching at Boscawen, New Hampshire on February 22, 1800, the national day of mourning, summarized the history of the United States, the “American Israel,” in covenant terminology that would have been familiar to his Puritan forbearers.

As from a state of Egyptian bondage, the Lord brought Israel to possess the land of Canaan; so from a state of oppression, the Lord conducted our forefathers to inherit this land, that here they might peaceably enjoy that religion

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<sup>9</sup> *New York Spectator*, Monday, 23 December, 1799.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the use of the doctrine of the “public covenant” as a mode of theological integration to link religion and politics in New England, see Christopher Grasso, *Speaking Aristocracy*. See also Harry S. Stout’s discussion of covenant theology in *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

which they could not in their native country. . . Great were the dangers which our progenitors encountered, and signal were the displays of Divine goodness in their settling in this then uncultivated wilderness. . . When our liberties were attacked by the power of Britain. . . As he saved Israel of old, so hath he saved us. . . God raised up George Washington as our deliverer. . . as he raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel. . . Whenever we look back upon the complex scene of the American Revolution and consider what difficulties have been overcome—what obstacles have been surmounted—till, from small beginnings, the Republic has become great—an asylum of liberty, both civil and religious—and all this so much owing to the skill, wisdom, and political virtue of one man—we are filled with reverential wonder at the counsels of heaven. . . As the Lord of Hosts saved Israel of old, so hath he saved us.<sup>11</sup>

The Reverend John Elliott of Guilford, Connecticut also relied upon the doctrine of covenant theology as he recounted the familiar biblical account of God’s supporting the Hebrews as they fled Egypt on their long march to the Promised Land. God selected and prepared Moses to lead the children of Israel, and when the heaven-guided march was completed and Moses was not allowed to go over the Jordan, Joshua was ordained by the Lord to lead them to the peaceable possession. “Clearly manifest and little less signal was the hand of heaven in the American Revolution, and in numerous conspicuous instances, we trace the special interference of the Almighty in the establishment of our independence and empire.” Reverend Elliott continued, “God hath designed this land for many important purposes of his glory and the good of mankind. . . The whole history of events since the first settlement of this empire, the great things which God hath done for us as a nation, and in special his kind providence in blessing us with the ‘Hero of the age’ are standing testimonies and evident presages that auspicious and extensive designs are yet in the womb of time.”<sup>12</sup> The Reverend Ariel Kendrick declared that “America seems

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Wood, *A Discourse, Delivered at Boscowen, New Hampshire, on Saturday the 22d of February, 1800, in Commemoration of the Late Death of General George Washington* (Concord: Printed by George Hough, 1800).

<sup>12</sup> John Elliott, *A Discourse, Delivered on Saturday, February 22, 1800, The Day Recommended by the Congress of the United States to Lament the Death and Pronounce Eulogies on the Memory of General*

to have been marked out by God himself as a place where to bestow his glorious goodness in the communication of those blessings which are suited to the social and civil state of man, particularly liberty and freedom.” From the time our forefathers left their native shores and crossed the broad Atlantic to seek the civil and religious rights which were denied them at home, Kendrick continued, “God crowned the enterprise with success, our fathers reached this desired haven, and from that time to the present, the interpositions of Heaven in favor of our country have astonished many of the human race.”<sup>13</sup>

The doctrine of the public covenant provided the common theological foundation for most of the major religious themes included in the ministers’ funeral discourses at the Washington memorial services at which they preached. A content analysis of those sermons and eulogies identified the following five religious themes that were most frequently included in the ministers’ funeral orations: (1) Religious sanction of the national mourning for Washington; (2) Warnings that excessive praise of Washington’s character and achievements constituted a violation of biblical injunctions against the sins of idolatry and the deification of mortals; (3) “Religious improvement” or the lessons to be learned from the death of Washington, including submission to God’s will, expressing gratitude to God, maintaining trust in him, religious consolations, and the necessity of preparing for one’s own death; (4) Jeremiads, or national warnings for the people to repent of their sins and to return to following God’s teachings; and (5) Evidence of Washington’s exemplary Christianity. These five themes, each described and analyzed at

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*George Washington. By John Elliott, Pastor of a Church in Guilford* (Hartford: Printed by Hudson and Goodwin, 1800).

length below, provide significant insights into the religious culture of mourning George Washington. Taken collectively, they constitute a “theology of mourning” that influenced profoundly the way in which Americans mourned Washington’s death.

### Religious Sanction of National Mourning

The death of Washington confronted Americans with an important national question that they had never before faced. What was the proper way in which the new republic should mourn the death of its former chief magistrate? George Washington was their first former president to die, so there were no precedents for mourning his death. (The nation would not face the question again until a quarter of a century later when both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Fourth of July 1826.) The question posed a myriad of political and religious issues that had to be dealt with, and there was not unanimity among Americans regarding the appropriate way to mourn the death of Washington and to commemorate his significant contributions of his country. Alluding to such national differences of opinion, Fisher Ames, the High Federalist Massachusetts statesman, observed in a eulogy before the Massachusetts legislature in Boston on February 8, 1800, “It is not impossible that some will affect to consider the honors to be paid to this great patriot by the nation as excessive, idolatrous, and degrading to freemen, who are equal.”<sup>14</sup> Although evidence of open dissension about the Washington funeral rituals rarely appeared in newspapers,

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<sup>13</sup> Ariel Kendrick, *An Eulogy on General George Washington, Delivered at the West Meetinghouse in the Town of Boscawen, on the 22d of February, 1800, at a Meeting of the Inhabitants, Agreeably to the Recommendation of Congress* (Concord, New Hampshire: Printed by George Hough, 1800.)

<sup>14</sup> Fisher Ames, *An Oration on the Sublime Virtues of General George Washington, Pronounced in Boston, before His Honor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Two Branches of the Legislature of Massachusetts, at Their Request, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 1800, in Eulogies and Orations on the Life and Death of General George Washington, First President of the United States of America* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1800).

perhaps because most editors were endeavoring to use their columns to portray the universality of Americans' grief during the national mourning for Washington, a strongly-worded letter expressing concerns about the mourning rites was submitted by "Decency" to the editor of the *Boston Independent Chronicle*.

Decent and honorable respect is due to the memory of General Washington, but there is a propriety in conducting this business, which as a Christian people, ought carefully to be observed. Funeral solemnities are of too serious a nature, to be the subject of ostentatious pageantry: a bier is not to be exhibited merely for parade. . . it is not a pleasing sight to observe the funeral ceremonies, moving in a solemn procession preceded by the mockery of a pall over an empty coffin. Washington we esteem, but the propriety of such exhibitions cannot be admitted by those who consider the scene of death as too affecting to be represented in parade and pageantry. . . While we are paying a proper respect to Washington, as a man, I would appeal to the consciences of every one who professes a veneration for the Christian religion, whether the expressions often used on this occasion are not bordering upon blasphemy and idolatry.<sup>15</sup>

The editor of the Wilmington, Delaware *Mirror of the Times* published several letters that expressed concerns about the mourning rites that were similar to those issues raised by "Decency." "A Friend to Virtue, whether in high or low stations of life" wrote, "On reading some of the public papers, and observing much adulation paid to a fellow mortal who, notwithstanding he was one of the great ones of the earth, yet a man, it drew me into the following reflections: would it not be well for some to remember (that the Christian religion leads us to believe) that the departed spirits of the greatest kings or ablest generals will meet with no more approbations from the majesty of heaven than the soul of the abject slave who leaves the world borne down with age and infirmity, with scarce a rag to cover his trembling limbs from the inclemency of the weather?"<sup>16</sup>

Another correspondent to the paper wrote, "Though I am a sincere admirer of the

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<sup>15</sup> Letter to the editor signed "Decency," *Boston Independent Chronicle and Independent Advertiser*, 23 January 1800.

<sup>16</sup> *Wilmington (Delaware) Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, 28 December 1799.

gallantry of General Washington in the field, and a long observer of his upright conduct in the cabinet, I cannot behold without disgust the methods taken to honor his memory, by pompous processions, mimic funerals, etc. which approach very near to idolatry, and only mock whom they were meant to honor.”<sup>17</sup> The same edition of the *Mirror of the Times* carried a reprint of an item from the Boston *Constitutional Telegraph* in which a correspondent to that newspaper had observed, “Every virtuous citizen would wish to pay a proper and decent respect to the memory of General Washington. . . But while we revere him as a man, we ought as Christians not to elevate his character to the pinnacle of a God, or place him supremely above angels, or archangels in the heavenly mansions. The extravagant encomiums which we have often seen in our papers, border so strongly on profanity, and even blasphemy, that it cannot but be disgusting to the serious mind.”<sup>18</sup>

Certainly aware of the concerns of some Americans regarding the propriety of the national mourning rituals, many of the clergymen who delivered eulogies at the Washington memorial services introduced their orations with comments in defense of the appropriateness of the funeral rites. They blended political and religious arguments in their defense of the national mourning and exhorted their listeners that to mourn the death of Washington was their duty as republicans and as Christians. Although the status and respect for the authority of clergymen had declined significantly following the American Revolution, the ministers continued the tradition of their reverend predecessors by relying on the authority of the Word of God to legitimate their political arguments. They combed the scriptures to find passages proving that the national mourning for Washington was sanctioned by God. Covenant theology provided the rationale for linking the public

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 January 1800.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

mourning in the American Israel to incidents of national bereavement that had occurred in ancient Israel. Preaching in the Baptist meetinghouse in Harvard Massachusetts, the Reverend John Mycall claimed the authority of the scriptures when he observed:

Many in the Christian world (and, I find by some among us) deem superfluous, if not wrong and antisciptural, publicly and anti-scriptural, to make any encomiastic address at the death, or pronounce a funeral oration over the grave, or remains, of a friend or patriot. I hope I shall not be censured, if my opinion does not coincide with theirs, more especially as I apprehend that I have the authority of the sacred Oracles to countenance and support me therein.<sup>19</sup>

“Yet this is not the first instance of national mourning,” declared the Reverend Elijah Parish during the oration he delivered on the national day of mourning at Byfield, Massachusetts. He mentioned the forty days of mourning by the children of Israel following the death of the patriarch Jacob. Parish also cited instances of public mourning for fallen leaders in ancient Greece and Rome, and he noted that the first Christians had adopted the custom of funeral eulogies for deceased saints. Reverend Parish concluded his review of historical precedents for public mourning, “But neither Christians for the loss of a brother, nor Greeks, nor Romans, for the fall of their Consuls and Generals, had such cause for mourning as the States of America at the present time.”<sup>20</sup>

The ministers linked politics and religion by arguing that it was the Christian duty of republicans to mourn the death of a national leader like George Washington. The Reverend Samuel Mead, preaching to his Danvers, Massachusetts congregation on the Sunday after receipt of the news of Washington’s death, discussed the propriety of

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<sup>19</sup> John Mycall, *A Funeral Address, on the Death of the Late General George Washington; Interspersed with Sketches of, and Observations on His Life and Character, Delivered in the Baptist Meeting-House in Harvard, February 22, 1800* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1800).

<sup>20</sup> Elijah Parish, *An Oration, Delivered at Byfield, February 22d, 1800, the Day of National Mourning for the Death of General George Washington* (Newburyport: Printed by Angier March, 1800).

Americans' lamenting the death of Washington and the national obligation to mourn the loss of their father:

We are justified in scripture in lamenting this great man; and we feel it no profanation of this day to bring into view our national obligations to that great, that excellent man, who is no more. . . America mourns—her tears will fall, as liberal and pure as the drops of heaven. He was her father; and her sons will remember that the soil which they reap, and the ocean which laves their shores, were secured by his toils. . . Every man is bound to commit the remains of a father to the ground with decency and respect. So a nation may be under obligations to commit the sacred ashes of a public benefactor to the grave with respect and tears. . . National sorrow is no more than justice to his character and national services. Not to notice his death would indicate forgetfulness of his services and ingratitude to God who raised him up as our national savior.<sup>21</sup>

A political argument used often by ministers to justify the national mourning for Washington as the duty of Americans was to remind their listeners that republics in the past had been notorious for “the vice of ingratitude” to their fallen leaders. “We shall exhibit a phenomenon new in the history of nations,” declared the Reverend Ebenezer Gay, “a republic which knows how to appreciate and reward the services of her citizens. . . Ingratitude has hitherto been characteristic of republics; we shall rescue them from this reproach.”<sup>22</sup> The Reverend Levi Glezen, preaching in Lenox, Massachusetts, observed, “Even though it is said that republics are always ungrateful, and that they destroy or banish the men who have defended their dearest privileges, such is not the case in America, as evidenced by Columbia’s love and affection for Washington and throughout his retirement.” Glezen concluded, “To show their lasting and

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel Mead, *A Sermon, Delivered December 29, 1799; Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington, Who Died December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1799, in His 68<sup>th</sup> Year, by Samuel Mead, A. M., Pastor of a Church in Danvers* (Salem: Printed by Joshua Cushing, 1800).

<sup>22</sup> Ebenezer Gay, *Oration, Pronounced at Suffield (Connecticut), on Saturday, the 22d of Feb. A. D. 1800, the Day Recommended by Congress, For the People, to assemble, publicly to testify their Grief, for the Death of General George Washington* (Suffield: Printed by Edward Gray, 1800).



affectionate regard, to perpetuate the memory of his virtues and services, to exhibit his character as a pattern for the statesmen of future generations. . . the sons of Columbia have united in commemorating the day in which he commenced his existence.”<sup>23</sup> The Reverend John M. Mason, pastor of the Associate Reformed Church of New York City, declared as he concluded his funeral oration on the national day of mourning, “This day we wipe away the reproach of republics, that they know not how to be grateful.”<sup>24</sup> After describing the greatness of Washington and his services to his country, the Reverend Samuel Miller, a Presbyterian minister in New York City and an avid Democratic-Republican, commented in his sermon on December 29, 1799, “Let it never be said that republicans are ungrateful. Let us testify by our conduct that we perceive the difference between the ostentatious pomp of grief which attends the death of tyrants, and the ardent spontaneous affection with which a grateful people can cherish and honor the memory of a patriot and a benefactor.”<sup>25</sup>

By linking good republicanism to both religious and national duty to mourn Washington, the ministers’ eulogies of Washington served to advance the development of an American civil religion that fused the symbol of Washington with religion and the nation. The religious and political reasons for mourning Washington were set forth in an explanatory footnote to the printed version of a

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<sup>23</sup> Levi Glezen, *An Oration Delivered at Lenox, on the Twenty-Second of February, 1800* (Stockbridge: Printed at the Office of H. Jones & Co. by H. Willard, 1800).

<sup>24</sup> John M. Mason, *A Funeral Oration on General Washington, Delivered February 22, 1800, by Appointment of a Number of the Clergy of New York, by John M. Mason, A. M. Pastor of the Associate Reformed Church in the City of New York*, in *Eulogies and Orations* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1800), 229-242.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Miller, *A Sermon, Delivered December 29, 1799; Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington, Late President of the United States and Commander in Chief of the American Armies*. By

funeral oration delivered at Harvard University by the Reverend Doctor David Tappan , Hollis Professor of Divinity:

“If any good Christians, who dread idolatry, view with anxiety the unequalled and long continued honors paid at the tomb of Washington; they are desired to consider . . . that it peculiarly becomes a free and happy nation to offer to her great patriots the generous tribute of public veneration . . . this is a spontaneous and sublime homage paid to superior goodness, and of course has the happiest influence in recommending and encouraging that private and patriotic virtue which is the basis and life of a Republic.”<sup>26</sup>

Doctor Tappan concluded his argument, “Sound policy therefore, as well as natural justice and gratitude, enjoins it as a great republican duty to bestow upon transcendent merit the highest tokens of respect.” He continued, “we may add that piety imposes the same obligation. . . Can we then, without violating our nature and reason, as well as religion, withhold our highest reverence and grateful affection from and father and governor infinitely great and good?”<sup>27</sup> This endorsement of the national mourning for Washington by Harvard’s esteemed professor of divinity combines the dictates of both religious and republican duty in calling for Americans’ expressions of respect and reverence for their deceased political father.

The approach used most frequently by ministers in arguing that the national mourning for Washington was sanctioned by God was to choose as the text for their sermons an Old Testament verse that referred to an occasion of national mourning by the children of Israel for a deceased leader. Using covenant theology, they drew parallels between the public mourning by the Hebrews and national mourning for Washington by

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*Samuel Miller, A. M., One of the Ministers of the United Presbyterian Churches in the City of New York* (New York: Printed by T & J Swords, 1800).

<sup>26</sup> David Tappan and Joseph Willard, *An Address in Latin by Joseph Willard, S.T.D., L.L.D., President, and a Discourse in English, by David Tappan, S.T.D., Hollis Professor of Divinity; Delivered before the University of Cambridge, February 21, 1800, in Solemn Commemoration of General George Washington* (Printed by Samuel Etheridge, 1800).

the people of the modern American Israel. “We are prompted to the duty of mingling our tears with our afflicted country by the example of God’s children on similar occasions,” declared the Reverend Walter King, a Norwich, Connecticut Presbyterian minister. He cited as examples from the scriptures the Hebrew people’s mourning for the deaths of Aaron, Moses, Saul and Jonathan, and Josiah. Reverend King concluded, “These several instances, selected from a multitude, unite in placing before us the examples of God’s children and demonstrate the duty and perfect propriety there is in a people’s unitedly expressing the grief they feel upon the decease of their greatest temporal benefactors and princes.”<sup>28</sup>

“There are many examples in the sacred scriptures that suggest that it is our duty, enjoined by the laws of God to lament the loss and speak the praises of one who is taken away from a life of eminent services to ourselves and country,” declared a Low Dutch Reformed pastor, Ira Condict, during his funeral sermon delivered in a Washington memorial service held in New Brunswick, New Jersey.<sup>29</sup> After mentioning several examples from the scriptures in which the children of Israel had mourned the death of their deceased leaders, the Reverend Doctor Nathaniel Emmons observed that God never reproved the ancient people for paying funeral honors to departed men of superior merit; therefore, “those examples seem to have a divine sanction and plainly teach us the propriety of lamenting the death and commemorating the virtues of those who have been

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Walter King, *A Discourse, Delivered in Chelsea, in the City of Norwich, January 5, 1800, As a Token of Humiliation before God, on Account of the Death of General George Washington; Who Died December 14, 1799. By Walter King, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in that Place* (Norwich: Printed by Thomas Hubbard, 1800).

<sup>29</sup> Ira Condict, *A Funeral Discourse, Delivered in the Presbyterian Church of New Brunswick, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 1799; The Day Set Apart by the Citizens for Paying Solemn Honors to the Memory of General George Washington, by the Reverend Ira Condict, A. M., Pastor of the Low Dutch Reformed Church, in the City of New Brunswick* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Printed by Abraham Blauvelt, 1800).

eminently useful in life.”<sup>30</sup> The Reverend John Croes of Woodbury, New Jersey asserted that the Congressional resolution declaring the national day of mourning for Washington was in conformity with the ancient practice of the Jews of paying funeral honors to their deceased leaders like Jacob and Moses. He continued, “And certainly if it were ever right, publicly to mourn on account of the death of a great and good man, if funeral honors may at any time properly be paid, this is the occasion which most forcibly demands a nation’s tears; Washington the good, the wise and the brave, is eminently entitled to such tributes of respect.”<sup>31</sup>

The ministers chose from several different scriptures as texts for their funeral sermons, but most commonly selected were those that described an occasion upon which the children of Israel had mourned a fallen leader, their purpose being to illustrate the propriety of national mourning for Washington by inferring God’s sanction of such mourning from their Old Testament analogies. The text chosen for nearly ten percent of the sermons was: *Know ye not that a prince and a great man is fallen this day in Israel.*<sup>32</sup> These words were part of a short eulogy pronounced by King David at the funeral of Abner, a chief general of the armies of Israel. “In our American Israel is fallen a prince, eminent and distinguished above all the other princes of the age,” said the Reverend Doctor David Osgood, pastor of the Congregational Church in Medford, Massachusetts.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nathaniel Emmons, *A Sermon, on the Death of General George Washington, Preached February 22, 1800, by Nathaniel Emmons, D. D., Pastor of the Church in Franklin* (Wrentham, Massachusetts: Printed by Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton, 1800).

<sup>31</sup> John Croes, *A Discourse, Delivered at Woodbury, in New Jersey; on the Twenty-Second of February, 1800, before the Citizens of Gloucester County, Assembled to Pay Funeral Honors to the Memory of General George Washington, by John Croes, A. M., Rector of Trinity Church at Swedensborough* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Ormrod, 1800).

<sup>32</sup> 2 Sam. 3:38.

<sup>33</sup> David Osgood, *A Discourse Delivered December 29, 1799, The Lord’s Day Immediately following the Melancholy Tidings of the Loss Sustained by the Nation in the Death of its most Eminent Citizen, George Washington, Who Departed this Life on the 14<sup>th</sup> instant, by David Osgood, D. D., Pastor of the Church in Medford* (Boston: Printed by Samuel Hall, 1800).

Another eulogy by King David provided the second most often used text for the ministers' funeral sermons. *How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!*<sup>34</sup> Interpreted by the Reverend Doctor Nathaniel Emmons, this scripture is said to have been written by David after he received word of the death in battle of former King Saul and his son Jonathan. The words are part of a "solemn, plaintive funeral dirge," says Emmons, and David is saying that "the death of our generals is the death of our hopes, and the destruction of our arms, and our national calamity calls for our national mourning, lamentation, and sorrow."<sup>35</sup> The third most often used text related to the death of Moses and the mourning that followed. *So Moses the servant of the Lord died. . . And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days.*<sup>36</sup> Comparisons between Washington and Moses as deliverers of their people were the most well developed biblical analogies used in the Washington eulogies, according to historian Robert P. Hay.<sup>37</sup> My study of 200 funeral sermons revealed that at least ten percent of them included a well-developed discussion of the Moses-Washington analogy. Other frequently cited scriptures referred to the deaths of and subsequent mourning for Old Testament figures including Elijah, Jacob, Josiah, Samuel, and Hezekiah. In each instance, the children of Israel had publicly mourned the death of their prophets and kings, thus enabling ministers to use the scriptures as examples of divine sanction for national mourning for fallen leaders.

### Idolatry and Deification

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<sup>34</sup> 2 Sam. 1:27.

<sup>35</sup> Nathaniel Emmons, Franklin, Massachusetts.

<sup>36</sup> Deut. 34: 5 and 8.

<sup>37</sup> Robert P. Hay, "George Washington: American Moses," *American Quarterly* 21 (Winter 1969): 780-91.

Most of the ministers who eulogized Washington, like the secular orators, devoted large portions of their orations to effusive praise of Washington's achievements and virtuous character. The Reverend Timothy Alden, preaching in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, asked his listeners, "Who can behold such a character without an admiration, if it may be so expressed, almost to idolatry! So much wisdom, prudence, humility, benevolence and piety, are seldom the portion of one man."<sup>38</sup> In Baltimore, the Reverend Doctor Patrick Allison observed, with regard to the death of "transcendently useful" characters, "let the lamentations proceed even to an extreme—palliating circumstances may induce us to commiserate the extravagance as a pardonable weakness, rather than to blame it as a criminal excess."<sup>39</sup> Aware that his extensive praise of Washington may have come close to eliciting charges of idolatry from his audience, academy preceptor Peter Folsom, concluded his eulogy, "But stop, say you—Washington, after all our encomiums, was no more than a man—and perhaps many of you are ready to say, that by thus exalting his merits, we place him on a par if not above the Deity. . . in deifying him, we reply, that to pay a tribute to tried merit ought not to lessen our esteem for the Great Governor of the universe—but on the contrary it should serve to give us more exalted ideas of his power and goodness, in that he was able to raise up, qualify, and send forth such an illustrious personage, as our beloved Washington, to be an honor and to happify his American Israel."<sup>40</sup> Also sensitive to

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<sup>38</sup> Timothy Alden, *A Sermon Delivered at the South Church in Portsmouth, on the 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1800. Occasioned by the Sudden and Universally Lamented Death of George Washington, Commander of the American Armies and Late President of the United States* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Printed at the United States Oracle Office, by Charles Peirce, January, 1800).

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Allison, *A Discourse Delivered in the Presbyterian Church in the City of Baltimore, the 22d of February, 1800—The Day Dedicated to the Memory of General George Washington* (Baltimore: Printed by W. Pechin for the Editor of the *American*, 1800).

<sup>40</sup> Peter Folsom, 4<sup>th</sup>, *An Eulogy on George Washington, Late Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America. Who Died December 14, A. D. 1799. Delivered in the Academy, February 22,*

possible accusations of idolatry because of his elaborate praise of Washington, the Reverend Levi Frisbie, preaching in Ipswich, Massachusetts, remarked in a defensive manner:

Let no honest and scrupulous, but erring mind, let no heart, attempting to disguise far different sentiments under the specious covering of humility and and piety, censure the honors we pay to his memory of far transcending the merit of a mortal; and tax us with idolatry in paying an homage to his virtues which is due only to the perfections of his God. For we religiously avow, and wish to have it forever understood, that we devoutly acknowledge that his whole bright assemblage of abilities, virtues and achievements, to have been given him from Heaven in tenderness and mercy to these United States; and to that original, inexhaustible fountain of being and happiness, our unfeigned tribute of gratitude and praise is, and ought ultimately to be paid.<sup>41</sup>

Distinguishing between the appropriate commemoration of virtue and inappropriate idolatry, the Reverend James Kendall, Pastor of the First Church in Plymouth, Massachusetts, said, “To commemorate the virtues of the great and good is not *adulation*; nor is due respect and reverence for the memory of the just, *idolatry*. It is proper, however, to distinguish between divine and human excellence; to make the former the standard by which to judge the latter; and in proportion to the resemblance, which the image bears to the original, we may safely admire and imitate the copy, while we give the honor to the Great Archetype of all perfection and excellence.”<sup>42</sup>

Comments such as those quoted above suggest a certain level of discomfort on the part of the ministers as they eulogized Washington with effusive praise of his worthy

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1800, *before the Inhabitants of Gilmanton*, by Peter Folsom, 4<sup>th</sup>, *Preceptor of Said Academy* (Gilmanton, New Hampshire: Printed by E. Russell, 1800).

<sup>41</sup> Levi Frisbie, *An Eulogy on the Illustrious Character of the Late General George Washington, Commander in Chief of All the Armies of the United States of America; Who Died on Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 1799. Delivered at Ipswich, on the 7<sup>th</sup> Day of January, 1800, by Levi Frisbie, A. M., Minister of the Gospel in the First Parish in Said Town* (Newburyport, Massachusetts: Published by Edmund M. Blunt, 1800).

<sup>42</sup> James Kendall, *A Discourse, Delivered at Plymouth, February 22, 1800. At the Request of the Inhabitants and in Compliance with the Recommendation of Congress, as a Testimony of Grief for the Death of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the American Armies, Who Died December 14,*

achievements and his virtuous character. They were very much aware of the biblical injunctions against blasphemy, the sins of idolatry and deification that occurred when mere mortals were raised to the same level as God by claiming the attributes of deity. Feeling the need to articulate the boundaries of appropriate praise of Washington so as to warn their congregations of the danger of committing idolatrous acts in mourning Washington, nearly twenty percent of the ministers who eulogized Washington cautioned their listeners of the dangers of sinful idolatry and deification. Their warnings were accompanied by practical suggestions on ways to avoid the commission of the sinful acts. The Reverend Robert G. Wetmore, preaching in Schoharie, New York, praised Washington for his decisive role in the American Revolution and then warned his audience, "But, Citizens and Brethren, suffer me to remind you, that while I am your orator, I am also the minister of Christ, and it is therefore a part of my duty to intimate that we ought to be extremely cautious, in this day's transactions, for some (and perhaps those of a lukewarm cast) have charged numbers already with heathenish practices, in paying a greater honor to the Creature than the Creator, and this illiberal declaration may have sprung from the minds of false brethren, among whom I have for some time past conceived we were in perils. It is prudent however, to be on our guard, and in this very particular we shall imitate him whom we now bring fresh to our memory."<sup>43</sup> John Carroll, Archbishop of Baltimore and first Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, issued instructions to avoid any acts of idolatry or deification of Washington by the priests in the Catholic churches under his jurisdiction. In a December

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1799. By James Kendall, A. M., *Pastor of the First Church in Plymouth* (Boston: Printed by John Russell, 1800).



29,1799 circular letter to his clergy requesting their cooperation with Congress in observing February 22, 1800 as a day of national mourning, Bishop Carroll instructed the priests to remove the Holy Sacrament from their churches prior to the memorial services. He also advised them not to “form their discourses on the model of a funeral sermon deduced from a text of Scripture, but rather to compose them bearing some resemblance to that of Saint Ambrose on the death of the young Emperor Valentinian, who was deprived of life before his initiation in our Church, but who had discovered in early age the germ of those extraordinary qualities which expanded themselves in Washington, and flourished with so much luster, during a life of unremitting exertions and eminent usefulness.”<sup>44</sup>

The Reverend Peter Whitney, a minister in Northborough, Massachusetts, preaching on the national day of mourning, warned his listeners to guard against “every thing that favors idolatry,” and suggested that the way to avoid such charges was to remember that God formed Washington with all his talents and lent him to the nation. “While then we highly extol the man, and celebrate his great and patriotic deeds, let us ultimately ascribe the glory and praise to the Most High God.”<sup>45</sup> The Reverend Samuel Wood told his Boscawen, New Hampshire audience that creatures who are instruments of God in doing his good works are not to be given the honor that is due him. Wood continued, “We may not give that honor to the servant which is due to his master; we

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<sup>43</sup> Robert G. Wetmore, *An Oration, Occasioned by the Death of Lieutenant General George Washington, Delivered at the Lutheran Church, in Schoharie, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 1800* (Cooperstown, New York: Printed by Elihu Phinney, 1800).

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in a foreword by Peter Guilday to a reprint of *Eulogy on George Washington, Delivered in St. Peter's Church, Baltimore, February 22, 1800, by John Carroll, First Bishop and Archbishop of Baltimore* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1931), xxi-xxii.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Whitney, *Weeping and Mourning at the Death of Eminent Persons a National Duty, A Sermon Delivered at Northborough, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1800. Observed as a Day of National Mourning on Account of*

may not ascribe that to the creature which is due to the great Creator, who is Lord of all—without being guilty of sacrilege more criminal than can justly be charged up on the heathen world.”<sup>46</sup> The Reverend Abiel Abbot concluded his eulogy delivered in Haverhill, Massachusetts, with the following warning about the possibility of committing idolatry in paying national funeral honors to Washington.

We will be unworthy of having had the blessings of Washington’s life if we do not this day mingle the tears of pious gratitude for the bestowment of those of national grief for the loss of this great man. It is our duty to remember him as a Providential man, given, furnished and supported for the glory and happiness of this new world. Criminal is our admiration, if it rise not above the creature. In this bright assemblage of virtues and talents, we have seen an emblem of their divine original; but an emblem infinitely humble. . . Let our just admiration of the man lead us profoundly to adore the Creator; and the affectionate honors, which are this day universally paid to his memory, excite a universal and most fervent gratitude to God, who gave him to our country. Though our first thanks are due to God, we must gratefully remember Washington, the first among human benefactors. Gratefully remember him! God grant there be no idolatry in the honors which his countrymen so ardently pay him.<sup>47</sup>

Clearly Washington’s eulogists knew they were walking a fine line between well-deserved praise of the first of men and raising his achievements and character to the high level of the deity. They addressed the issue by denying that their purpose was to deify Washington but rather to justly praise his virtue and services to his country. The Reverend Alden Bradford, introducing a eulogy in Wiscasset, Maine, said, “It is not that we are convened to make an ostentatious display of unmeaning sorrow; it is not to pronounce a fulsome apotheosis: but from the highest veneration of the character of the

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*the Death of General George Washington. By Peter Whitney, A. M. Minister of the Gospel in Northborough* (Brookfield, Massachusetts: Printed by E. Merriam & Co., April, 1800).

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Wood, *A Discourse, Delivered at Boscawen, New Hampshire, on Saturday, the 22d of February 1800, in Commemoration of the Late Death of General George Washington. By Samuel Wood, A. M., Pastor of the Church in Said Boscawen* (Concord: Printed by George Hough, 1800).

<sup>47</sup> Abiel Abbot, *An Eulogy on the Illustrious Life and Character of George Washington, Delivered before the Inhabitants of the Town of Haverhill, on His Birth Day, 1800* (Haverhill: Printed by Seth H. Morr, 1800).

Man whose death we so deeply lament—it is to reflect on his merit and virtue, and to cherish that patriotic spirit, which conducted him to glory and immortality.”<sup>48</sup> The ministers then articulated the way to avoid charges of idolatry, to praise God rather than Washington, to worship the Creator, not the creature. Reverend Doctor William Linn told his Society of the Cincinnati audience in New York, “Eminent men are qualified for their work by God. They are his servants. In honoring them, we honor him. . . There is danger that even we, with the clearest revelation, may be guilty of idolatry in not lifting up our hearts to Him from whom cometh down every good gift and every perfect gift. Let us ascribe the glory to God, and we may safely extol the man whose loss this day we deplore.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to their warnings of idolatry in mourning Washington, the ministers also devoted portions of their funeral sermons to the “religious improvement” of the melancholy news of Washington’s death.

#### Religious Improvement

“It becomes us, my Christian friends, as followers of Jesus, to make a religious improvement of that sudden, unexpected, and melancholy event, which has bedewed our country with the tears of millions,” said the Reverend Timothy Alden during his eulogy on Washington delivered in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.<sup>50</sup> The Reverend John D. Blair, speaking in Richmond at the request of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, declared, “The loss of George Washington is a heavy and afflictive one for America, and it is only in some measure retrievable by the improvement we shall make of

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<sup>48</sup> Alden Bradford, Address delivered at Wiscasset, Maine, on January 1, 1800 (Boston: *Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 5 February 1800).

<sup>49</sup> William Linn, *A Funeral Eulogy, Occasioned by the Death of General Washington, Delivered February 22, 1800, Before the New York State Society of the Cincinnati, by William Linn, D. D.* (New York: Printed by Isaac Collins, 1800).

<sup>50</sup> Timothy Alden, 5 January 1800, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

it.”<sup>51</sup> The Reverend Joseph Buckminster said that the improvement of the death of men was required by reason and religion in order to “rise from the creature to the Creator.”<sup>52</sup> Preaching to large audiences that included many people who did not regularly attend church services, the ministers sought to evangelize the lapsed Christians by instructing them in the religious lessons to be learned from the death of Washington. Referring to these lessons as “religious improvement” of the punishing act of providence that had removed Washington by death, the ministers encouraged their listeners to be attentive to the lessons to be learned from this melancholy event. Many of the ministers said that the consolation of the Christian belief in life after death was among the important lessons to be learned from Washington’s sudden death. In Salem, the Reverend Doctor Thomas Barnard concluded his eulogy by remarking that the religion of Jesus Christ “affords us the highest consolation and joy upon such instances of mortality as we are this day peculiarly called to mourn.” He continued, “with respect to his followers he says, ‘I am the resurrection and the life, and assures us that all the just shall be raised incorruptible and immortal.’”<sup>53</sup> Richard Furman, a Baptist minister in Charleston, preaching before the American Revolution Society, the South Carolina State Society of the Cincinnati, and a numerous assemblage of citizens said that the last article of improvement he wished his listeners to contemplate was, “Let us not indulge hopeless grief concerning the pious dead, ‘tis the command of revelation; the reason is obvious and conclusive.”

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<sup>51</sup> John D. Blair, in *Sermons Collected from the Manuscripts of the Late John D. Blair* (Richmond: Printed by Shepherd & Pollard, 1825), 14.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Buckminster, *A Second Sermon, Delivered Lord's Day, January 5, 1800, Delivered in the First Church in Portsmouth, The House Being Dressed in Mourning in Token of Respect to the Memory of General Washington* (Portsmouth: Printed by John Melcher, 1800).

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Barnard, *A Sermon Preached December 29, 1799, in the North Meeting House, Salem, the Lord's Day after the Melancholy Tidings were Received of the Death of General George Washington, Who Died December 14, 1799. By Thomas Barnard, D. D., Minister of the North Church and Congregation* (Salem: Printed by Thomas C. Cushing, 1800).

Was our beloved Washington numbered among the pious; as well as the wise, the great, the brave—of which we are furnished with so many pleasing evidences? And has he died their death? Then let us cheerfully submit to the afflicting dispensation which has removed him from us; and in the contemplation of his perfect happiness and endless rest, divest our minds of every repining thought; and of every sense of disadvantage we have sustained by his death. . . . Be consoled, ye his adopted children, who shared in him the tenderest father's care! Citizens of America! his political children, dry up your tears! Turn away your eyes from the desolate mansion where his presence is no longer seen—turn them from the dreary vault on Potomac's bank where his mortal part lies mouldering in the dust;—view him in the realms of light, united in blest society with saints and patriots, who have finished like him, the toils of virtue, and now share the vast rewards of grace.<sup>54</sup>

Reverend Furman imagined the scene of Washington enjoying the “sublime glories of the heavenly world,” as he talked with the Angels of Light and approached the Divine Presence with humble adoration. Furman's rhetorical portrait of Washington in glory depicted youth smiling in his face, joy sparkling in his eyes, and his brow bound not with a fading laurel wreath but with branches of the tree of life and flowers of paradise. The Baptist preacher concluded that Washington's reward in glory “serves as a rich source of consolation and the most powerful motive to cleave to that religion which lays so solid a foundation for human happiness.”<sup>55</sup> Like Furman, ministers across the nation attempted to use the death of Washington to evangelize their audiences by arguing that those people who were faithful to the teachings of Christianity were consoled in their bereavement and that they too would receive the same heavenly reward as Washington when they died.

The death of a man as great and good as George Washington also provided ministers with the theme of personal salvation to use in their efforts to turn the memorial

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Furman, “*Humble Submission to Divine Sovereignty, the Duty of a Bereaved Nation*,” *A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of His Excellency General George Washington, Late Commander in Chief of the Armies, and Formerly President of the United States of America. Preached in the Baptist Church, in Charleston, South Carolina, on the 22d of February, 1800, before the American Revolution Society, the State Society of the Cincinnati, and a Numerous Assemblage of Citizens* (Charleston: Printed by W. P. Young, 1800).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

services into religious revivals. They pointed out to their listeners that if a man like Washington could not escape death, a prominent man who as an instrument of providence had been the savior of his country, then certainly all men must die. Therefore, all men should use the time left to them to repent of their sins and to prepare for their own death by adhering to Christian teachings. This theme became central to the efforts of many of the ministers to evangelize among their audiences of nonbelievers. Preaching in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, the Reverend John Armstrong turned his eulogy of Washington into a religious revival. “I fear there are some here today,” he said, “who very seldom come to the house of God and who are rebels against the Prince of Life. Repent and be converted before life comes to an end. God’s judgment lies ahead—make haste. If you turn unto God, you will be good citizens here, and reign with your Prince, the King of Kings, in glory.”<sup>56</sup> The Reverend Jonathan Belden, preaching in Winthrop, Maine on the national day of mourning, warned his listeners, “Turn your attention, my audience, beyond the grave. Washington died to instruct you. By his example in this world, dignified and Christian, his spirit has ascended to God the giver. With him you will shortly be lodged in the grave, with him you will shortly stand in judgment—imitate his virtues, live the Christian, and then your memory with Washington’s shall be blessed.”<sup>57</sup> The Reverend John Weylie, a young Episcopalian minister in Frederick County, Virginia, warned his audience of the perils of the grave with a fervor that resembled that of his evangelical Christian brethren of the cloth in their religious revivals.

George Washington’s death is a striking example that no man is exempt from mortality. Washington hath given us an awful proof of the truth of this assertion.

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<sup>56</sup> John Armstrong, *Sermon on the Death of General Washington Preached by the Reverend John Armstrong at Pottstown* (Reading, Pennsylvania: Printed by Jungmann & Bruckmann, 1800).

<sup>57</sup> Jonathan Belden, *An Oration, Pronounced at Winthrop, February 22, 1800. Commemorating the Virtues of the Late General Washington* (Hallowell, District of Maine: Printed by Peter Edes, 1800).

The man, whose reputation filled the Universe, is now confined within the narrow compass of the tomb. That arm, which dealt destruction among the foes of his country, is nerveless and unstrung. Those eyes, which beamed benevolence are now closed in a long and peaceful slumber—a slumber that shall last till the morning of resurrection. That bosom, which glowed with patriotism and the love of liberty, hath ceased to beat, and is now but a clod of the valley. Ye unthinking mortals, who tread the giddy round of pleasure and spend your days in petty struggles, here for a moment fix your attention. Let this event, therefore, which hath filled America with sorrow and consternation, be to you a monitory lesson. Let it teach you to be wise, to consider your latter end, and let it stir you up to live in such a manner that you may die the death of the righteous, and that your last end may be like his.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to preaching about the lessons of the consolations of Christianity and the need for every man to prepare for his own death, the ministers urged their listeners to learn the lessons of gratitude and humble submission to the will of providence and to place their trust in God. “Heaven appointed the time, instrument, and manner of Washington’s death, so we must submit to the awful dispensation and be careful that we do not offend God by any indecent expressions of grief,” declared the Reverend Thomas Baldwin, pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Boston. He continued, “However much he was honored and revered, he was but a man; and we know it is better to trust in the Lord than to put our confidence in princes.”<sup>59</sup> Reverend Richard Furman, the Baptist preacher in Charleston, told his listeners that George Washington’s death was an act of God, and they should not oppose the will of heaven. “Washington was to America the valuable gift of God: He had a right to resume his own gift at his pleasure.” He

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<sup>58</sup> John Weylie, *A Funeral Sermon in Commemoration of the Virtues of General Washington, Delivered by the Reverend John V. Weylie, on the Twenty-Second of February, at the Parish of Frederick, and County of Frederick* (Included in bound volume of pamphlets from the personal library of St. George Tucker, Williamsburg, Virginia, Swem Library).

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Baldwin, *A Sermon Delivered to the Second Baptist Society in Boston, on Lord’s Day, December 29, 1799. Occasioned by the Death of George Washington, Who Departed this Life the 14<sup>th</sup> Instant, Age 68. By Thomas Baldwin, A. M., Pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Boston* (Boston: Printed by Manning & Loring, 1800).

continued, “America will remain the object of divine care and favor.—If therefore, one honored agent is removed, another will be raised up to fill his place; to catch, as it were, his mantle, imbibe his spirit, stand forth, under God, the guardian of our lives, liberties, and laws.”<sup>60</sup> Whether America would remain “the object of divine care and favor” after Washington’s death was the subject of extensive comment by the ministers in their funeral sermons. In the tradition of the jeremiads of the Puritans, ministers of all denominations speculated about the possible reasons why God had removed Washington at this time of great danger to the new republic, and issued stern warnings about the urgent need for Americans to repent of their sins and to return to the teachings of religion.

### Jeremiads

Most of the funeral sermons delivered during the national mourning for Washington included some of the traditional metaphors, themes, and symbols of the Puritan jeremiad. Sacvan Bercovitch describes the Puritan jeremiads as “political sermons tendered at every public occasion—on days of fasting and prayer, humiliation and thanksgiving, at covenant-renewing and artillery-company ceremonies, and most elaborately and solemnly at election day gatherings.” He says that the jeremiads were “state of the covenant addresses” that focused on the major themes of the colonial pulpit: “false dealing with God, betrayal of covenant promises, the degeneracy of the young, the lure of profits and pleasures, the prospect of God’s just, swift, and total revenge.”<sup>61</sup> Bercovitch argues that historian Perry Miller’s focus on the “dark side” of the jeremiads was only a partial view of their message. More than just cries of declension and doom as

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Furman, Charleston, South Carolina.

<sup>61</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 4.



portrayed by Miller, Bercovitch believes that the jeremiads were part of a cultural strategy to revitalize the New England errand, later the national mission, that helped to fashion and sustain the myth of America.<sup>62</sup> Bercovitch argues that Miller missed the “unshakeable optimism” of the jeremiads that went beyond their “catalogue of iniquities” to an affirmation and exultation of the growing, more fervent, more absolute commitment to and faith in the errand.”<sup>63</sup> During the Revolutionary War, the jeremiad became a national ritual, and the early national Federalist jeremiads warned against unbridled ambition and denounced a long series of local insurrections. Bercovitch writes: “The motive of these Federalist jeremiads is transparent in the momentous choice they posed: on one side, apocalyptic disaster, on the other side, millennial glory earned through a process of taming, binding, curbing, and restraint. Like their predecessors, they were berating the present generation for deviating from the past in order to prod it toward their vision of the future. In ritual terms, they were asserting consensus through anxiety, using promise and threat alike to inspire (or enforce) generational rededication.”<sup>64</sup> These motives and themes of the jeremiads of the Federalist Era as identified by Bercovitch appear to be borne out in the Washington funeral sermons. The Reverend Doctor Nathaniel Emmons, Congregational pastor and theologian, delivered a classic jeremiad as part of his Washington funeral sermon at Franklin (Wrentham), Massachusetts on the national day of mourning. He observed that “the removal of wise, virtuous and valuable men from a people is not only a distressing, but an alarming dispensation of divine providence. It indicates that God is about to bring a train of heavy judgments upon them, for their ingratitude, and abuse of public blessings. He often took away from the house of

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-xvi.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

Israel their greatest and best men as a prelude to a series of national calamities. We often find a train of evils following the death of great and good men in Israel.” Emmons continued, “it ought to be remembered that what has been, may be again. God severely frowns upon a people when he takes away their great and useful men; and at the same time threatens them with still further tokens of his awful displeasure.” Completing the analogy to the American Israel, the Reverend Emmons said:

You will now, my hearers, spontaneously conclude that we have great reason to deplore the late death of General Washington, as a severe frown of Heaven upon our rising nation. He was unquestionably the most useful as well as most illustrious man of the present age. But alas! amidst all his glory and usefulness, God has been pleased to remove him, not only from our sight but from our help. We have lost a large share of respectability in the eyes of Britain, in the eyes of France, and in the eyes of every nation to which our flag has wafted the fame of Washington. . . . But our national strength no less than our national glory is diminished. . . . But God has seen fit to take him away at a most critical time, when the world are in arms, and every nation seems to be spreading misery and destruction to the utmost of their power. Though the armies of Europe have not invaded our country, yet the courts of Europe have employed all their political arts to embarrass our government, divide our councils, and draw us into their destructive contentions. . . . The death of our renowned Chief may encourage, unite, and strengthen all our national enemies. How far it may affect our current embassy to France and the present opposition to the administration of our government, we cannot determine, though we certainly have much to fear.<sup>65</sup>

Doctor Emmons warned his listeners that the death of the Father of our Country would have been at any time a public calamity, but Washington’s removal at this dangerous time was “a peculiar frown of heaven, and God is now therefore calling us to humiliation and mourning.” Seeking to interpret this afflictive act of heaven, Emmons said that “the plain and solemn language of his providence is put not your trust in princes nor in men because they must all perish.” He said he had reason to believe that

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-36.

Washington's removal was designed a "a solemn admonition to America to renounce an undue dependence on an arm of flesh, and to place their supreme confidence in the Lord Jehovah, in whom there is everlasting strength." God seems to be coming out against us in the way of judgment, Emmons continued, and the removal of Washington was God's way of "reading a solemn lecture on the vanity and frailty of life, and teaching everyone the absurdity as well as the criminality of relying on any inherent quality of outward circumstances to shield him from the stroke of death." The strong man could no longer rely on his strength, the rich man could not trust his wealth, the great man could not trust his greatness, and the benevolent man could not trust his benevolence and usefulness. He concluded by encouraging his listeners to imitate Washington's virtues and legacy of public service. "In a word, he said, let all classes and descriptions of men imitate that moderation, that public spirit, and that tender concern for the good of all mankind, which he so eminently displayed in every part of his private and public life." In this way, Emmons brought his jeremiad back to the ultimate purpose of serving the needs of the new republic by promoting the development of a virtuous citizenry.

The language of the Puritan jeremiad appeared in many of the funeral sermons delivered by ministers throughout the nation, several examples of which follow. Reverend Titus Theodore Barton, preaching in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, told his audience, "We ought to realize that the death of this great and eminently useful man is a punishment for our sins, and to be humble before God; yes, and it is suitable that we should accept the punishment for our iniquities. . . . Should we as a nation suitably conduct ourselves under this afflicting stroke of God, should it lead us to true repentance and the

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<sup>65</sup> Nathaniel Emmons, *A Sermon on the Death of General George Washington, Preached February 22, 1800*. By Nathaniel Emmons, D. D., Pastor of the Church in Franklin (Wrentham, Massachusetts: Printed

service of God, we may with confidence look to and trust in the great all and in all, to raise us up another Washington.”<sup>66</sup> The Reverend John I. Carle, a Presbyterian minister in Rockaway, New Jersey, concluded his funeral sermon by warning his listeners, “Let us not lose sight of what this melancholy dispensation of Divine Providence portends. It seems to be an alarming denunciation that the God of Heaven is angry with the inhabitants of the United States; and we have reason to apprehend that heavy and awful judgments are ready to be poured out upon us. O that this dispensation of Providence might so alarm our whole nation, as to lead us all to repent of our sins, in sackcloth and ashes, and to turn from our evil ways.”<sup>67</sup> Reverend Nathaniel Porter told his listeners in Conway, New Hampshire that “the death of great men looks like a frown of heaven upon a people.” He continued, “As the raising up of able men to direct the civil or military affairs of a state is the doing of the Lord, and indicates his favorable regard to a people; so, of their removal by death seems to be a token of the divine displeasure and shows that he has a controversy with the people. It therefore behooves a nation thus bereaved to mourn and inquire with penitent hearts wherefore the Lord contendeth with them.”<sup>68</sup> The Reverend Doctor David Tappan, professor of divinity at Harvard, also used the classic jeremiad in his funeral oration in Cambridge on February 21, 1800. Doctor Tappan said:

While we thus lament our deceased Patriot; let us notice, with pious humiliation, the rebuke of providence in suddenly withdrawing so great a blessing; and acknowledge, with penitence, that national ingratitude

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by Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton, 1800).

<sup>66</sup> Titus Theodore Barton, *A Sermon Preached at Tewksbury, February 22, 2800. On Account of the Death of General George Washington. By the Reverend Titus Theodore Barton* (Medford, Massachusetts, 1800).

<sup>67</sup> John I. Carle, *A Funeral Sermon, Preached at Rockaway, December 29, 1799, on the Much Lamented Death of General George Washington, Who Departed This Life December 14, 1799, at Mount Vernon, in the Sixty-Eighth Year of His Age. By John I. Carle, A. M., Pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Rockaway* (Morristown, New Jersey: Printed by Jacob Mann, 1800).

<sup>68</sup> Nathaniel Porter, *A Discourse on the Death of General George Washington, Delivered at Conway, [New Hampshire] January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1800. By Nathaniel Porter, A. M., Pastor of the Church in Said Town* (Portsmouth: Printed by John Melcher, 1800).

and guilt, which had forfeited its continuance. Let us view with awful concern, the gap which this event has opened for the entrance of public calamities; and the dark presage of impending judgments which heaven seems to exhibit by recalling its beloved Minister.<sup>69</sup>

Most ministers described George Washington as the instrument of providence who had been raised by God to lead his nation to independence and to establish a stable system of government. Using the language of the Puritan jeremiad, the ministers then warned that Washington's removal by death at this dangerous time for the nation could only mean that an angry providence had determined that the services of this long favored instrument of God were to be denied at a time when they were still very much required by the young republic. Reverend Nathan Strong, a Presbyterian minister speaking to the citizens of Hartford, Connecticut, on the city's day of mourning on December 27, 1799, exemplified the manner in which ministers portrayed Washington as the instrument of providence in the most critical times in the history of the new nation. "Washington was formed to rescue from bondage the modern and western Israel of the Lord, and after they were saved from foreign enemies by his sword, to save them a second time from destruction by themselves; from the miseries of anarchy; and to bring them into a state of government, whereby they might be preserved from devouring each other, and being devoured by the whole earth. . . A third time danger menaced his country—a third time his country called, and he took his sword." Reverend Strong concluded, "Let us praise and adore the providence of God, for raising up such an instrument to save this country from oppression. It was the work of God's most gracious providence; let us now with reverence adore the sovereignty which hath withdrawn this gift. . . The Lord who hath

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<sup>69</sup> David Tappan, Cambridge, Massachusetts, February 21, 1800.

been our God, and the defender of our country, is still on the throne, and he hath prepared an Adams to succeed our Washington.”<sup>70</sup>

At this time of erosion in the moral authority of ministers and the declining status of religion in America, the Puritan jeremiads provided a time-tested vehicle for ministers to use in their efforts to capitalize on the death of Washington by attempting to bring about a religious revival in the nation. This objective was articulated by Reverend John Stancliff in his prayer concluding his funeral sermon delivered in Cape May, New Jersey, “And, above all, my brethren, let us use fervent prayer, through the merits of divine Emanuel, for the revival of decayed religion among us—that our land may prosper, and our independence maintain under the auspices of the King eternal, immortal, and only wise God, Jesus Christ.”<sup>71</sup> But the centerpiece of the ministers’ efforts to bring about a religious revival in America at the time of Washington’s death was their portrayal of the great man as a lifelong devout Christian whose religious beliefs and practices should be emulated by all Americans. They hoped that Washington’s Christianity would serve as a credible endorsement of their religion and attract new converts to the faith.

#### Washington’s Christianity

The clergymen who eulogized Washington had to overcome doubts that the great man granted by God to preside over a covenanted people was actually a Christian, notwithstanding ample evidence that he was not. The quandary the ministers faced was that if Washington were not a Christian, then how could America be a nation in covenant with God? Clearly, that specter had to be cast aside. Washington gave little evidence in

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<sup>70</sup> Nathaniel Strong, *A Discourse, Delivered on Friday, December 27, 1799, the Day Set Apart by the Citizens of Hartford, to Lament Before God, the Death of General George Washington; Who Died December 14, 1799. By Nathan Strong, Pastor of the North Presbyterian Church in Hartford* (Hartford, Connecticut: Printed by Hudson and Goodwin, 1800).

his life of conventional Christian faith. Although he attended public worship regularly and issued thanksgiving proclamations and invoked Providence and the “Governor of the Universe,” the name of Christ did not come from his lips or his pen. Nor did he ever testify to an experience of saving grace. But these concerns had to be muted because if one took seriously the notion that Washington was not a Christian, that he inclined to Deism that was undermining established religion, then clearly he could not be viewed as the chosen instrument of a Christian God, and were that the case, how could one assert the claim that the United States was a nation in covenant with the Lord?

The matter of George Washington’s personal religious beliefs has been a topic of debate beginning during his lifetime and continuing to the present time. Whether or not he was a Christian has been the issue most frequently contested. Of course, the matter can never be fully resolved, because the ever-private Washington took the ultimate answer to questions about his religious faith to his tomb. However, to most of the ministers delivering funeral orations during the national mourning, it was expedient to portray Washington as the epitome of the Christian believer. They needed to claim him as a Christian in order to use his faith as an endorsement of their religion and to hold up Washington as an example of piety to be followed by their listeners, many of whom no longer attended church or lived by the tenets of the Christian faith. The Reverend Abiel Abbot, preaching in Haverhill, Massachusetts, declared, “It is his best eulogium, attested by his public acts and private life, that HE WAS A CHRISTIAN.”<sup>72</sup> Harvard theology professor, the Reverend Doctor David Tappan, acknowledged the value of Washington’s

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<sup>71</sup> John Stancliff, *A Sermon on the Death of General George Washington, Delivered at Cape May, on the 22d of February, 1800* (Mount Holly, New Jersey: Printed by S. C. Ustick, 1800).

Christianity to the status of the religion, observing, “the Christian religion therefore receives new luster from its transcendent influence upon the character of our virtuous sage, as well as from his avowed belief and earnest recommendation of its divine principles.” He continued, “You cannot despise this religion, without insulting the ashes of a man, whom you are forever bound to love and revere; You cannot reject it, without renouncing the precious assurance that the most beloved of human benefactors is now inheriting a reward equal to his matchless services; and that, if you imitate his virtues, you will shortly associate with him, and other kindred spirits in a world of perfect gratitude, benevolence, and joy.”<sup>73</sup> Preaching in Orleans, Massachusetts, Reverend Jonathan Bascom said that Washington, the “savior of our country,” was himself a disciple of the “Savior of the world” who believed in and professed the Christian religion. He said that Washington was “in church fellowship, attended the sacred ordinances, and, in his more private walks, ordered his steps by the heavenly rules and maxims of the gospel.”<sup>74</sup> Reverend Jonas Coe, a Presbyterian minister in Troy, New York, described Washington’s religious belief as follows:

His great mind was superior to modern licentious philosophy [deism] and he readily discerned and cordially embraced the Christian religion as of divine authenticity and as the only rational system of moral truth upon which guilty mortals can build a permanent hope of immortal life and external salvation. Under these impressions, he annexed himself to the church of Christ and avowed his attachment to the glorious gospel. Through all the vicissitudes of his important life, he uniformly attended the public worship of God, with punctuality and reverence; and gave his highest sanction to all the institutions of religion. He was under the divine influence of his

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<sup>72</sup> Abiel Abbot, *An Eulogy on the Illustrious Life and Character of George Washington: Delivered before the Inhabitants of the Town of Haverhill, on his Birth Day, 1800* (Haverhill, Massachusetts: Printed by Seth Morr, 1800).

<sup>73</sup> David Tappan, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 21 February 1900.

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan Bascom, *An Oration, Delivered February 22, 1800, the Day of Public Mourning for the Death of General George Washington. By the Reverend Jonathan Bascom, of Orleans, to the People of His Charge.* (Boston: Printed by Samuel Hall, 1800).



creator in all aspects of his conduct.<sup>75</sup>

The Reverend Coe urged his listeners to follow Washington's example in their own religious faith. He admonished them, "Like him, let us cautiously avoid modern philosophy, and adhere to the Christian religion; and cordially embrace its divine author, as the only foundation of our eternal salvation. And like him, let us uniformly countenance, and solemnly attend upon all the institutions of the gospel, and see that our souls are embellished with its divine grace. . . Copy after his great example, and then like him, you will be respected and loved while you live; you will be lamented when you die; and will dwell forever with him, in the same bright regions of elevated joy and everlasting felicity."

The ministers who proclaimed Washington's Christianity in their funeral orations usually included several "proofs" to support their assertions regarding his personal religious beliefs. Reverend Alexander Macwhorter, a Presbyterian minister in Newark, New Jersey, and chaplain to General Henry Knox's brigade during the Revolution, summarized the evidence of Washington's Christianity as follows, much of it from his own eye-witness observations during the Revolutionary War:

General Washington was a uniform professor of the Christian religion. He steadily discountenanced vice; abhorred the principles of infidelity, and the practice of immorality. He was a constant and devout attendant upon divine worship. In the army he kept no chaplain of his own, but attended divine service with his brigades, in rotation, as far as conveniency would allow; probably to be an example to his officers, and encourage his soldiers to respect religion. He steadily attended the worship of God when president. He was not in this respect like too many, who practically declare themselves superior to honoring their Maker in the offices of religion. He firmly believed in the existence of God and his superintending providence. This appears

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<sup>75</sup> Jonas Coe, *A Sermon Delivered before the Military Officers, Apollo Lodge, and a Large and Respectable Number of the Citizens of Troy, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1800. In Consequence of the Death of Lieutenant General George Washington. By Jonas Coe, A. M., Minister of the Presbyterian Church, in Troy* (Troy, New York: Printed at the Budget Office, by R. Moffit & Co., 1800).

in almost all his speeches. He was educated in the Episcopal Church, and always continued a member thereof, and was an ornament to the same. He was truly of a catholic faith, and considered the distinction of the great denominations of Christians rather as shades of difference, than anything substantial or essential to salvation.<sup>76</sup>

Congregational minister Eliab Stone, preaching in Reading, Massachusetts, offered further “proofs” of Washington’s Christianity, including his regular observance of the Sabbath. He said that, when inaugurated president of the United States, Washington had announced that he would attend to no secular business on the Lord’s Day, and he uniformly adhered to his resolution. He was regular and constant in his attendance of public worship of God, during which he always appeared “serious and engaged.” He “maintained daily intercourse with Heaven by prayer,” he regularly maintained family prayer, and throughout the Revolutionary War “he is known to have observed stated seasons of retirement for secret devotion.” Finally, “frequently in his conversation and in his communications to the public, he expressed his deep sense of a superintending providence, and of his own dependence upon the divine care and direction.”<sup>77</sup>

Although most ministers portrayed Washington’s Christianity as a matter of irrefutable fact, a few of them hinted that there was reason to question the nature of Washington’s personal religious beliefs. Several orators seemed to go out of their way to

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<sup>76</sup> Alexander Macwhorter, *A Funeral Sermon, Preached in Newark, December 27, 1799, a Day of Public Mourning Observed by the Town, for the Universally Lamented, General Washington, Late President of the United States, Who Died the Fourteenth of the Same Month* (Newark: Printed by Jacob Halsey, 1899).

<sup>77</sup> Eliab Stone, *A Discourse, Delivered at Reading, February 22, 1800; The Day Recommended by Congress to the Observance of the People of the United States, by Their Assembling in Such Manner as Might Be Convenient, and Publicly Testifying Their Grief for the Death, and Their Respect for the Memory of General George Washington. By Eliab Stone, A. M., Minister of the Second Church in Reading* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800).

deny that Washington was a Deist, or a believer in “modern philosophies.”<sup>78</sup> Reverend Samuel G. Bishop, in delivering his eulogy at Pittsfield, New Hampshire, cited the evidence of Washington’s Christianity, then issued a challenge: “Let deists, atheists, and infidels of every description, reflect on this, and well remember, that the brave, the great, the good Washington, under God the savior of his country, was not ashamed to acknowledge and adore a greater Savior, whom they despise and reject.”<sup>79</sup> Reverend Aaron Bancroft, preaching in Worcester, Massachusetts, said that Washington’s mind was fortified for death, “not by the cold maxims of philosophy, but by the enlivening hopes of religion; the unassuming disciple of the Prince of Life, to him the valley of death was illuminated by the beams of revelation.”<sup>80</sup>

The Reverend Doctor Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, confronted directly the issue of disagreement about Washington’s personal religious beliefs. “With respect to his religious character there have been different opinions,” Dwight remarked during his funeral oration in New Haven, Connecticut on the national day of mourning. “No one will be surprised at this, who reflects, that this is a subject, about which in all circumstances not involving inspired testimony, doubts may and will exist.” Doctor Dwight continued:

The evidence concerning it must of course arise from an induction of particulars. Some will induce more of these particulars, and others fewer; some will rest on one class, or collection, others on another; and some will

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<sup>78</sup> Merriam-Webster’s *Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition defines Deism as “a movement or system of thought advocating natural religion, emphasizing morality, and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century denying the interference of the Creator with the laws of the universe.”

<sup>79</sup> Samuel G. Bishop, *An Eulogium on the Death of General George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Armies of America. Pronounced February 22d, A. D. 1800, at the Meeting House in Pittsfield, Rockingham County, State of New Hampshire. By Samuel G. Bishop, Preacher of the Gospel* (Gilmanton, New Hampshire: Printed by E. Russell for the Author, March 1800).

<sup>80</sup> Aaron Bancroft, *An Eulogy on the Character of the Late General George Washington, Delivered before the Inhabitants of the Town of Worcester, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, on Saturday, the 22d Day of February, 1800* (Worcester: Printed by Isaiah Thomas, Jun., March 1800).

give more, and others less, weight to those which are induced; according to their several modes and standards of judging. The question is this, and all other cases, must be finally determined before another tribunal, than that of human judgment; and to that tribunal it must be ultimately left. For my own part, I have considered his numerous and uniform public and most solemn declarations of his high veneration for religion, his exemplary and edifying attention to public worship, and his constancy in secret devotion, as proofs sufficient to satisfy every person, willing to be satisfied. I shall only add, that if he was not a Christian, he was more like one than any man of same description, whose life has been hitherto recorded.<sup>81</sup>

Reverend Stanley Griswold, pastor of a church in New Milford, Connecticut, addressed the controversies surrounding Washington's Christianity. "It has been objected to General Washington that he never took a zealous part in favor of any creed, sect, or system—that in his numerous references to the Almighty and providence, he seems only to refer to God as the God of nature—that he rarely, if ever, publicly mentioned the name of Christ, nor declared his sentiments at all. Therefore, many have concluded he must even be a Deist, though none that I have heard have ventured to call him an Atheist."<sup>82</sup> Reverend Griswold defended Washington's Christianity by arguing that in the stations that Washington filled, it would have been improper for him to be "a stickler for sects and systems." He had to deal with people of all systems and sects, and if he had been a bigoted religious zealot, he would have driven away those with different beliefs. Washington was always a regular attendant upon public worship when he had the opportunity, and he always professed Christianity "as far as the Episcopal form requires profession." And he always showed his regard for Christianity in other forms by attending the worship of all denominations where he happened to be. For those who

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<sup>81</sup> Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse, Delivered at New Haven, February 22, 1800; on the Character of George Washington, Esq. By Timothy Dwight, D. D., President of Yale College* (New Haven: Printed by Thomas Green and Son, 1800).

<sup>82</sup> Stanley Griswold, *A Funeral Eulogium, Pronounced at New Milford, on the Twenty-Second of February, 1800; Being the Day Recommended by Congress for Publicly Testifying Respect to the Memory*

complain that if Washington had declared himself as a Christian, he would have had “a powerful tendency” to convert others, Griswold reminds them that “Jesus Christ turned but a few in his day.” At any rate, “his disposition and works, more than ten thousand professions, demonstrated that he was a friend of Jesus and in reality a Christian.”

Reverend Griswold completed his defense as follows:

Narrow-minded bigots might call him a Deist, and those who seek the patronage of such for selfish purposes might join in the cry: But he cared not if such called him so. Breathing the pure spirit of Christ’s precepts in all that he thought and acted, he had the approbation of his conscience, was sure the approbation of his God and of all benevolent, good beings; which was enough to him.—In short, his conduct in this matter proved him to have had the best religion in the world, especially as to *quantity*—for, he had enough, we see, to make him an excellent man—and still not so much as to cause him to trouble other folks with it.<sup>83</sup>

One of the major underlying reasons why Washington’s contemporaries debated his Christianity was his failure to refer to Jesus Christ in any of his public speeches or writings. There was virtually no written or oral testimony from Washington himself confirming his Christianity. Though his writings are replete with references to the Almighty, Providence, and other contemporary euphemisms for God, there is not a single reference to Christ. Reverend Richard Furman, the Baptist minister in Charleston, South Carolina, did not believe that Washington’s writings alone should be used to determine whether he was a Christian. He observed, “that the General possessed a high sense of the importance and excellency of religion, his public declarations on almost every occasion abundantly manifested. God’s superintending Providence, his special interposition in favor of the just and innocent; his attention to the prayers of his supplicating people; and the necessity of religion for the support of morality, virtue, and the true interests of civil

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*of George Washington, Being also His Birth-Day. By Stanley Griswold, Pastor of a Church in New Milford (Litchfield, Connecticut: Printed by T. Collier, 1800).*

society; are articles which he has fully stated in them, and zealously supported.” In addition to such writings, Furman noted that Washington regularly attended divine worship and was respected by the ministers of religion who knew him. Above all, his strict morality and many virtues showed that these professions were not just words, but “the genuine sentiments of his heart.” Given this evidence, Furman concluded, “The whole conspires to induce the belief, that he was more fully acquainted with the sublime doctrines of Christianity, and their gracious, experimental influence on the heart, than there was occasion to declare in these communications he made to the public.”<sup>84</sup>

Perhaps of all the eulogists, the Salem, Massachusetts clergyman and intellectual, the Reverend William Bentley, offered the most balanced perspective on Washington’s personal religious beliefs:

In religion, the President was practical. At the Church devout. In his temper, catholic. The religion established in his own education, he loved. He saw the same religion, under whatever form disguised, a blessing in the lives of all sincere men. Theology was not his study, but religion was his duty. It imposed laws upon his mind, which he obeyed. It blessed him in the Camp and in the Council. It was his guide in the offices of public and private life; and it spake peace to his dying moments. He lived as a Christian ought to live; and he died resigned to his God. Such a life, and such attention to religious institutions is a more rational defense and a more sure aid of virtue and religion, than all the tests and civil laws which have confounded the human understanding, oppressed conscience, and divided mankind by hatreds and dissensions.<sup>85</sup>

Many twentieth century historians writing on the subject of Washington’s personal religious beliefs conclude that he was a Deist rather than a Christian. James Thomas Flexner, Washington’s biographer, says that “Washington’s religious belief was

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Richard Furman, Charleston, South Carolina, 22 February 1800.

<sup>85</sup> William Bentley, *Eulogy on the Occasion of the Death of George Washington, Delivered at Salem, Massachusetts, January 2, 1800. By William Bentley, D. D.* (Morrisania, New York: reprinted in *The Historical Magazine*, 1870).

that of the enlightenment: deism.”<sup>86</sup> In the introduction to his study of George Washington and religion, Paul F. Boller, Jr., writes, “Perhaps nothing about Washington has been so thoroughly clouded by myth, legend, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation as his religious outlook.” Boller describes his work as a “full-scale, critical study of Washington’s religion.” He explains, “I have attempted to separate the myths from the facts, and to make a systematic analysis of Washington’s religion in all its ramifications on the basis of what may be regarded as trustworthy records: his behavior as a churchman, his attitude toward the place of organized religion in society, his position with regard to Christianity, his religious philosophy as it emerges from his private writings.”<sup>87</sup> Boller believes that the evidence indicates that Washington, broadly speaking, was a Deist. In his writings, Washington used a variety of “stock Deist phrases” to refer to providence, heaven, or God, including “Grand Architect, Governor of the Universe, Higher Cause, Great Ruler of Events, Supreme Architect of the Universe, Author of the Universe, Great Creator, Director of Human Events, and Supreme Ruler.”<sup>88</sup> Boller believes that the determination as to whether Washington was a Christian is largely a matter of semantics. He writes, “If to be a member of a Christian church, to attend church with a fair degree of regularity, to insist on the importance of organized religion for society, and to believe in an over-ruling Providence in human affairs is to be a Christian, then Washington can be regarded as a Christian. . . On the other hand, if to believe in the divinity and resurrection of Christ and his atonement for the sins of man and to participate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper are requisites for the Christian

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<sup>86</sup> James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington: Anguish and Farewell* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 490.

<sup>87</sup> Paul F. Boller, Jr., *George Washington and Religion* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), vii.-ix.

faith,<sup>89</sup> then Washington can hardly be considered a Christian except in the most nominal sense.”<sup>90</sup>

In a recently published comprehensive essay on Washington’s religious beliefs, Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., Associate Editor of *The Papers of George Washington*<sup>91</sup> concludes that Washington’s religious and philosophical opinions were filtered by Stoic philosophy, which “he apparently had imbibed either directly through his own study, or indirectly by his association with the Fairfax family at Belvoir, said to be given to Stoicism.” Grizzard writes that Stoic philosophy was “simple, practical, reasonable, and humanitarian,” and it “embraced the classical virtues and reinforced the Deist beliefs current in the eighteenth century.”<sup>92</sup>

In the final analysis, Washington’s personal religious beliefs were known only to him and his God. Only one of the ministers who eulogized Washington had the candor and wisdom to admit that he did not have the answer as to whether Washington was a Christian and died in a state of grace. In tribute to his unique perspective, Seth Williston, a missionary from Connecticut who preached a funeral sermon in Scipio, New York on the national day of mourning, will have the last word on this subject, excerpted from his introductory comments accompanying the printed version of his sermon:

It is true that the preacher nowhere in the sermon did pretend to decide absolutely whether Washington had a principle of GRACE. It is thought

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>89</sup> According to Dr. James Abercrombie, minister at Christ Church in Philadelphia, which Washington attended while living in Philadelphia, the President always went out of the church before the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. See Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., *George Washington, A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 268-269. Reverend Dr. William White, Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania, recalled that Washington was “always serious and attentive in church but never knelt.” See Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, 7:235n.

<sup>90</sup> *Boller.*, 89-90.

<sup>91</sup> W. W. Abbot, Dorothy Twohig, and Philander D. Chase, eds., *The Papers of George Washington* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1983-2003).

<sup>92</sup> Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., *George Washington: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara California: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 269.



that this is going too far for him, or any other mortal. . . The preacher's acquaintance with this great man's religious character was not such as to make it appear to him expedient, even to give his opinion of his piety. It is conceived that a man may have shining talents and may maintain what is called a good moral character and yet be destitute of the grace of God, or a new heart. . . As a general and as a statesman, we place our Washington above the most, if not all of them; yet we dare not positively affirm that, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, he will not be found wanting. If our patriot was pious, as well as brave—if he was a man of prayer as well as a man of war, we rejoice. All the pious will be happy to sit with him at the feet of our exalted Prince, who is himself a man of war and a mighty conqueror. But the sending of great men all to heaven in funeral sermons, orations, and elegies, it is thought has a bad tendency. It is calculated to establish the self-righteous system, and to keep out of sight, the NECESSITY OF FAITH IN CHRIST.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Seth Williston, *The Agency of God, by Raising of Important Characters, and Rendering Them Useful: Illustrated in a Discourse, Delivered at Scipio, on the Twenty-Second Day of February 1800: Being the Day Set Apart by the Government of the United States for the People to Testify in Some Suitable Manner, Their Grief at the Death of General George Washington. By Seth Williston, Missionary from Connecticut* (Geneva, New York: Printed at the Press of Eaton, Walker, & Co, 1800).

CHAPTER EIGHT  
THE EULOGIES AS BIOGRAPHY:  
CONTEMPORARY PORTRAITS OF WASHINGTON

When General Washington is the subject,  
history and eulogy are the same.

Dr. David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

Biographical sketches of George Washington constituted the major component of nearly all the eulogies and funeral orations delivered during the period of national mourning. Intimidated by the daunting task of constructing a comprehensive portrait of the character and lifetime achievements of George Washington, the eulogists apologized to their audiences for the inadequacy of their efforts. Captain Josiah Dunham remarked, “to attempt a complete portrait of this great man would be in vain. It is a task which will engross the talents of the poet, the painter, the biographer, and historian.”<sup>1</sup> Expressing his feelings of inadequacy to eulogize Washington properly, Captain Dunham continued, “I shrink from the holy theme, and would fain evade the task this day assigned me.”<sup>2</sup> Many of the eulogists used the metaphor of painting a portrait to describe their literary efforts to compose a biographical sketch of Washington. The Reverend Richard Furman observed, “in our taking a just view of the character, services, and influence of this great

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<sup>1</sup> Josiah Dunham, *A Funeral Oration on George Washington, Late General of the Armies of the United States, Pronounced at Oxford, Massachusetts, at the Request of the Field Officers of the Brigade Stationed at that Place, on the 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1800; It Being the Day Devoted to the Funeral Honors of Their Departed*

man and of the present state of the country . . . where should we find the Raphael-hand that could draw it in all its pleasing attitude and glowing colors? Leaving this arduous task to a master's hand, we shall only attempt a sketch."<sup>3</sup> The Reverend Ebenezer Gay said, "for as the finest pencil cannot paint like nature, so no portrait will be drawn of his character, which will justly represent him. Too low or too high coloring will mar every picture."<sup>4</sup> Reverend Henry Holcombe said that "to draw his portrait is more than mortal hands can do; it merits a divine."<sup>5</sup> Expressing the "diffidence that overwhelmed" him in approaching the task of eulogizing Washington, Holcombe said, "My feeble soul take courage! A Demosthenes or a Cicero might fail here without dishonor."<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Mitchel Sewall remarked, "to delineate with exactness in the portrait, each feature of the admirable original, is far beyond the powers of my pencil. . . Thus have I attempted with trembling hand and over-burthened heart, to exhibit a few brief sketches of the life, and to delineate a faint portrait of this unrivalled hero, sage, and Christian."<sup>7</sup> To attempt to write a "character" of George Washington was like painting the clouds or the sun, a task that required the hands of a master to trace, observed the Reverend Henry Ware. He said, "The image of Washington, strongly marked as the features of his character are, is

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*Chief, Pursuant to General Orders from the Secretary at War. By Josiah Dunham, A. M. Capt. 16<sup>th</sup> U. S. Regiment* (Boston: Printed by Manning & Loring, 1800).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Richard Furman, Charleston, South Carolina, 22 February 1800.

<sup>4</sup> Ebenezer Gay, *Oration Pronounced at Suffield, on Saturday, the 22d of February A. D. 1800, the Day Recommended by Congress, for the People to Assemble Publicly to Testify Their Grief, for the Death of General George Washington. By the Rev. Ebenezer Gay* (Suffield, Connecticut: Printed by Edward Gray, 1800).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Holcombe, *A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of Lieutenant-General George Washington, Late President of the United States of America . . . First Delivered in the Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1800. By Henry Holcombe, Minister of the Word of God in Savannah* (Savannah: Printed by Seymour and Woolhopter, 1800).

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

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Mitchel Sewall, *Eulogy on the Late General Washington; Pronounced at St. John's Church, in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on Tuesday, 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1799, at the Request of the Inhabitants. By Jonathan Mitchel Sewall, esquire* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Printed by William Treadwell, 1800).

impressed on all our imaginations in lively colors; yet, to reflect this image so as to preserve the unity of the whole, and the distinct characteristics of each of his parts, would require a mirror of more perfect polish than you are to expect in a mind of ordinary structure.”<sup>8</sup>

The occasion of Washington’s death provided the first nationwide opportunity for Americans to look back over his long public career and to assess the great man’s many contributions to the welfare of his country. Reverend Doctor Patrick Allison remarked, “The obligations of this hour direct us to examine more fully than we have yet done, the talents, the qualities and functions of our first of citizens.”<sup>9</sup> This examination of Washington’s “talents, qualities and functions” proved to be a major challenge even to his most eminent eulogists. The much-acclaimed orator and prominent High Federalist politician, Fisher Ames, told his audience, the members of the Massachusetts legislature, “you have assigned me a task that is impossible.”<sup>10</sup> Catholic Bishop John Carroll asked, “What language can be equal to the excellence of such a character? What proportion can exist between eloquence and the tribute of praise, due so much virtue?” He described his efforts as “a feeble testimony,” and asked Washington’s spirit to pardon him if his “cold accents of exhausted imagination” did not measure up to the orations of “youthful sons of

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Ware, *A Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of George Washington, Supreme Commander of the American Forces, during the Revolutionary War; First President, and late Lieutenant General and Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America; Who Departed this Life at Mount Vernon, December 14, 1799. Delivered in Hingham, January 6, 1800. By Henry Ware, Pastor of the First Church in Hingham* (Boston: Printed by Samuel Hall, 1800).

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Allison, *A Discourse Delivered in the Presbyterian Church in the City of Baltimore, the 22d of February, 1800—the Day Dedicated to the Memory of Gen. George Washington. By the Rev. Patrick Allison, D. D.* (Baltimore: Printed by W. Pechin, 1800).

<sup>10</sup> Fisher Ames, *Eulogies and Orations on the Life and Death of General George Washington, First President of the United States of America* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800), 108-129.

genius.”<sup>11</sup> The president of Yale College, Reverend Doctor Timothy Dwight, one of the leading intellectuals of his time, expressed his reservations about delivering a eulogy of Washington. Noting that “no efforts of the mind have been less approved than funeral eulogies,” and that “the added difficulties in this case are due to the splendid subject and the demand for only noble efforts,” Dwight said, “To some person, however, the task assigned must have fallen; and to none could it have fallen without anxiety. I have ventured upon it with an intention to perform a duty, not with a hope to fulfill expectation. Funeral panegyric I have always shunned, and would have more willingly avoided it on this occasion than any other.”<sup>12</sup>

In spite of their expressions of diffidence and concerns that they lacked the information and abilities to eulogize Washington properly, the funeral orators across the nation devoted a major portion of their eulogies to telling the familiar story of the life and character of George Washington. The eulogists of course knew that many of the men and women in their audiences had been observers of many of Washington’s public roles and had formed their own impressions of his character and achievements. “You are acquainted with his virtues and worth; you know how valuable he has been to his country. . . His contemporaries, who were the witnesses of his actions, need no higher eulogy than to recollect them,” said the Reverend John Prince<sup>13</sup> Major Isaac Roberdeau, remarked that if he were to attempt a history of the Revolutionary War period, the day

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<sup>11</sup> John Carroll, *Eulogy on George Washington Delivered in St. Peter’s Church, Baltimore, February 22, 1800*, by John Carroll, First Bishop and Archbishop of Baltimore (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1931).

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse, Delivered at New Haven, February 22, 1800; On the Character of George Washington, Esq., at the Request of the Citizens* (New Haven: Printed by Thomas Green and Son, 1800).

<sup>13</sup> John Prince, *Part of a Discourse Delivered on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, upon the Close of the Year 1799, Recommending the Improvement of Time. By John Prince, L. L. D., Minister of the First Congregational Society in Salem* (Salem: Printed by Thomas C. Cushing, 1800).

would not suffice for the narration. “What expedient then remains but that I refer to the recollection, and that, of almost every individual present?—For what youth amongst us, hath not heard, or who of more advanced life, hath been so indifferent to his country’s interests and glory, as not often and with boastful pride to have related the meritorious exploits of Washington?”<sup>14</sup> Reverend Abiel Holmes observed that “new information, indeed cannot be given you concerning him; for not a few of you have personally witnessed his talents and virtues; and those whose years admit not this testimony, have been taught from the cradle to lisp his name and to revere his character.”<sup>15</sup> Reverend John M. Mason said, “I tell you that which you yourselves do know. His deeds are most familiar to your memories, his virtues most dear to your affections. To me, therefore, nothing is permitted but to borrow from yourselves.”<sup>16</sup>

It is the contemporary perspective of the Washington funeral eulogies that makes them a unique and valuable source of biographical information about George Washington. The eulogies were delivered *by* Washington’s contemporaries *to* his contemporaries, and they included comprehensive descriptions of the character and accomplishments of George Washington in the eyes of men, some of whom had known him personally, who had lived through the momentous national events in which Washington had occupied center stage. This chapter will draw on the biographical

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<sup>14</sup> Isaac Roberdeau, *An Oration upon the Death of General Washington, Pronounced before the Officers of the Second Brigade, Fourth Division of the Militia of New Jersey, at Johnsbury, Sussex County, on the Twenty-Second of February, 1800. By Isaac Roberdeau, Major of Brigade* (Philadelphia: Printed by William W. Woodward, 1800).

<sup>15</sup> Abiel Holmes, *A Sermon, Preached at Cambridge, on the Lord’s Day, December 29, 1799, Occasioned by the Death of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the American Armies, and Late President of the United States of America. By Abiel Holmes, A. M., Pastor of the First Church in Cambridge* (Boston: Printed by Samuel Hall, 1800).

<sup>16</sup> John M. Mason, *A Funeral Oration on General Washington. Delivered February 22, 1800, by Appointment of a number of the Clergy of New York. By John M. Mason, A. M., Pastor of the Associate-Reformed Church in the City of New York, in Eulogies and Orations* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800), 229-242.

sketches from the funeral eulogies and orations to construct a composite biography of Washington that reflects his life and times as viewed by his contemporaries. The contemporary biographies of Washington had a unique freshness and time perspective because the eulogists wrote the biographical sketches using as primary sources their own experiences and observations, information they had gleaned from contemporary print sources, and what they had heard in discussions with their contemporaries. Because these biographical sketches were written for oral delivery, it was rare to find any footnotes attributing the specific sources of published information used by the eulogists. However, a few publications were identified that were used frequently by the eulogists as sources of biographical information. Given their remarkable congruence, it appears that common texts were the basis of the accounts. The print source most often quoted was a six-page biographical sketch of Washington that had been appended as a “note” to Jedidiah Morse’s book, *The American Geography*, printed for the author in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, by Shepard Kollock in 1789. Although Morse’s biographical sketch was only rarely acknowledged as the source, his accounts of Washington’s birth, ancestry, domestic life, and service in the French and Indian War and the American Revolution were often quoted verbatim by the eulogists. Another source on Washington’s Revolutionary War service that was quoted by several eulogists was Charleston historian Dr. David Ramsay’s two-volume *The History of the American Revolution*, also published in 1789. In addition, the eulogists occasionally quoted one or more of Washington’s writings, especially his “Circular Letter to the Governors of the States” written at his New York headquarters in 1783 at the close of the Revolutionary War. His “Farewell Address” on declining a third term as president of the United States

was also frequently quoted. The eulogists knew that the broad scope of Washington's life and times prohibited their doing the subject justice within the bounds of a one or two-hour oration. "Let it be the business of the elegant historian and the faithful biographer to recite all the virtues and services which George Washington has rendered to his country," said the Reverend John Andrews.<sup>17</sup> "To the biographer and the historian belong the narrative of his life and the detail of his military and political services," observed the Reverend Thaddeus Mason Harris<sup>18</sup> "Our history is scarcely more than his biography," said Charles Pinckney Sumner.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, most of the eulogists blended their biographical sketches of Washington with the history of the United States, tacitly confirming the truth inherent in the historian David Ramsay's statement, "When General Washington is the subject, history and eulogy are the same."<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the unique advantages of their contemporary perspective, the eulogists' biographical sketches of Washington should be read and evaluated with the understanding that the orators were influenced by multiple objectives as they wrote and delivered their eulogies. Some of the objectives of the eulogists have been discussed in earlier chapters of this study—including those of the ministers who portrayed George Washington as the ideal Christian in hopes of raising the status of the church and

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<sup>17</sup> John Andrews, *An Eulogy on General George Washington: Who Departed this life December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1799. Delivered Before the First Religious Society, in Newburyport, February 22d, 1800. By John Andrews, A. M., Colleague Pastor with the Rev. Thomas Cary* (Newburyport, Massachusetts: Printed by Angier March, 1800).

<sup>18</sup> Thaddeus Mason Harris, *A Discourse, Delivered at Dorchester, December 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, Massachusetts: Printed by Samuel Etheridge, 1800).

<sup>19</sup> Charles Pinckney Sumner, *Eulogy on the Illustrious George Washington. Pronounced at Milton, 22d February, 1800* (Boston: Manning & Loring, *Eulogies and Orations*), 261-272.

<sup>20</sup> David Ramsay, *An Oration on the Death of Lieutenant-General George Washington, Late President of the United States, Who Died December 14, 1799. Delivered in St. Michael's Church, January 15, 1800, at the Request of the Inhabitants of Charleston, South Carolina. By David Ramsay, M. D.* (Charleston: Printed by W. P. Young, 1800).



initiating a religious revival in America; the Federalists who praised the political achievements of Washington's presidency and firmly supported the continuation of a Federalist national administration; the Freemasons who hoped that claiming Washington as their most prominent member would restore the sagging reputation of their fraternity; the members of the Society of the Cincinnati who hoped to use Washington's connections to their fraternity of Revolutionary War officers to enhance their claims of embodying the Revolutionary War spirit and values; and the military officers, led by Alexander Hamilton, who hoped to use Lieutenant General Washington's military leadership to gain broad support for the continuation of a standing army. In spite of all these self-serving agendas of the eulogists, it can be argued, however, that nation building was the over-riding objective of Washington's eulogists in constructing their biographical sketches of him. They characterized George Washington as the cultural ideal, a man whose private and public virtues should serve as an example to be emulated by all Americans in building a strong and enduring new nation. Reverend James Muir expressed the idea that Washington should serve as the American cultural ideal when he said, "Let the remembrance of Washington be impressed upon the hearts of his countrymen, and stamp the national character: His name shall thus be more lasting than the marble—it shall shine, when even that sun has set to rise no more."<sup>21</sup> Most of the eulogists argued that the life and character of Washington should serve as the example to be followed by all Americans to ensure the independence and liberty of the young republic. Reverend Benjamin Wadsworth stressed the importance of Americans emulating Washington's virtues. "Republican citizens! Virtue is the stability of our government, and good examples are replete with moral instruction. Insensibly they

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<sup>21</sup> *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 27 February 1800.

charm the heart and possess a constraining influence over life. . . And where shall we find a fairer, brighter, or more excellent human pattern than the life of Washington? It comprises a rich assemblage of public and private virtues, accommodated by the highest and lowest walks of life. . . MAY WASHINGTON BE THE MODEL OF OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER!”<sup>22</sup> The Reverend Peter Whitney concluded his funeral sermon with the recommendation that Americans of all ranks should imitate the virtues of Washington. He said, “Finally, while we mourn the death of Washington, and particularly because he loved our nation and had done such great things for this people, let us all, of whatever age, rank or station, remember to imitate the virtues and deeds which have immortalized his name, according to our respective abilities and opportunities. Like him let us be animated with an ardent love of our country, and exhibit the most unremitting exertions to promote and perpetuate its interest and prosperity. . . Could all this people, from the highest to the lowest, emulate the virtues of a Washington, then God would delight to bless us, to build us up, plant us, cause us to see the good of his chosen, to rejoice in the gladness of his nation, to glory with his inheritance—the days of our mourning would cease, and our peaceful, happy prosperous state should not, but with time itself, have an end.”<sup>23</sup>

The eulogists’ biographical sketches of Washington’s exemplar life and character were intended to serve didactic purposes, to give instruction to their listeners about the

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Wadsworth, *An Eulogy on the Excellent Character of George Washington, Late Commander in Chief of the American Armies, and the First President under the Federal Constitution: Who Departed this Life December the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1799, in the 68<sup>th</sup> Year of his Age; Pronounced February 22, 1800, Being the Anniversary of His Birth, and the Day Recommended by Congress to Testify the National Grief for his Death. By Benjamin Wadsworth, A. M., Pastor of the First Church in Danvers* (Salem, Massachusetts: Printed by Joshua Cushing, 1800).

<sup>23</sup> Peter Whitney, *Weeping and Mourning at the Death of Eminent Persons, a National Duty, A Sermon, Delivered at Northborough, February 22, 1800, Observed as a Day of National Mourning, on Account of*

virtues and actions of all citizens that would be required if the new republic were to continue to prosper and survive.<sup>24</sup> Lawrence J. Friedman argues that writers of history and biography from the end of the American Revolution through the 1830s were engaging in projects of “literary nationalism,” a patriotic crusade to cultivate loyalty to the state and society and to cultivate and sustain nationalism. Friedman writes that according to Washington’s eulogists, “the proof that there would be a ‘Rising Glory of America’ derived from the faultless personage of the Founding Father.” The eulogists portrayed Washington as infallible, and because his qualities were the basis of American character, true patriots were obligated to emulate him to ensure the “Rising Glory of America.”<sup>25</sup>

The following composite biography of Washington was constructed from the biographical sketches written and delivered by his eulogists.

#### Washington’s Youth

“Notwithstanding it has often been asserted with confidence, that General Washington was a native of England, certain it is his ancestors came from thence to this country so long ago as the year 1657. He, in the third descent after their migration, was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, (old style) 1732, at the parish of Washington, in Westmoreland county, in Virginia. His father’s family was

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*the Death of General George Washington. By Peter Whitney, A. M., Minister of the Gospel in Northborough* (Brookfield, Massachusetts: Printed by E. Merriam, & Co., April, 1800).

<sup>24</sup> For a comprehensive literary history of the use of exemplar biography in eulogies, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence J. Friedman, *Inventors of the Promised Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), xiii-xv and 70-71; See also Michael T. Gilmore’s discussion of the Revolutionary leaders’ eulogies as symbolic biographies expressing the beliefs and values of the new nation, Michael T. Gilmore, “Eulogy as Symbolic Biography: The Iconography of Revolutionary Leadership, 1776-1826,” in Daniel Aaron, ed., *Studies in Biography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), 131-157. Scott E. Casper explores the didactic purposes of early national biography in his book, *Constructing American Lives: Biography & Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

numerous, and he was the first fruit of a second marriage.”<sup>26</sup> These exact words from the biographical sketch in Jedidiah Morse’s *Geography*, or some variation of them, were used by many of the eulogists to describe the location and date of George Washington’s birth and his American ancestry. It seemed important to establish that Washington was a native-born “pure” American descended from a long line of Americans.<sup>27</sup> “Virginia claims the honor of his birth, and that of his progenitors for several generations,” said the Reverend Jonathan Belden.<sup>28</sup> Obviously borrowing his information from Dr. Morse’s *Geography*, the Reverend Levi Frisbie reported that Washington was born in the parish of Washington, in the county of Westmoreland, and state of Virginia, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February old style, in the year 1732. Reverend Frisbie continued, “Yes, he was a *pure* American; he was born in our country; his genius, his virtues, his actions, are all our own.”<sup>29</sup> The Methodist preacher William Guirey stressed the republican egalitarianism of Americans, saying that “Washington’s greatness did not come from noble birth, the virtues of ancestors, or the worthy deeds of his fathers. His greatness proceeds from his own innate virtues and abilities.”<sup>30</sup> David Hillhouse

<sup>26</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography; Or, a View of the Present Situation of the United States of America* (Elizabethtown, New Jersey: Printed by Shepard Kollock, for the Author, 1789), 127.

<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (orig. pub. Paris, 1785) Thomas Jefferson cited America’s “production” of George Washington as part of his arguments to refute the Count de Buffon’s assertion that nature tended to “belittle her production” on the western side of the Atlantic.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Belden, *An Oration, Pronounced at Winthrop, February 22, 1800, Commemorating the Virtues of the Late General Washington*. By Jonathan Belden, A. M. (Hallowell, District of Maine: Printed by Peter Edes, 1800).

<sup>29</sup> Levi Frisbie, *An Eulogy on the Illustrious Character of the Late General George Washington, Commander in Chief of All the Armies of the United States of America; Who Died on Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 1799. Delivered at Ipswich, on the 7<sup>th</sup> Day of January, 1800*. By Levi Frisbie, A. M., Minister of the Gospel in the First Parish of Said Town (Newburyport, Massachusetts: Published by Edmund M. Blunt, 1800).

<sup>30</sup> William Guirey, *Funeral Sermon, on the Death of General George Washington, Who Died at Mount Vernon, December 14, 1799, Aged 68. Delivered by Request, before the Methodist Episcopal Church at Lynn, January 7, 1800. Being the Day Set Apart by that Society to Testify Their Affectionate Regard for the*

said that Washington was “born of and educated by American parents, untaught in the dissipation of Europe, the finesse of courts, and luxuries, he was a child of the American wilderness.”<sup>31</sup> Pliny Merrick commented, “In a Republican Government, it would be degrading the dignity of man, to boast of the high and exalted ancestors from whom he was descended. Royalty and nobility are the baubles of monarchy. It is enough that the man himself possessed the noble virtues which adorn and embellish the human character. . . George Washington sprang from a very ancient and respectable family in the greatest state in the union.”<sup>32</sup> The Reverend Samuel Miller said that Washington was “without the tinsel ornament of titled nobility—without the advantage of what is called distinguished and honorable birth, he was raised by the Governor of the world to a degree of greatness of which the history of man has furnished but few examples.”<sup>33</sup> Doctor Samuel Stanhope Smith, president of the College of New Jersey observed “Other nations begin their eulogiums of great men by tracing their birth to some royal house, or some noble family. . . virtues, talents, services are our nobility. What glory could he have derived from a noble parentage? Washington’s father was a virtuous citizen—not royalty. His name is all his

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*Memory of Their Most Illustrious Citizen. By the Rev. William Guirey* (Salem: Printed by Joshua Cushing, 1800).

<sup>31</sup> *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 8 March 1800.

<sup>32</sup> Pliny Merrick, *An Eulogy on the Character of the Late General George Washington, the Pride of America, the Glory of the World. Pronounced before the Inhabitants of the Town of Brookfield, on Saturday the 22d of February, 1800. By Pliny Merrick, Esq.* (Brookfield, Massachusetts: Printed by E. Merriam & Co., March, 1800).

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Miller, *A Sermon, Delivered December 29, 1799; Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington, Late President of the United States, and Commander in Chief of the American Armies. By Samuel Miller, A. M., One of the Ministers of the United Presbyterian Churches in the City of New York* (New York: Printed by T. & J. Swords, 1800).

own—it is derived from the intrinsic worth and merit of the man—not a ray of it borrowed.”<sup>34</sup>

Lacking any reliable information about Washington’s youth, the eulogists filled in the blanks, much as “Parson” Mason Locke Weems would do in the early nineteenth century when he invented stories about Washington’s youth for his multi-edition bestseller, *The Life of Washington*, like that of the young George Washington’s courageously demonstrating his honesty by admitting that he had indeed cut down his father’s cherry tree. The historian David Ramsay said of Washington’s youth, “I cannot speak from positive anecdote, what was his situation and employment for the first twenty years of his life; but I have heard, that in his youth he was remarkably grave, silent, and thoughtful, active and methodical in business, highly dignified in his appearance and manners, and strictly honorable in all his department.”<sup>35</sup> In his history of the revolutionary war, Dr. Ramsay had written an inventive account of Washington’s youth, saying that General Washington’s education “was such as favored the production of a solid mind and a vigorous body. Mountain air, abundant exercise in the open country—the wholesome toils of the chase, and the delightful scenes of rural life, expanded his limbs to an unusual but graceful and well-proportioned size. His youth was spent in the acquisition of useful knowledge, and in pursuits tending to the improvements of his fortune, or the benefit of his country. Fitted more for active, than for speculative life, he devoted the greater proportion of his time to

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Oration, upon the Death of General George Washington, Delivered in the State-House, Trenton, January Fourteenth, 1800. By Samuel Stanhope Smith, D. D., President of the College of New Jersey* (Third Edition, Trenton: Published by D. & E. Fenton, 1817).

<sup>35</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

the latter, but this was amply compensated by his being frequently in such situations as called forth the powers of the mind, and strengthened them by repeated exercise.”<sup>36</sup> Morse’s biographical sketch indicated that Washington’s father had died when the boy was “but ten years of age,” and his education was “principally conducted by a private tutor.” Samuel Stanhope Smith reported that Washington’s education was directed “only to solid and useful attainments—mathematical science was his earnest and favorite study. His exercises were manly and vigorous; his constitution was active and strong.”<sup>37</sup>

Doctor Joseph Blyth indicated that Washington’s education was principally conducted by a private tutor, “and he soon seized the great objects of erudition—skill in the sciences and a strict adherence to moral duties. He had a vigorous, penetrating mind, and by studying good models, he soon acquired an elegant, pure, nervous style. The occasional occupation of his early life was surveying lands, and that gave him vigor and activity of body and cultivated that kind of mathematical knowledge that proved very useful to him afterwards in far higher stations.”<sup>38</sup> Catholic Bishop John Carroll observed that in Washington’s early youth, “even though he could have lived a life of ease, he worked hard, adding vigor to his constitution and robustness to his nerves that never shrunk from danger. As a young man he explored the wilderness, exposed to hunger, thirst, and the tomahawk and scalping knife, but he never despaired or became disheartened by the difficulties that surrounded him. Such was the training and

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<sup>36</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution in Two Volumes* (Originally published: Philadelphia, Printed by R. Aitken, 1789). Reprinted Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1990), 2: 201.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, Trenton, New Jersey.

education by which Providence prepared him for the fulfillment of his future destinies.”<sup>39</sup> Doctor Elisha Cullen Dick said of Washington’s youth “presages of his future eminence were to be drawn from his earliest life. While yet at school, his deportment was such as to procure him the confidence and respect of his young companions: He was the common arbiter of their juvenile disputations, and his decisions were conclusive and satisfactory.”<sup>40</sup>

As a part of the eulogists’ descriptions of Washington’s youth and his education, many of them told a story about a significant incident that supposedly took place when he was fifteen years of age. Jedidiah Morse included the story in his biographical sketch of Washington which may have been the source for all the eulogists who relayed the incident. According to Morse, “At fifteen years old he was entered a midshipman on board of a British vessel of war stationed on the coast of Virginia, and his baggage prepared for embarkation: but the plan was abandoned on account of the reluctance of his mother expressed to his engaging in that profession.” Reverend Levi Frisbie told the story of the intervention of Washington’s mother to disparage his plans to go to sea, adding, “Thus an omniscient Providence prevented his becoming a skillful artist in hurling that British thunder against those bolts he was destined to defend the lives and liberties of his countrymen.”<sup>41</sup> Major William Jackson, one of President Washington’s secretaries, told the story and remarked, “Save for the fond solicitude of his mother, he would have enlisted in the naval service of Great

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Blyth, *An Oration on the Death of General George Washington, Delivered at the Chapel in All Saint’s Parish, on the 22d of February, 1800, at the desire of the Officers and Privates of Capt. Ward’s Company* (Georgetown, South Carolina: Printed by John Burd, 1800).

<sup>39</sup> John Carroll, St. Peter’s Church, Baltimore, 22 February 1800.



Britain. Restrained by filial affection, Washington yielded to his mother's wishes and did not join the British navy, thus preserved for the service of his own country. Who does not bless the memory of this tender mother! Who does not reverence the piety of her exalted son!"<sup>42</sup>

### The French and Indian War

Describing Washington's participation in the French and Indian War, James Moynihan said, "Behold him at an early age, fighting under the banners of his sovereign, gaining laurels in the field of battle, and displaying his courage, with success, against the enemies of his king and country."<sup>43</sup> Portions of Jedidiah Morse's account of Washington's involvement in the French and Indian War were frequently quoted by many of the eulogists, therefore, Morse's flattering version of Washington's experiences in the French and Indian War became part of the Washington myth. In his sanitized account, Morse had deemed the young Colonel Washington's defeat and surrender to the French at Fort Necessity a victory, and his attack on a French detachment led by the Sieur de Jumonville was described as a defensive action, even though the French later claimed that their emissary Jumonville had been assassinated by Washington's troops while on a peaceful mission. Morse reported Washington's first entrance on the public stage:

When he was little more than twenty-one years of age, an event

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<sup>40</sup> *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Advertiser*, 13 March 1800.

<sup>41</sup> Levi Frisbie, Ipswich, Massachusetts, 7 January 1800.

<sup>42</sup> William Jackson, *Eulogium on the Character of General Washington, Late President of the United States; Pronounced before the Pennsylvania Society of the Cincinnati, on the Twenty-Second Day of February, 1800, at the German Reformed Church, in the City of Philadelphia. By Major William Jackson, Aid-de-Camp to the Late President of the United States, and Secretary-General of the Cincinnati* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Ormrod, 1800).

<sup>43</sup> *The Centinel of Liberty, or the George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, 8 April 1800.

occurred which called his abilities to public notice. In 1753, while the government of the colony was administered by lieutenant governor Dinwiddie, encroachments were reported to have been made by the French, from Canada, on the territories of the British colonies, at the westward. Young Mr. Washington, who was sent with plenary powers to ascertain the facts, treat with the savages and warn the French to desist from their aggression, performed the duties of his mission with singular industry, intelligence and address. His journal, and report to governor Dinwiddie, which were published, announced to the world that correctness of mind, manliness in style, and accuracy in the mode of doing business, which have since characterized him in the conduct of more arduous affairs.<sup>44</sup>

Because the trouble still subsisted on the frontiers, the colony of Virginia raised a regiment of troops for their defense, and Washington was commissioned lieutenant colonel and named second in command of the regiment. Washington later assumed command of the Virginia Regiment upon the death of Colonel Joshua Fry. Colonel Washington commenced a march of the Virginia troops to pre-occupy an advantageous post on the Ohio at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. Advised that a body of French had already taken possession of the site and had erected a fortification which they called Fort Duquesne, Washington fell back for forage and supplies to Great Meadows where he built Fort Necessity, a temporary stockade to cover his stores. Upon receiving information from his scouts that a considerable party was approaching to reconnoiter his post, Washington sallied and defeated them. In return, Washington was attacked by an army of about fifteen hundred French and Indians. After a gallant defense, in which more than one third of his men were killed and wounded, Washington was forced to capitulate. The garrison marched

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<sup>44</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *American Geography*, 127-28.

out with the honors of war, but were plundered by the Indians, in violation of the articles of capitulation.<sup>45</sup>

Ebenezer Grant Marsh referred to Washington's early military career in the French and Indian War, commenting, "By the natural strength and superiority of his genius, without experience, he broke out at once a general and a hero. . . . Through the whole of that war, he displayed an energy of character, which presaged that he might be designed by Providence for a future savior of his country."<sup>46</sup> The story told by the eulogists more than any other about Washington's participation in the French and Indian War was about the young provincial colonel's heroic role in leading the retreat of the remnants of General Edward Braddock's army after a bloody ambush by the French and Indians on the banks of the Monongahela River on July 9, 1755. General Braddock was killed during the battle, and Morse reported that Colonel Washington, serving as Braddock's volunteer aide de camp, was the only British or provincial officer on horseback that day who was not killed or wounded. Underscoring the importance of the battle on the banks of the Monongahela, Reverend Patrick Allison, said, "The defeat of General Braddock spread more trepidation and dismay through America than the most brilliant victory achieved by our enemies during the whole Revolutionary War."<sup>47</sup> Fisher Ames noted that "Washington's spirit, and still

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>46</sup> Ebenezer Grant Marsh, *An Oration, Delivered at Wethersfield, February 22, 1800; On the Death of General George Washington, Who Died December 14, 1799* (Hartford: Printed by Hudson and Goodwin, 1800).

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Allison, Baltimore, 22 February 1800.

more his prudence, on the occasion of Braddock's defeat, diffused his name throughout America and across the Atlantic."<sup>48</sup>

The eulogists used the story of Washington's heroism following Braddock's defeat on the banks of the Monongahela to make the point that his courage and military skills that were evidenced on that day presaged his military talents that were to be demonstrated amply during the Revolutionary War. The Reverend Abiel Abbot remarked that "Washington's taking command of the retreating British troops covered the young hero with unfading laurels, and gave a just presage of that intrepid coolness, and of those superior military talents, which have been so gloriously displayed in a more important day."<sup>49</sup> Historian David Ramsay said, "The first public notice of him that I have seen, was in a note to a sermon, printed in London forty-five years ago, which had been preached a short time before, in Hanover County, Virginia, on some public occasion, by the late President [Samuel] Davies. In this, the preacher observed, 'I may point out to the public that heroic youth, Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but hope, Providence has hitherto preserved for some important services to his country.' As no thought of American Independence was entertained at that early day, this observation could only have been founded in a knowledge of his talents and character."<sup>50</sup> The Reverend Samuel Davies "prophecy" was referred to or quoted by many of the eulogists.

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<sup>48</sup> Fisher Ames, Boston, 8 February 1800.

<sup>49</sup> Abiel Abbot, *An Eulogy on the Illustrious Life and Character of George Washington; Delivered before the Inhabitants of the Town of Haverhill, on His Birth Day, 1800* (Haverhill, Massachusetts: Printed by Seth Morr, 1800).

<sup>50</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

Jedidiah Morse closed his commentary on Washington's military career during the French and Indian War with the observation, "The tranquility on the frontiers of the middle colonies having been restored by the success of [the Forbes campaign against the French at Fort Duquesne] and the health of Colonel Washington having become extremely debilitated by an inveterate pulmonary complaint, in 1759 he resigned his military appointment. Authentic documents are not wanting to show the tender regret which the Virginia line expressed at parting with their commander, and the affectionate regard which he entertained for them."<sup>51</sup>

#### The Years Between Wars (1759-1775)

As for the period of Washington's youth, there seemed to be a paucity of printed sources of information about his activities between the end of the French and Indian War and the commencement of the Revolution. Once again, many of the eulogists turned to Jedidiah Morse's biographical sketch for information. Quotations from the following description of Washington's life between the wars appeared in the eulogies frequently.

His health was gradually re-established. He married Mrs. Custis, a handsome and amiable young widow, possessed of ample jointure; and settled as a planter and farmer on the estate where he now resides in Fairfax County. After some years he gave up planting tobacco, and went altogether into the farming business. . . His judgment in the quality of soils, his command of money to avail himself of purchases, and his occasional employment in early life as a surveyor, gave him opportunities of making advantageous locations; many of which are much improved.<sup>52</sup>

Morse continued, "After he left the army, until the year 1775, he thus cultivated the arts of peace. He was constantly a member of assembly, a

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<sup>51</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography*, 129.

magistrate of his county, and a judge of the court. He was elected a delegate to the first Congress in 1774; as well as to that which assembled in the year following. Soon after the war broke out, he was appointed by Congress Commander in Chief of the forces of the United Colonies.<sup>53</sup> Bishop John Carroll commented on the importance of this period of Washington's life in preparing him for the future roles of commander in chief of the Revolutionary armies and president of the United States:

When the French and Indian War was over, the same all-wise Providence, which had inured him to danger, prepared him for the toils of government, and the important duty of superintending, in his riper years, the political administration of a great and widely extended people. His services in the field had won the confidence of his fellow citizens; they committed to his vigilance and integrity their highest interests in their legislative assembly. In this school he perfected himself in the knowledge of mankind; he observed the contentions of parties, the artifices and conflicts of human passions; he saw the necessity of curbing them by salutary restraints; he studied the complicated science of legislation; he learned to venerate the sanctity of laws, to esteem them as the palladium of civil society, and deeply imbibed this maxim, so important for the Soldier and the Statesman, and which he ever made the rule of his conduct, that the armed defenders of their country would break up the foundations of social order and happiness, if they availed themselves of the turbulence of war, to violate the rights of private property and personal liberty.<sup>54</sup>

Washington's long-time acquaintance, Protestant Episcopal Bishop James Madison, president of the College of William and Mary, believed that Washington had used the period between wars to study the martial arts. Eulogizing Washington in Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, on the national day of mourning, Bishop Madison observed,

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-30.

<sup>54</sup> John Carroll, Baltimore, Maryland, 22 February 1800.

This retirement was only a preparation for the august theater upon which he was afterwards to appear. It would be delightful could we attend him in this retirement; could we here trace out the steps which his philosophic mind pursued in the acquisition of useful knowledge.

Hitherto, Turenne, Marlborough, and Eugene, had been his preceptors. I know with what ardency in the early stage of his life, he followed them through every campaign, retraced their battles, and thus served under those illustrious men. Washington has often been supposed to have made a Camillus, a Fabius, or an Emilius, his prototype. I believe that he was himself destined to be a high example to mankind, and that the native strength of his own mind soared above imitation; but still it is probable, that his knowledge in tactics was greatly perfected during this period of retirement, by cultivating an acquaintance with the most distinguished commanders of ancient and modern times.<sup>55</sup>

### The Revolutionary War

Daniel Adams observed, "The eyes of these then infant colonies were lifted to Washington. On him his country called—his voice responded to their cry. He quit the scenes of rural bliss for the horrors and fatigues of war. He sacrificed the sweet enjoyments of domestic life for no other reward than that of serving his country."<sup>56</sup> Later in the eulogy, Adams discussed Washington's motivation in accepting the command of the Revolutionary army:

What caused Washington to unsheathe his sword and dip his hands in blood? It was not to subjugate nations, lay warriors low, and make mankind fall down at his feet. No, he fought but in freedom's cause. It was not a thirst for fame and military glory which led him to accept the high appointment of his country. It was not wealth or power, pride or ambition which led him to engage. No, it was love of his country, a sacred regard for liberty and the rights of man; it was to preserve from the grasp of tyranny the Independent States, that he sacrificed ease and the sweet enjoyments of domestic life; for this cause he endured hardship, passed watchful hours, exposed life and health, hazarded reputation. A most noble patriotism warmed his soul, animated him

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<sup>55</sup> James Madison, *A Discourse on the Death of General Washington, Late President of the United States; Delivered on the 22d of February 1800, In the Church in Williamsburg. By James Madison, D. D., Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia, and President of William and Mary College* (Richmond, Virginia: Printed by T. Nicolson, 1800).

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Adams, *An Oration, Sacred to the Memory of General George Washington, Delivered at Leominster, February 22, 1800. By Daniel Adams, M. B.* (Leominster, Massachusetts: Printed by Adams & Wilder, 1800).

in action, supported him in fatigue, refreshed him when weary, upheld him when faint.<sup>57</sup>

The eulogists assessed General George Washington's effectiveness as commander in chief of the American armies during the Revolution. "His responsibility was immense," observed William Pitt Beers, "Both rulers and people, in an unexampled manner, referred to his sagacity, prudence and skill, the task of finding, of forming and arranging, as well as executing and employing the means of defense and the powers of war. He was the soul of that admirable union between political wisdom and military genius, which supported and led on the march of the American Revolution." Beers continued, citing many of the elements of Washington's performance that were mentioned by other eulogists:

Washington faced innumerable obstacles during the war: without arms or implements of war, without magazines or money, without regular forces, with men unused to obedience and military discipline, and with people unaccustomed to taxation, he was to collect and arrange the disjointed and scattered energies of the country, to unite rude materials by his plastic skill, and to supply the want of ready resource by invention, by creation. If you attend him from his seat in the hall of Congress to the camp of Cambridge, to the defense of New York, to the heights of Harlem, and to White Plains, you see him everywhere inspiring confidence, remedying disorder, re-animating dispirited troops, recruiting in the face of a superior enemy, his wasted and enfeebled army seizing every moment of active impression, and annoying and impeding his adversary by sudden and well concerted attacks, conducting slow and hostile retreats from a victorious foe, and covering those retreats by every cautious disposition. Forming extensive views, and yet ever ready to seize a favorable and critical moment, and to improve an unexpected incident, inured to disaster, and yet never losing his equanimity and firmness, he was prepared for all events.<sup>58</sup>

General George Washington was virtually indispensable to the cause of American independence, according to his eulogists. The Reverend Alden

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*



Bradford said, “To the illustrious Washington, under Providence, we are more indebted for success in the late glorious revolution, and for the establishment of our civil rights and liberties, than to any other individual.”<sup>59</sup> Reverend Bradford, eulogizing Washington a second time at a town memorial service, said, “During the war, General Washington displayed foresight, caution, bold enterprise, personal bravery, consummate prudence, and invincible courage. Had the command of our army been entrusted to any other citizen, our freedom might never have been preserved.”<sup>60</sup> “Had less than Washington been our chief, the sun of glory had never beamed on the American arms,” declared Ebenezer Davenport.<sup>61</sup> Doctor Robert Davidson told his listeners, “Never did a people look up with more confidence, to any man placed at the head of their affairs, than we looked up to the father of our country. However threatening might be the aspect of the war—as long as we heard that our Washington was alive, and his countenance still serene and wearing the placid smile of hope, we were confident that all would be well. Had we been deprived of him at a certain crisis, there was abundant reason to fear, our armies would have been dissolved, and our country brought to the brink of ruin!”<sup>62</sup> The Reverend John B. Johnson observed, “He was the spring that moved the very spirit which informed and actuated that system

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<sup>58</sup> William Pitt Beers, *An Oration on the Death of General Washington; Pronounced before the Citizens of Albany, on Tuesday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1800*. (Albany: Printed by Charles R. and George Webster, 1800).

<sup>59</sup> *Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, 5 February, 1800.

<sup>60</sup> Alden Bradford, *Eulogy, in Commemoration of the Sublime Virtues of General George Washington, Late President of the United States, who Died December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1799; Pronounced in Wiscasset, February 22d, 1800*. By Alden Bradford A. M. S., H. S. (Wiscasset: Printed by Henry Hoskins, 1800).

<sup>61</sup> Ebenezer Davenport, *An Oration on the Death of General George Washington, Delivered at Stamford, Connecticut, on the 22d Day of February, A. D. 1800* (New York: Printed by John Furman, 1800).

<sup>62</sup> Robert Davidson, *Funeral Oration on the Death of General George Washington, Delivered in the Presbyterian church of Carlisle, to a Crowded Assembly of the Military and Other Citizens (in Washingtoniana, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1802)*, 282.

of measures which wrought our political redemption. Had he then fallen, who but could have predicted the disastrous consequences? Then, you my fellow citizens, would have fallen—Thou my country—never more to rise!”<sup>63</sup>

The eulogists offered their interpretations of General Washington’s military strategies and tactics and weighed their effectiveness in America’s ultimate victory over Britain in the Revolutionary War. The Reverend Samuel Miller noted the irony of General Washington’s victory over Britain—the general won the war but rarely won a battle. Reverend Miller observed, “His talents as a military commander were not so much displayed by the number or the magnitude of the battles which he won, nor by marching over thousands and tens of thousands who had fallen by his victorious sword; as by his address, in making the most of the feeble force which he led, by preventing the effusion of blood; by skillful diversions and movements; by exhausting the strength of his foes; by wise delay, and avoiding decisive actions, where they could only be hurtful; by concealing the weakness of his army, not from his opponents but even from his own soldiery themselves; and finally by availing himself, with admiral discernment, of seasons and opportunities to make an effectual impression on the enemy.”<sup>64</sup> Doctor David Barnes said of Washington’s military strategies, “During the first stages of the contest, his courage and skill were more conspicuous in his retreats than in his victories. These were conducted in such a manner that the enemy profited but little by the victories they had won and the

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<sup>63</sup> John B. Johnson, *Eulogy on General George Washington. A Sermon Delivered February 22d, 1800, in the North Dutch Church, Albany, before the Legislature of the State of New York. By John B. Johnson, one of the Chaplains of the House of Assembly, and one of the Ministers of the Reformed Dutch Church in the City of Albany* (Albany: Printed by L. Andrews, 1800).

advantages they gained. A defensive mode of war was adopted, as being the only mode the Americans were able to pursue, and which he was well assured would lead to conquest in the end.”<sup>65</sup> William Bentley, observed, “Not by splendid victories and the havoc of war, but by military prudence and a sacred regard, not to fame, but to the public interest, General Washington secretly weakened the enemy and strengthened his friends. In the end, peace returned without destruction of life or desolation of the country.”<sup>66</sup> Timothy Dwight noted that Washington’s military greatness “lay not principally in desperate sallies of courage; in the daring and brilliant exploits of a partisan: These would have been ill suited to his nation, and most probably have ruined his cause and country. It consisted in the formation of extensive and masterly plans; effectual preparations, the cautious prevention of great evils, and the watchful seizure of every advantage.”<sup>67</sup> Harry Toulmin explained Washington’s military strategies to his Kentucky audience as follows:

If he felt the power of Britain, he also knew her weaknesses. If he beheld the extent and magnitude of her resources, he likewise saw that those resources would in time be rendered inoperative by the vast obstacles which nature had placed to the exercise of them. Though a want of military skill and courage might for the moment render the conflict an unequal one for the American troops; yet he knew that experience would communicate both: and though he perceived that much was lost by want of energy; he was aware that more would be gained by the command of time. On these ideas his operations were founded—a maxim dictated by a clear and accurate view of the relative situation of the two armies, that the war should, on the side of America, be a defensive one, that should on all occasions avoid a general action, nor

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<sup>64</sup> Samuel Miller, New York City, 29 December 1799.

<sup>65</sup> David Barnes, *Discourse Delivered at South Parish in Scituate, February 22, 1800, the Day Assigned by Congress to Mourn the Decease and Venerate the Virtues of General George Washington*. By David Barnes, D. D. (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800).

<sup>66</sup> William Bentley, *Eulogy on the Occasion of the Death of George Washington, Delivered at Salem Massachusetts, January 2, 1800*. By William Bentley, D. D. (New York: Morrisania, 1870).

<sup>67</sup> Timothy Dwight, New Haven, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

put anything to risk, unless compelled by a necessity, into which they ought never to be drawn.<sup>68</sup>

The eulogists agreed unanimously that General Washington was beloved and revered by the soldiers and officers of the Revolutionary army. Gunning Bedford said that Washington was “a father to his soldiers who endured in common with them all the fatigues of war in summer’s heat and winter’s cold.”<sup>69</sup> The Reverend John Croes observed, “Washington’s suavity of manners, strict integrity, uniform moderation, refined humanity, and dignity of deportment, both commanded the veneration and engaged the affections of the officers and soldiers of his army. Never was there a commander, perhaps, so universally and affectionately beloved, so nearly idolized by all ranks of his troops.”<sup>70</sup> Reverend Levi Frisbie said, “His soldiers were his children and friends; they loved, they revered, they adored him as the best of fathers and the greatest of men.”<sup>71</sup> The Reverend William Patten said of the soldiers’ affection for Washington:

It was not the majesty of his appearance, the lightning of his eye, nor the high authority of his commission, that influenced the troops to endure hardships and meet the enemy with fortitude—it was a sense of the union of the most endearing virtues in his heart, with the most enlightened skill: a conviction that in their General they had a Father, who was solicitous to mitigate their distresses, and in toils and dangers would appear at their head; and that in the love of him they loved their country—it was these sentiments and feelings which rendered them patient in sufferings, and in the day of battle inspired them with such courage, that though their

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<sup>68</sup> Harry Toulmin, Frankfort, Kentucky, 22 February 1800.

<sup>69</sup> Gunning Bedford, *Funeral Oration, upon the Death of General George Washington. Prepared at the Request of the Masonic Lodge, No. 14, of Wilmington, State of Delaware, and delivered on St. John the Evangelist’s Day, being the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, anno lucis 5799* (Wilmington: Printed by James Wilson, 1800).

<sup>70</sup> John Croes, *A Discourse, Delivered at Woodbury, in New Jersey; on the Twenty-Second of February, 1800, Before the Citizens of Gloucester County, Assembled to Pay Funeral Honors to the Memory of General George Washington. Agreeably to a recommendation of Congress, as announced by the President, in his Proclamation of the 6<sup>th</sup> of January last: By John Croes, A. M., Rector of Trinity Church at Swedensborough* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Ormrod, 1800).

<sup>71</sup> Levi Frisbie, Ipswich, Massachusetts, 7 January 1800.

bodies might be cut down, their spirit could not be subdued.<sup>72</sup>

The eulogists described the period following the successful conclusion of Revolutionary War as a time of great danger for the future of the young nation. They characterized Washington's success in peacefully disbanding the unhappy army and his voluntarily resignation of his commission to Congress as perhaps his greatest achievements in his lifetime of service to his country. David Ramsay described the dangerous post-war situation as follows,

Though the capture of Lord Cornwallis, in a great measure, terminated the war, yet great and important services were rendered to the United States by our General, after that event. The army, which had fought the battles of independence, was about to be disbanded without being paid. At this period, when the minds of both officers and men were in a highly irritable state, attempts were made by plausible but seditious publications to induce them to unite in redressing grievances while they had arms in their hands. The whole of General Washington's influence was exerted, and nothing less than his unbounded influence would have been availing to prevent the adoption of measures that threatened to involve the country in an intestine war, between the army on one side and the citizens on the other. If Washington had been a Julius Caesar or an Oliver Cromwell, all we probably would have gained by the revolution would have been a change of our allegiance; from being the subjects of George the Third of Britain, to become the subjects of George the First of America.<sup>73</sup>

Many of the eulogists seemed to agree that, at this critical time at the end of the Revolutionary War, General George Washington could have used his personal reputation and the power of the army to become a king or dictator. Reverend Adam Boyd observed, "With an army attached; with an army devoted to him, and with his bayonets whetted and sharpened for execution, how easily he could have established himself perpetual dictator or monarch of the United

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<sup>72</sup> William Patten, *A Discourse, Delivered in the 2d Congregational Church, Newport, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1799; Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America, Who Deceased December 14, 1799, Aged 68. By William Patten, A. M., Minister of Said Church* (Newport: Printed by Henry Barber, 1800).

States.”<sup>74</sup> Reverend Levi Frisbie said that, “instead of availing himself of the discontent and resentment of the army to usurp the powers of government, and to render himself the sovereign master of his country, Washington calmed their passions and satisfied their minds that justice would be done.”<sup>75</sup> The Reverend Thadeus Fiske observed, “Enjoying the unbounded confidence of the people, whom he had delivered, and having at pleasure the entire control and direction of the views of the revolutionary army, Washington was presented with the opportunity, accompanied by every allurements, to make himself Sovereign of Empire, without even the appearance of usurpation. The disposal of his country was then completely in his power. . . with a dignity and nobleness of mind, he returned the power and commission with which he had been entrusted and retired to the private walks of life, a citizen with other citizens.”<sup>76</sup>

General Washington bade farewell to his officers, left his headquarters in New York and, accompanied by his aides de camp, journeyed on horseback to Annapolis, Maryland, the city in which Congress was sitting at the close of war. Washington resigned his military commission to Congress on December 23, 1783. He arrived at his Mount Vernon, Virginia home on Christmas Eve. “The closing scene of war is almost beyond the power of description,” said the Reverend Benjamin Gleason. “Washington went to Annapolis, the capital of

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<sup>73</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

<sup>74</sup> Adam Boyd, *A Discourse Sacred to the Memory of George Washington, the Father of His Country. Delivered before an Audience of Several Hundred Citizens in Nashville, on the 22d of February, 1800. By the Reverend Adam Boyd, Late Chaplain of a Continental Brigade* (Nashville, Tennessee: Printed for the Author, 1800).

<sup>75</sup> Levi Frisbie, Ipswich, Massachusetts, 7 January 1800.

<sup>76</sup> Thadeus Fiske, *Sermon, Delivered December 29, 1799. At the Second Parish in Cambridge, being the Lord's Day Immediately following the Melancholy Intelligence of the Death of General George Washington, Late President of the United States of America* (Boston: Printed by James Cutler, 1800).

Maryland, then the seat of Congress to resign his commission to a large and respectable audience of distinguished and illustrious characters. In his address he expressed his warm affection for his country and the grateful devotion of his soul toward the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, his own—his country's God. He retired to his delightful seat at Mount Vernon in Virginia and was welcomed home by the pure, unaffected and heartfelt joy and satisfaction of neighbors and domestics; the welcoming smiles, the various tendernesses of conjugal love.”<sup>77</sup>

#### First President of the United States

Following the Revolutionary War, the newly free and independent nation continued to be governed by the provisions of the Articles of Confederation which had been approved by all the states during the war to provide a means of their common government. The eulogists uniformly described the postwar period in America as a trying time. Daniel Adams said, “The war was hardly over when new dangers rose, disorders threatened, and these states were again on the brink of ruin. It was the danger from an invading enemy which had united all hearts and sentiment; no sooner had our victorious arms crushed the tyrants power, than the bands of our union were broken. The Federal Compact was found of no effect, and our land seemed fast verging to a state of anarchy and ruin.”<sup>78</sup> “The feebleness of our general government every day became more notorious,” observed Samuel Bayard. “The decay of commerce; the decline of manufactures; the loss of individual and national credit; the weakness of some states and the

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<sup>77</sup> Benjamin Gleason, *An Oration, Pronounced at the Baptist Meetinghouse in Wrentham, February 22, 1800. At the Request of the Society, in Memory of General George Washington, First President and Late Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America* (Wrentham, Massachusetts: Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton, 1800).

interfering claims of others, threatening to involve us in domestic broils and exposing us to attack of any foreign invader; imperiously demanded the review of our Articles of Confederation, and the substitution in their place of an efficient form of government.”<sup>79</sup> Timothy Dwight observed, “under the weakness and inefficiency of the confederation, these states were falling asunder and tumbling into anarchy and ruin.”<sup>80</sup>

“Our revolution was not yet completed,” said Fred W. Hotchkiss. “No sooner did we find the want of a national government to call forth the energies of the land, and honorably discharge those debts which were contracted in the cause of liberty; no sooner did we find the impossibility of progressing to national respectability, by reason of the state governments clashing with the imbecile and advisory power of the realm; and that no general measure could succeed but by the most tedious, slow, circuitous, and uncertain means; but the voice of the people, as of one, said, let there be a national government or our liberties are at an end. In this critical period of our public affairs, our political father was called forth a second time from his favorite recess, to advise as a statesman to tell us how we might respectably and surely support that independence which his sword had gained.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Daniel Adams, *An Oration, Sacred to the Memory of General George Washington, Delivered at Leominster, February 22, 1800*.

<sup>79</sup> Samuel Bayard, *Funeral Oration Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington; and Delivered on the First of January, 1800, in the Episcopal Church at New Rochelle, in the State of New York* (New Brunswick: Printed by Abraham Blauvelt, 1800).

<sup>80</sup> Timothy Dwight, New Haven, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

<sup>81</sup> Fred W. Hotchkiss, *An Oration Delivered at Saybrook on Saturday February 22, 1800; The Day Set Apart by the Recommendation of Congress for the People of the United States to Testify Their Grief for the Death of General George Washington; Who Died December 14, 1799* (New London, Connecticut: Printed by S. Green, 1800).



In 1787, the states called for a general convention to meet in Philadelphia to make recommendations for the revision of the Articles of Confederation, and George Washington was chosen to preside over the deliberations. Timothy Dwight said, “At the head of the general convention, Washington contributed more, by his wisdom, virtue and influence, than any other man to the final adoption of the Federal Constitution; and thus saved his country a second time.”<sup>82</sup> Major William Jackson, who had served as secretary to the Constitutional Convention, recalled his eyewitness observations of Washington’s contributions to the deliberations:

Elected by an unanimous suffrage to preside over those deliberations, on which the fate of a mighty nation and the felicity of millions were suspended, the dignity of his character and the influence of his example gave to the discussion of different interests a spirit of conciliation which resulted in the noblest concessions—and an impression of national deference, in which subordinate considerations were merged and extinguished. Yes, my fellow citizens, to his accurate perception of our several interests—to his just construction of what was required to reconcile them, no less than to his skill and valor in the day of battle, are we indebted for a large portion of our national harmony and social happiness. It is not in language to appreciate, with just estimation, the advantages which on this emergency were derived to his country from the mild dignity of his manner and the harmonizing character of his deportment. In them was personified that accommodation which the crisis demanded, and which the great instrument of our national safety most happily proclaims in all its provisions.<sup>83</sup>

David Ramsay observed that “Washington’s wisdom had a great share in forming, and the influence of his name a still greater in procuring the acceptance of the Constitution which the Convention recommended to the people for their

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<sup>82</sup> Timothy Dwight, New Haven, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

<sup>83</sup> William Jackson, Philadelphia, 22 February 1800.

adoption.”<sup>84</sup> Reverend Patrick Allison, speaking about Washington’s role as president of the Constitutional Convention, said that “All the wisdom of Washington’s counsel and all the weight of his authority were necessary to assist and sanction the proceedings.”<sup>85</sup> “Washington’s name beyond a doubt contributed greatly to the adoption of the Constitution,” observed the Reverend Joseph Dana.<sup>86</sup>

In 1789, George Washington was elected unanimously the first president of the United States. Of Washington’s election, the Reverend Abiel Abbot said, “in organizing the new government, every eye, true, as the magnet to the pole, was attracted to the illustrious Farmer, and designated him the first President of a nation, whose independence and constitutional establishment owed so much to his valor and wisdom. He sacrificed every personal consideration to patriotism, and with a humility which exalted greatness, having solicited the candor of his country, and most fervently supplicated the favor of heaven, he entered his civil career.”<sup>87</sup> Washington was again perceived to be indispensable to the welfare of his country as the nation chose its first president. Reverend Samuel Worcester said, “In all probability, Washington is the only man in the country so fully possessed of the confidence and affections of the nation and so completely qualified in every respect for the office to which he is called, as to carry the Constitution into effect without bloodshed or commotion.”<sup>88</sup> In accepting his

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<sup>84</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

<sup>85</sup> Patrick Allison, Baltimore, Maryland, 22 February 1800.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Dana, *A Discourse on the Character and Death of General George Washington, Late President of the United States of America; Delivered at Ipswich on the 22d February, A. D. 1800, By Joseph Dana, A. M., Pastor of the South Church in that Place* (Newburyport, Printed by Edmund M. Blunt, 1800).

<sup>87</sup> Abiel Abbot, Haverhill, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800.

<sup>88</sup> Samuel Worcester, Fitchburg, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800.

country's call to the presidency, Washington sacrificed his beloved retirement at Mount Vernon and also risked his personal reputation. Thomas Thacher observed, "But when it is considered that he had already acquired the universal goodwill of his country, and a reputation which could scarcely be increased, obedience to the voice of his fellow-citizens was a sacrifice. . . It demonstrated that he was not only willing to expose his life, but even hazard his fame, when the sacred calls of duty and the public necessity demanded it at his hands."<sup>89</sup>

Washington was inaugurated the first president of the United States in New York City on April 30, 1789, and he immediately set about the task of creating the American presidency. Reverend John Brodhead Romeyn said, "He now embarked on the arduous, difficult, important, and to him, untried duties of a statesman. . . His situation was novel and called for uncommon prudence. The principles of republicanism had never prevailed in their purity—at least no modern example offered. He had no model for his conduct but his own mind."<sup>90</sup> The Reverend Abiel Flint observed, "When first called to the chief magistracy, his situation was peculiar in that every situation was new. He had to tread an unbeaten path, and in many respects to establish regulations not only for himself but for his successors in office. The friends of the Constitution watched him closely because they knew that the successful establishment of the new government much depended on his actions. The enemies of the Constitution also

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas Thacher, *An Eulogy on George Washington, First President of the United States, and Late Commander in Chief of the American Army, Who Died December 14, 1799. Delivered at Dedham, February 22, 1800, At the Request of the Inhabitants of Said Town* (Dedham, Massachusetts: Printed by H. Mann, 1800).

<sup>90</sup> John Brodhead Romeyn, *A Funeral Oration, in Remembrance of George Washington: Delivered at Rhinebeck Flats, February 22. By John B. Romeyn, Minister of the Reformed Dutch Church, Rhinebeck Flats* (Poughkeepsie, New York: Printed by John Woods, 1800).

watched him closely, to find something which they might make use of as an instrument for the subversion of the government.”<sup>91</sup> Ebenezer Grant Marsh said that “under Washington’s administration, the excellent organization of the different branches of the Federal Constitution, the judicious appointments, and the energy applied to all its operations, gave it a basis which secured the happiness and prosperity of our country. In no situation did Washington appear more truly great than at the helm of our Federal government.”<sup>92</sup>

The eulogists admitted that President Washington’s administration had not uniformly pleased all the American people. Reverend John B. Romeyn observed, “To say that he satisfied all his countrymen would be saying what experience denies—The voice of some, who had a right of thinking, as well as he had a right of acting, arraigned his policy and doubted his gratitude. The energy of that voice was, however, soon lost in the remembrance of his past services. No one could with any justice attach improper motives to him, who, under God, principally resisted the allurements of ambition when presented. That he was liable to error could not be denied. He was a man, and, as such, necessarily imperfect. He never, however, erred upon principle.”<sup>93</sup> Dr. Patrick Allison observed, “In conducting a civil administration among a free people, especially when the scene is new and untried, multiplied difficulties will unavoidable occur. Every citizen has a right to think for himself—to judge of governmental measures—to declare his sentiments—a great diversity of opinions must unavoidably prevail. . . . Perhaps a qualified encomium on our first supreme magistrate would be concurred in even

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<sup>91</sup> Abiel Flint, Hartford, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

<sup>92</sup> Ebenezer Grant Marsh, Wethersfield, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

by those who withheld an approbation of all his measures—that at no period of his existence had they any reason to question his ardent unabating zeal to promote the best interest of America.”<sup>94</sup> “It belongs not to the present age dispassionately to decide on the policy which governed his long administration—experience and impartial posterity will most justly determine the merits of those political disputes which at present divide the public mind. But whilst some nice shades of difference discriminated his opinions from those of many of his fellow citizens, all agreed that every part of his conduct was dictated by a spirit, pure disinterested, and inviolably attached to the happiness of his country,” said Transylvania University law professor James Brown.<sup>95</sup>

In spite of the political differences that divided Americans, George Washington was reelected unanimously in 1792 to a second term as president of the United States. The Honorable Isaac Parker observed that during his second term, Washington “preserved our national neutrality, terminated a cruel and relentless war with the savages, crushed a formidable rebellion, triumphed over a persevering spirit of faction, gave respectability to our nation abroad, and saw his people prosperous and happy at home.”<sup>96</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith attributed the following accomplishments to Washington’s second administration: “Public peace has been restored, notwithstanding the most powerful efforts to disturb it; domestic faction has been kept under control; foreign intrigue and insolence have been defeated and repressed; a savage war has been terminated; a rebellion has

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<sup>93</sup> John B. Romeyn, Rhinebeck Flats, New York, 22 February 1800.

<sup>94</sup> Patrick Allison, Baltimore, Maryland, 22 February 1800.

<sup>95</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, 6 February 1800.

been punished; the laws have been strengthened, and energy and stability have been infused into the government.”<sup>97</sup> The Reverend Benjamin Wadsworth reviewed the many challenges of President Washington’s second term. “Had it not been for the restless savages of the wilderness, and the intrigues of foreign emissaries, and internal foes, our national tranquility had been uninterrupted: but from these sources originated a complication of evils. To his vigilance and pacific disposition, we are greatly obligated for averting the impending judgments. United the arm of power with the voice of clemency, he concluded an honorable peace with the Indian tribes. When, at the instigation of enemies of government, a formidable insurrection arose in the state of Pennsylvania, mingling mercy and energy, he taught succeeding ages how to quell a tumult. By an early declaration of neutrality, he happily prevented America being involved in the wars of Europe. When the subtle, intriguing, systematic Genet and his accomplices were unwearied in their endeavors to divide the people from their government, and precipitate hostilities with Great Britain, his conciliatory measures frustrated their Machiavellian policy.”<sup>98</sup>

President Washington’s proclamation of American neutrality with regard to the struggles among the European powers was described by nearly all the eulogists as the wisest and most beneficial act of his administration. Reverend

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<sup>96</sup> Isaac Parker, *An Oration on the Sublime Virtues of General George Washington, Late President of the United States. Pronounced before the Inhabitants of Portland, February 22d, 1800, by Appointment of the Selectmen* (Portland: Printed by Elezer Alley Jenks, 1800).

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, Trenton, New Jersey, 14 January 1800.

<sup>98</sup> Benjamin Wadsworth, *An Eulogy on the Excellent Character of George Washington, Late Commander in Chief of the American Armies, and the First President under the Federal Constitution; Who Departed this Life December the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1799, in the 68<sup>th</sup> Year of his Age; Pronounced February 22, 1800, Being the Anniversary of His Birth, and the Day Recommended by Congress to Testify the National Grief for His*

John Croes said, “ Washington’s proclamation of neutrality defeated the designs of those who would have involved us in a perilous and ruinous contest and displayed the firmness of mind which disregarded the discontents of the moment. Although this firm and decided conduct drew upon him the enmity of the friends of disorder, and of the admirers of French principles, and exposed him to the bitterest and most rancorous shafts of calumny; yet it will stand upon the historic page among the most brilliant acts of his political life.”<sup>99</sup> Timothy Dwight said that Washington’s proclamation of neutrality was “the hinge on which at that time, the whole well being of our country turned. No public measure has ever been more necessary, more happily timed, or more prudently constructed.”<sup>100</sup> Expressing the sentiments that seemed to be shared generally by many of the eulogists, Reverend Doctor David Barnes attributed the nation’s peace and prosperity in 1800 to the wisdom of Washington’s neutrality proclamation. “The line he adopted, when it was extremely difficult to determine what course it was best to pursue, has, under Providence, saved this nation from the calamities of a dreadful war and enabled us to enjoy a great share of peace, and as large a portion of temporal prosperity as the world has ever seen.”<sup>101</sup>

Near the end of his second term, President Washington announced that he wished to retire and had decided not to accept a third term of office. Samuel Bayard noted that Washington “voluntarily descended from the elevated place of

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*Death.* By Benjamin Wadsworth, A. M., Pastor of the First Church in Danvers (Salem: Printed by Joshua Cushing, 1800).

<sup>99</sup> John Croes, Gloucester County, New Jersey, 22 February 1800.

<sup>100</sup> Timothy Dwight, New Haven, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

<sup>101</sup> David Barnes, *Discourse Delivered at South Parish in Scituate, February 22, 1800. The Day Assigned by Congress to Mourn the Decease and Venerate the Virtues of General George Washington* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800).

president of the United States to retire to the humble duties and enjoyments of private life.”<sup>102</sup> Gunning Bedford said that Washington, who was “worn down by the incessant fatigues of public employments, asks his fellow citizens to spare him the pain of refusing to obey their voice—he voluntarily descends the seat of state.”<sup>103</sup> Reverend Adam Boyd said that the “acme of Washington’s greatness was his resignation from the presidency, while with unanimous voice he could have re-ascended the chair. Even greater than his resignation of command at the end of the Revolution, this instance of moderation and self-denial was the admiration of Europe. It completed his character. It made greatness and Washington synonymous.”<sup>104</sup> Thomas Robbins saw the great drama of Washington’s resignation, “After having filled the Presidential chair, by the unanimous call of his country for eight years, carried the State through storms and calms, and seeing its government fixed on a firm basis, he declared to his fellow citizens and to the world that he had not further desire for office, for civil or military honors, and requested to be permitted to spend the remainder of his days in his beloved retirement and peace. This was an action which might justly crown his glorious career. On the third of March 1797, he appeared at the head of the nation, invested with all the sovereignty of the people and might have held it unmolested until he died. On the fourth, he appeared as a private citizen, divested of all titles and authority, merely one among millions.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Samuel Bayard, New Rochelle, New York, 1 January 1800.

<sup>103</sup> Gunning Bedford, Wilmington, Delaware, 27 December 1799.

<sup>104</sup> Adam Boyd, Nashville, Tennessee, 22 February 1800.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas Robbins, *An Oration, Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington, Delivered at Danbury, on a Day Appointed to Commemorate that Melancholy Event, January 2, 1800* (Danbury, Connecticut: Printed by Douglas & Nichols, 1800).



Washington announced his decision to retire from the presidency by submitting for publication a letter to one of the Philadelphia newspapers that has ever since been called his “Farewell Address.” The eulogists referred to the Farewell Address as Washington’s legacy, his parting counsel to his children. Doctor William Bentley noted that Washington’s address to the United States when he retired is printed with our laws, common to our almanacs, and folded in the leaves of our Bibles.”<sup>106</sup> “Americans, bind it in your Bibles next to the Sermon on the Mount that the lessons of the two Saviors can be read together,” said the eulogist William Cunningham.<sup>107</sup> Timothy Dwight observed that Washington’s Farewell Address is “the sum of all his political wisdom. . . Here all the national interests of America; here all its political wisdom is summed up in a single sheet. Nothing can be added, nothing without injury taken away.”<sup>108</sup> Major William Jackson described the Farewell Address as “the legacy of an affectionate father to a beloved family, containing the most instructive, interesting, and important advice that has ever been submitted to any nation. An observance of those maxims would insure our political welfare, and promote our national happiness.”<sup>109</sup> David Ramsay said, “Prior to Washington’s retirement, he gave his last parting advice to the citizens in a valedictory address. This is in your hands—teach it to your children. It is an invaluable legacy. Perhaps there was never so much important instruction, so much good advice, given by any

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<sup>106</sup> William Bentley, Salem, Massachusetts, 2 January 1800.

<sup>107</sup> William Cunningham, Lunenburg, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800.

<sup>108</sup> Timothy Dwight, New Haven, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

<sup>109</sup> William Jackson, Philadelphia, 22 February 1800.

mere man, in the compass of so few words.”<sup>110</sup> It is interesting to note that the Farewell Address was printed as a supplement to at least eleven eulogies.

Washington retired to Mount Vernon in March 1797, but it would not be long until his country called for his services one last time.

#### Quasi-War with France

The Quasi-War with France is discussed in Chapter Six of this study as part of the discussion of the military’s mourning for their fallen commander in chief. The eulogists unanimously praised Washington’s acceptance of President John Adams’s request that he come out of retirement to serve as lieutenant general and commander in chief of the American armies being raised to defend the nation against possible invasion by France. The eulogists said that the need to mobilize an American army was a defensive action made necessary by the arrogance and hostile actions of France during the two years since Washington’s retirement from the presidency. Chauncy Langdon said, “Angry clouds began to arise in our political horizon. Our national rights were trampled under the foot of power: Our flag was insulted; and wanton barbarities were inflicted on our seamen, without provocation. The pacific measures begun by him and steadily pursued by his virtuous successor proved abortive. Our messengers of peace were derided; and a tribute demanded.”<sup>111</sup> David Ramsay described the deteriorating relations between France and the United States that led to Washington’s acceptance of the command of the American armies, “The rulers of France

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<sup>110</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

<sup>111</sup> Chauncy Langdon, *An Oration on the Virtues and Death of General George Washington, Late President of the United States; Delivered at Castleton, February 22, 1800* (Rutland, Vermont: Printed by W. Fay, 1800).

having entirely departed from the principles on which they set out, plundered our commerce, insulted our ministers of peace; and some of their agents went so far as to threaten us with invasion. This imposed a necessity to organize an army, and prepare for the last extremity. All the world knew, and Washington, though the most modest of men, could not but know that his name at the head of our army would either deter any European power from invading us; or, if they should madly make the attempt, would unite all our citizens as a band of brothers for the common defense. He therefore accepted the appointment; and though on the verge of threescore years and ten, stood ready and pledged to take the field whenever the necessities of the country required it.”<sup>112</sup>

Washington’s willingness to accept a position subordinate to the man who had replaced him as president was praised by the eulogists as the ultimate proof of his disinterested patriotism. Reverend Caleb Alexander observed, “In the opinion of candid and impartial men, this was esteemed an additional luster to his glory; As he had been once before commander in chief of the American Army and twice chosen to the supreme magistracy of the United States, his accepting a general lieutenancy was clear proof of the goodness of his heart and that he preferred the weal of his country to the etiquette of honor.”<sup>113</sup> Reverend John M. Mason observed that Washington’s acceptance of the commission “fully displays his magnanimity. While others become great by elevation, Washington becomes greater by condescension. Matchless Patriot! To stoop, on public motives, to an

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<sup>112</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

<sup>113</sup> Caleb Alexander, Mendon, Massachusetts, December, 1799.

inferior appointment, after possessing and dignifying the highest offices!”<sup>114</sup>

Washington’s acceptance of the commission “called forth afresh the military spirit of his country,” said the Reverend Doctor Robert Davidson, and it “showed foreign powers that we know how to maintain, as we know how to acquire our independence.”<sup>115</sup> “Animated by his example, his countrymen fly to arms,” said Asbury Dickins.<sup>116</sup> Chauncy Langdon remarked that when Washington, “like Cincinnatus, again left his plow and girt on the sword of freedom and independence. . . our enemies heard and trembled, faction saw the warlike chief, and hid its head—discord shrunk away at the majesty of his virtue.”<sup>117</sup> “Upon Washington’s accepting the command of the army, “the national gloom was dispelled. Every bosom beat with joy, and the public face appeared cheerful when the hero expressed his willingness to quit the evening pleasures of his life,” said Reverend Samuel Spring. “The event at once created officers and soldiers and organized a respectable army; for the proved veteran, whose strength was not exhausted by following him during the late successful war, were emulously engaged to enjoy the command.” He continued, “The account of Washington’s being at the head of the army no sooner reached us, than even the little boys were fired with the martial spirit and paraded the streets as though they thirsted for the honor of battle.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> John M. Mason, New York, New York, 22 February 1800.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Davidson, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, n.d.

<sup>116</sup> Asbury Dickins, *An Eulogium on General George Washington, Pronounced on the 22d of February, 1800. Before the Hermathenian Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed by H. Maxwell, 1800).

<sup>117</sup> Chauncy Langdon, Castleton, Vermont, 22 February 1800.

<sup>118</sup> Samuel Spring, *God the Author of Human Greatness. A Discourse on the Death of General George Washington; Delivered at the North Congregational Church in Newburyport, December 29, 1799. By Samuel Spring, Pastor* (Newburyport: Printed by Edmund M. Blunt, 1800).

George Washington was commissioned lieutenant general and commander in chief of the American armies on July 4, 1799, just six months before his death at Mount Vernon on December 14. Though he had led the efforts to organize an army during the last months of his life, he was never called to take the field. Reverend Adam Boyd said, “Happily no occasion called him forth to shine again in arms. The storm was dispersed by the providential care of that power which hath so long showered blessings on the United States.”<sup>119</sup> Fittingly, “In the character of commander in chief of the armies of the United States, he ended his days,” observed Gunning Bedford.<sup>120</sup> “As he began in the defense of his country, so he must die with the same sword in his hand,” observed Thomas Tolman.<sup>121</sup>

#### Washington’s Appearance and Personality

George Washington was to his eulogists a man made of flesh and blood rather than the cold, remote historical figure portrayed in formal portraits and marble statuary. Some of his eulogists had known him personally by having served as an officer during the Revolution or by holding an office in the government during his presidency. Their contemporary views of Washington paint an interesting composite portrait that has been blurred by the passage of years and the growing mythology of Washington that has turned him from man to monument. Describing Washington’s personal appearance, Doctor Joseph Blyth, observed that “nature gave Washington a comely, majestic person, well

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<sup>119</sup> Adam Boyd, Nashville, Tennessee, 22 February 1800.

<sup>120</sup> Gunning Bedford, Wilmington, Delaware, 27 December 1799.

proportioned, tall and active; with regular manly features, a very interesting countenance and penetrating eye; his deportment was easy and graceful, with an air of benevolence and dignity; his constitution, naturally good, was by temperance and exercise preserved sound to an advanced age.”<sup>122</sup> Reverend Abiel Abbot said that Washington’s “noble person at once announced the majesty of his mind; and his countenance, while it commanded reverence, invited love and confidence. An affecting tenderness, doubly endeared by his majestic dignity, beamed from his countenance on all around him.”<sup>123</sup> Gunning Bedford said that Washington was “blest with the most commanding figure—a dignity which forcibly impressed all beholders—a complacency of manners—a mind highly cultivated, and stored with knowledge. He seemed formed by nature for great and glorious deeds.”<sup>124</sup> Colonel George R. Burrill recalled how the passage of time and the heavy burdens of public responsibilities had taken their toll on Washington’s appearance by the last time the citizens of Providence had seen him. “Most of my auditors will recall the last time that he gratified the citizens of this town with his presence. He appeared not then, as he had appeared before, glittering with martial pomp, and full of the vigor of his middle age; but venerable in his hoary head, and bending beneath the weight of years and cares, his form was less splendid, but more impressive and interesting, and the General was lost

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas Tolman, *An Oration, on the Death of General George Washington; Delivered at Danville, before Harmony Lodge of Free Masons, and a Large Concourse of Citizens, the 26<sup>th</sup> Day of February, A. D. 1800. By Thomas Tolman, Master of Said Lodge* (Peacham, Vermont: Printed by Farley & Goss, 1800).

<sup>122</sup> Joseph Blyth, All Saints Parish, South Carolina, 22 February 1800.

<sup>123</sup> Abiel Abbot, Haverhill, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800.

<sup>124</sup> Gunning Bedford, Wilmington, Delaware, 27 December 1799.

in the Father.”<sup>125</sup> William Griffith also described the effects of aging on Washington’s appearance. “You who saw him in the vigor of life can never forget his graceful form, and his commanding aspect. We who have seen him bending with years, and furrowed with public cares, can never forget the filial reverence which his presence inspired.”<sup>126</sup> But the George Washington described by Maryland eulogist Thomas Johnson, Sr. was youthful and just beginning his career on the public stage. Johnson was the Maryland delegate to the Second Continental Congress who had nominated Washington as commander in chief of the American army. Johnson reminisced, “Oft has his majestic figure, on his acceptance of the high commission, risen to my imagination: so strongly is the dear image imprinted on my memory, methinks I can almost see him now: His manly form and graceful attitude, his piercing blue eyes softened by modesty, innate sweetness and harmony of soul; the fate of a nation attends him and hangs on his fortitude, his wisdom, and his talents.”<sup>127</sup> Because of the popular images of Washington based on contemporary portraits by Gilbert Stuart, depicting Washington with a stern expression on his face, his lips closed tightly over ill-fitting teeth, we cannot imagine a smiling George Washington. But some of his eulogists remembered his warm smiles. Former Congressman and Senator John Vining said, “Methinks even now I see his radiant form, with smile benign—with

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<sup>125</sup> George R. Burrill, *An Oration Pronounced at the Baptist Meetinghouse in Providence, on Tuesday the Seventh of January, 1800, at the Funeral Ceremony on the Death of General George Washington* (Providence: Printed by John Carter, 1800).

<sup>126</sup> William Griffith, *An Oration, Delivered to the Citizens of Burlington on the 22d of February, 1800, in Commemoration of General George Washington, Who Died at Mount Vernon, December 14, 1799, in the 68<sup>th</sup> Year of His Age*. (Trenton: Printed by G. Craft, 1800).

<sup>127</sup> *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Advertiser*, 7 March 1800.

courteous dignity.”<sup>128</sup> Washington’s presidential secretary, Major William Jackson described the President, “Nature bestowed upon the greatest advantages of external form, and the highest degree of intellectual endowment. To the noble port of a lofty stature were united uncommon grace, strength and symmetry of person, and to the commanding aspect of manly beauty was given the benignant smile, which, inspiring confidence, created affection.”<sup>129</sup> Preaching in Gloucester, Massachusetts, Reverend Eli Forbes reminded his fellow townsmen of Washington’s appearance when he visited the town during his tour of New England. “Weep all ye who saw his lovely face when he made his paternal visit to these northern states; you saw his graceful bow, you saw his majestic countenance, softened into Christian meekness, and adorned with the smiles of approbation and love.”<sup>130</sup>

Former congressman and United States senator from New Jersey, Doctor Jonathan Elmer, painted a verbal portrait of Washington for his audience. “His person was tall, graceful, and well proportioned; his countenance serene, majestic, and impressive; his dress plain and simple, and evidenced the solid excellencies of his mind. To these were added a modest reserve, and a mild, amiable and encouraging deportment, which never failed to command the esteem and respect of those who were personally acquainted with him, and to excite the veneration of

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<sup>128</sup> John Vining, *Eulogium, Delivered to a Large Concourse of Respectable Citizens, at the State House, in the Town of Dover, on the Twenty-Second of February, 1800, In Commemoration of the Death of General George Washington* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Ormrod, 1800).

<sup>129</sup> William Jackson, Philadelphia, 22 February 1800.

<sup>130</sup> Eli Forbes, *An Eulogy Moralized, on the Illustrious Character of the Late General George Washington, Who Died on Saturday, the 14<sup>th</sup> Day of December, 1799. Delivered at Gloucester, on the 22d of February, 1800—in Compliance with the Recommendations of Congress, the Legislature of This Commonwealth, and the Unanimous Vote of the Town Aforesaid. By Eli Forbes, A. M., Pastor of the First Church in Said Town* (Newburyport: Printed by Edmund M. Blunt, 1800).



all who beheld him.”<sup>131</sup> David Ramsay told his Charleston listeners, “For the sake of those who have never seen General Washington, it may be worthwhile to observe, that his person was graceful, well proportioned, and uncommonly tall. When he was cheerful, he had a most engaging countenance, when grave, a respectable one. There was at all times an air of majesty and dignity in his appearance.”<sup>132</sup> Gouverneur Morris, who had known Washington very well over a period of many years, described him to his New York City audience, “His form was noble—his port majestic. So dignified his deportment, no man could approach him but with respect—None was great in his presence. You have all seen him, and you all have felt the reverence he inspired: It was such, that to command, seemed in him but the exercise of an ordinary function, while others felt a duty to obey.”<sup>133</sup> William Cunningham said that Washington “was a becoming and commanding figure. His countenance wore the sign of the serious and important occupation of his thoughts. It was the throne, too, of unassumed dignity, which instantly by a silent and unconscious power, proclaimed to the beholder an irresistible edict of veneration.”<sup>134</sup> Describing Washington’s physical strength and energy, Reverend Abiel Holmes said, “Washington was the *mighty man*. Lofty in stature, robust and vigorous in constitution. He was formed for active enterprises and heroic achievements.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Jonathan Elmer, *An Eulogium, on the Character of General George Washington, Late President of the United States: Delivered at Bridge-Town, Cumberland County, New Jersey, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1800* (Trenton: Printed by G. Craft, 1800).

<sup>132</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.

<sup>133</sup> Gouverneur Morris, *An Oration upon the Death of General Washington. Delivered at the Request of the Corporation of the City of New York, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 1799*. In *Eulogies and Orations* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800).

<sup>134</sup> William Cunningham, Lunenburg, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800.

<sup>135</sup> Abiel Holmes, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 29 December 1799.

In addition to portraying Washington's physical appearance, the eulogists attempted to describe his personality traits to their listeners. Thomas Johnson, the man who had nominated Washington to be commander in chief of the Revolutionary army and who had known him throughout his lifetime, observed that Washington's modesty, "which was to a degree embarrassing, was perfectly natural; his long and general acquaintance with the world and men, could not subdue it."<sup>136</sup> Describing Washington's decision-making style, Johnson said, "his patience in inquiry to gain information and form a right judgment, was untired. His thoughts in the course of discussion were closed in his own breast without giving offense; thereby drawing out the reasons of others which he received and weighted with candor. He compared things and took their difference with exactness; he had indeed a most excellent judgment, which guided the decision to which he adhered. Feeling in less degree the weaknesses of our nature, and undeviating from the line of rectitude himself, he was uncommonly indulgent to the mistakes, the failings, the faults of others." Johnson continued, "With a gravity which did not distance confidence or decent freedom, he possessed a steady cheerfulness which did not invite to over familiarity: in this perhaps no temper was ever better balanced to gain and maintain respect."<sup>137</sup>

Describing Washington's uniform politeness to others, Reverend Alexander Macwhorter said that "one thing very remarkable about Washington that was often observed by his friends was how was it possible for a man, whose mind was full of cares, perplexities, embarrassments, and great concerns, to attend

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas Johnson, Frederick-Town, Maryland, In *The Federal Gazette and Baltimore Advertiser*, 7 March 1800.

at all times with the graces of the politest ease, to the various minutiae of what is styled good breeding, or the accomplished gentleman. All ranks of men even to children were objects of his peculiar politeness. A modest and placid serenity ever surrounded. Of what multitudes of little ones did he take a tender and condescending notice? And ladies of every class universally acknowledged with pride his respectful attention. He was a person of such finished politeness, that bystanders would suppose he had nothing else to attend to, but the etiquette of genteel ceremony.”<sup>137</sup> Methodist Elder Thomas Morrell, who had served as an officer under General Washington in all the major battles of the Revolutionary War, described his recollections of Washington’s personality. “He was mild and condescending, and never treated with contemptuous language any person that behaved with propriety, or addressed him with decency; He had none of the haughtier of office, so frequently discovered in some men who are in exalted stations; He was always accessible, at suitable times, by the private soldier and the poorest citizen; He was temperate and decent in all his deportment. No noisy, indecent (much less impious) mirth was allowed in his presence; no excess nor luxury was permitted at his table; He conducted himself on every occasion with uncommon propriety and decorum, and evinced to all, that he was not only the wise statesman, and the great commander, but that he was really a gentleman.”<sup>138</sup> Washington’s eulogists often referred to his “condescension.” Reverend David Porter observed, “The greatness of General Washington appeared from his

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Alexander Macwhorter, Newark, New Jersey, 27 December 1799.

generous condescension to his inferiors. His station was the first. He was honored more than any other man in the world; but all this did not make him proud and haughty. He did not view it beneath him to mingle in social intercourse with the lowest peasant. Unlike the despots of the Eastern continent, Washington, though elevated to the highest pinnacle of honor, did not forget that he was a man, and that others were too. He wanted not flattery nor the parade of adulation. He was never more in his element than in friendly intercourse with those of ordinary stations.”<sup>140</sup> Reverend Patrick Allison said that Washington always remained accessible to his old friends. “Despite the constant acclamations and applauses of his countrymen, Washington remained moderate and magnanimous—no assuming airs of consequence, no displays of self-importance, no indications of insolence marked a single word of his mouth or action of his life. . . . After passing through a scene of so much celebrity, what old acquaintance did he forget; of what former friend was he ashamed? Whose society did he decline, among circles that knew him and were known by him previous to the era of his seductive elevation.”<sup>141</sup> Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick said of Washington, “Modest and unassuming, yet dignified in his manners—accessible and communicative; yet superior to familiarity, he inspired and preserved the love and respect of all who knew him.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Thomas Morrell, *A Sermon on the Death of General George Washington. By Thomas Morrell, Elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Delivered on the 22d of February 1800, in the City of Baltimore* (Baltimore: Printed by Warner & Hanna, 1800).

<sup>140</sup> David Porter, *Two Discourses: The First Occasioned by the Death of General Washington. Delivered at Spencertown, [New York] on January 19, 1800* (Hudson, New York: Printed by Ashbel Stoddard.

<sup>141</sup> Patrick Allison, Baltimore, Maryland, 22 February 1800.

<sup>142</sup> Elisha Cullen Dick, Alexandria, Virginia, 22 February 1800.

Many of the eulogists discussed Washington's personality in terms of what they called his "private virtues." Jonathan Mitchel Sewall observed, "The private virtues of this great man exactly corresponded with those exhibited in public life. His mansion was the seat of hospitality. He was idolized by his domestics; by his neighbors and friends, esteemed and venerated: and it is worthy to remark that all who best knew him, particularly those who were more immediately attached to his person in the course of the war, and during his civil administration, are among his warmest admirers and panegyrists. There was a gravity and reserve, indeed, in his countenance and deportment, partly natural, and partly the effect of habitual cares for the public weal: but these were wholly unmixed with the least austerity or moroseness. True native dignity was blended with the most placid mildness and condescension. He was a pattern of moderation, meekness, and self-possession. No person ever existed that had all his passions under more complete control."<sup>143</sup> Reverend Uzal Ogden remarked, "If we view General Washington in private life, we shall still perceive that he acted worthy of himself. He was a faithful, attentive, and affectionate husband; a faithful and sincere friend; a generous and obliging neighbor; as a citizen, he honored the laws of his country and promoted its interests; promoted seminaries of learning and works of public utility; to the poor he was liberal; to the stranger hospitable; as a master, he was lenient and kind—he liberated all his slaves and gave them land for support. To all, his deportment was affable, though grave; benevolent without pride; and pleasing without affectation. His manners were plain, but dignified; his conversation was easy, instructive but not loquacious; and

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<sup>143</sup> Jonathan Mitchel Sewall, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 31 December 1799.

he made no display of superior knowledge, virtue, or talent that he possessed; he was revered and beloved by all who enjoyed the honor of his acquaintance.”<sup>144</sup>

Washington’s “public virtues” were also praised by most of the eulogists. Fisher Ames said that Washington’s “pre-eminence is not so much seen in the display of any one virtue, as in the possession of them all, and in the practice of the most difficult. Modesty and reserve, adapted to lead without dazzling mankind, to draw forth the talents of others, consummate prudence, moderate and mild—subdued strong passions, concealed his weaknesses, if he had them.”<sup>145</sup> David Ramsay observed that “to dwell on all the virtues of General Washington would protract my oration beyond the going down of the sun. Ramsay cited Washington’s patience and spirit of accommodation, his ability to harmonize clashing interests, bravery in battle, equanimity in trying situations—never despairing and never depressed, his patriotism—he was not motivated by love of fame or power but love of country. Reverend Aaron Bancroft observed that Washington’s life was an assemblage of the noblest virtues of humanity. . . the picture of man in him was perfect, and there is no blot to tarnish his brightness.”<sup>146</sup> Samuel Bayard said, “In Washington’s character were combined more exalted virtues than in the character of any man of whom we have heard or read. Never did any man better understand the human character, or employ more suitable agents for the accomplishment of his views. In a remarkable degree, he united genius with judgment, the enterprise of youth with the caution of age. He

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<sup>144</sup> Uzal Ogden, *Two Discourses, Occasioned by the Death of General George Washington, at Mount Vernon, December 14, 1799. By the Rev. Uzal Ogden, D. D., Rector of Trinity Church, Newark, in the State of New Jersey. Delivered in that Church, and in the Church in Union with It, at Bellville, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1799 and January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1800* (Newark: Printed by Matthias Day, 1800).

was brave but not rash; fearless of death but not prodigal of life. He possessed zeal without intemperance, liberality without profusion, and economy without avarice. . . His dignity never wore the garb of haughtiness, nor his modesty that of affection.”<sup>147</sup>

For Washington’s eulogists, the flesh had not yet turned to marble, and the man they remembered was, in their minds, unquestionably the greatest mortal who had ever lived in any age or time. George Washington was the ultimate hero, uniquely American, unrivalled by the heroes of ancient or modern history, and it was of everlasting credit to the rising glory of America that Washington was a home grown hero. “Ought we not greatly to exult that our country has produced the fairest and grandest example of Virtue, Patriotism, and Honor, in the character of our late illustrious President, that history has yet recorded,” asked Edward Roche. “The annals of mankind,” he continued, “so far as they can be traced with accuracy, and understood with perspicuity, afford no parallel to our Washington.”<sup>148</sup> Preaching in Roxbury, Massachusetts, the Reverend Eliphalet Porter observed, “It is not every country, nor every age, that produces a Washington. Might I not, with more propriety ask, what country, or what age, has this honor, but our own? If we compare this great man with the most distinguished characters of ancient or modern times, will he not appear still greater by comparison?”<sup>149</sup> The Reverend Alden Bradford told his Wiscassett,

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<sup>145</sup> Fisher Ames, Boston, 8 February 1800.

<sup>146</sup> Aaron Bancroft, Worcester, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800.

<sup>147</sup> Samuel Bayard, New Rochelle, New York, 1 January 1800.

<sup>148</sup> Edward Roche, Wilmington, Delaware, 22 February 1800.

<sup>149</sup> Eliphalet Porter, *An Eulogy on George Washington, Late Commander of the Armies, and the First President of the United States of America, Who Died on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 1799, aged 68. Delivered*

District of Maine, audience, “To the latest periods of the world, this greatest and best of men shall be celebrated in the faithful page of history; he shall live in the memory of every friend of human kind; and it will ever be the highest glory of America that Washington was her son.”<sup>150</sup> Washington’s uniquely American heroism was celebrated by the Reverend Dr. Charles Henry Wharton, when he declared in Burlington, New Jersey, “ At the grand and soothing idea, that this greatest instance of human perfectibility, this conspicuous phenomenon of human elevation and grandeur, should have been permitted to rise first on the horizon of America, every citizen of these states must feel his bosom beat with rapturous and honest pride, tempered with reverential gratitude to the great author and source of all perfection.—He will be penetrated with astonishment, and kindled into thanksgiving, when he reflects that our globe had existed 6000 years before a Washington appeared on the theatre of the world; and that he was then destined to appear in America—to be the ornament, the deliverer, the delight!”<sup>151</sup>

The historian David Ramsay believed that Washington’s heroism was unique in the annals of time. He called upon antiquity and upon modern Europe “to produce one of their heroes or statesmen, that can surpass, or even equal, our disinterested patriot.”<sup>152</sup> Speaking in New London, Connecticut, Lyman Law, Esquire, said, “In touching on the character of the deceased, I shall confine myself merely to a comparative view of him, with others who have been eminently

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*January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1800, before the Inhabitants of the Town of Roxbury. By Eliphalet Porter, One of the Ministers of Said Town* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1800).

<sup>150</sup> Alden Bradford, Wiscassett, Maine, 2 January 1800.

<sup>151</sup> Charles Henry Wharton, “Extract from a Sermon, on the Death of General Washington, Preached at Burlington, New Jersey,” in *Memory of Washington* (Newport, Rhode Island: printed by Oliver Farnsworth, 1800).

<sup>152</sup> David Ramsay, Charleston, South Carolina, 15 January 1800.



distinguished in the world; and although I should be unwilling to tarnish the glory of any man, which has been fairly and honorable acquired; whether he be living in history only, or is now active on the stage of life, yet I deem it no robbery or diminution of their glory, to say they all fade in comparison. . . . Never until the time of Washington has a character appeared so richly adorned, with all the great and noble virtues of which humanity is susceptible. He is not like other heroes, sages, or patriots, whose names are enrolled in the book of fame; for no history can polish his glory, and even malign censure dare not pluck a sprig from his well earned laurels. Heaven seemed to have formed the man Washington out of the choicest materials, and robbed, as it were, humanity of its virtues to form one perfect man. Being thus endowed with superlative virtues and talents, he was introduced on the stage of life, and assigned a part in a scene which had never before been acted in the nations o the earth.”<sup>153</sup> “Should I ransack the pages of history in quest of an illustrious character with whom to compare him, there were none to be found,” said the Reverend John D. Blair on the national day of mourning in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>154</sup> Colonel Isaac Parker, speaking in Portland, Maine, differentiated between Washington’s heroism and that of other heroic figures of the past. “Thanks be to Heaven, the man whom it selected to be its willing instrument of the independence and prosperity of this grateful people, was adorned with all the virtues which so dignified an agency required; unsullied with

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<sup>153</sup> Lyman Law, New London, Connecticut, 11 January 1800.

<sup>154</sup> *Virginia Gazette & General Advertiser*, 25 February 1800.

the vices by which most of the conquerors and heroes of history have been disgraced.”<sup>155</sup>

Washington’s eulogists attributed the independence, peace, and prosperity enjoyed by the nation at the end of the eighteenth century to his lifetime of accomplishments in the service of his country. Doctor Joseph Blyth contrasted the state of the American colonies at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War with the state of the nation upon Washington’s death:

And now, my fellow citizens, shall I claim your attention a moment, in taking a comparative view of our flourishing state at this period, with our wretched condition when Washington took command of our armies? Sole lords and proprietors of a vast tract of continent, comprehending all the various soils and climates of the world, abounding in all the necessaries and conveniences of life, we are possessed of absolute freedom and independence. The actors on a most conspicuous theater, which seems peculiarly designed by Providence for the display of human greatness and felicity, surrounded with everything that can contribute to the completions of domestic enjoyment; Heaven has crowned all its other blessings, by affording a fairer opportunity for political happiness, than any nation has ever enjoyed. Here the rights of mankind are more clearly defined and better understood, than in any other quarter of the globe; our laws are made equitable, expounded impartially, and executed faithfully. Here no gloomy superstition reigns, no subordination of one sect or denomination to any other: every one who acknowledges the being of a God is entitled to every civil right, at liberty to enjoy his own religious professions, and to worship God in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of his conscience. . . This, my fellow citizens, is a sketch of that happy state in which the labors of your Washington have had a principal instrumentality in placing you.<sup>156</sup>

“Of his services, man could ask no more,” observed a youthful twenty-eight-year-old orator, Benjamin Orr. “He had fulfilled the demands of time, in aiding us to the free possession of our rights, inspiring his countrymen with the most lively and reverential sense of the blessings of public and private virtue, exhibiting an eminent example to every class from the Chief Magistrate to the private citizen,

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<sup>155</sup> Isaac Parker, Portland, Maine, 22 February 1800.

<sup>156</sup> Joseph Blyth, All Saint’s Parish, South Carolina, 22 February 1800.

and in fervently recommending the country for which he conquered to the protection of the God whom he served.”<sup>157</sup> George Washington “lived to see our enemies defeated, America independent, the Federal Government established, commerce flourishing, agriculture progressing, the nation rising in respectability, the whole community enjoying the blessings of civil and religious liberty, and his fellow citizens in the quiet and full possession of the means of political and moral felicity,” observed the Reverend Daniel Hopkins, preaching in Salem, Massachusetts.<sup>158</sup>

Washington had left an indelible mark on the face of the new nation, and his eulogists gave him full credit for the magnitude and scope of his achievements. Ebenezer Grant Marsh described the breadth and depth of Washington’s legacy to his country by saying, “He could pass through no American state, survey no field, and tread on any spot of ground which he did not save from devastation. He could mix with no assembly, visit with no family, and accost no person who must not say, ‘Our freedom, our peace, our safety, we owe first to God, and next to you.’ He could turn his ear to no sound of joy which he had not a share in exciting; and open his eye to no scene of comfort which did not trace him as its origin. Like the central orb of the planetary world, he enlightened and animated, cemented and beautified our whole political system. With a skillful, steady, yet gentle hand, he molded a confused mass of discordant

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<sup>157</sup> Benjamin Orr, *An Oration, Delivered at Bedford, New Hampshire on the 22d of February 1800, in Commemoration of the Life of General George Washington* (Amherst, New Hampshire: S. Preston, Printer, 1800).

<sup>158</sup> Daniel Hopkins, *A Sermon, Preached December 29, 1799, in the South Meeting House, Salem, the Lord’s Day after the Melancholy Tidings Were Received of the Death of General George Washington, Who Died December 14, 1799. By Daniel Hopkins, A. M., Pastor of the Third Church* (Salem, Massachusetts: Printed by Thomas C. Cushing, 1800).

materials into one regular and harmonious compound. And by a strictly just and paternal administration, he diffused the blessings of freedom, tranquility, public and private prosperity, throughout all classes of people.”<sup>159</sup>

The eulogists sensed that such a remarkable man as Washington belonged to the ages, and they predicted that his name would be immortal in American history. Reverend Aaron Bancroft said, “Let the sculpted marble preserve his resemblance and the superb monument proclaim his achievements; these are but the decent expressions of the public mind. But the sculpted marble and the costly monument are alike unnecessary to perpetuate his worth. His memory is embalmed in the affections of his grateful countrymen: His name is written in the book of immortal fame: He shall be had in everlasting remembrance.”<sup>160</sup>

Perhaps of all Washington’s eulogists during the period of national mourning, the Reverend Doctor Timothy Dwight, President of Yale College, most beautifully and eloquently described Washington’s certain immortality in the history of the new American nation when he observed, “To Americans his name will be ever dear; a savor of sweet incense, descending to every succeeding generation. The things which he has done are too great, too interesting, ever to be forgotten. Every object which we see, every employment in which we are engaged, every comfort which we enjoy, reminds us daily of his character. The general peace, liberty, religion, safety, and prosperity, strongest impress, in every place, what he has done, suffered, and achieved. When a legislature assembles to

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<sup>159</sup> Ebenezer Grant Marsh, *An Oration, Delivered at Wethersfield, February 22, 1800; On the Death of General George Washington, Who Died December 14, 1799* (Hartford: Printed by Hudson and Goodwin, 1800).

<sup>160</sup> Aaron Bancroft, Worcester, Massachusetts, 22 February 1800.

enact laws; when courts meet to distribute justice; when congregations gather to worship God; they naturally, and almost necessarily say, 'To Washington it is owing, under God, that we are here.' The farmer pursuing his plough in peace, the mechanic following the business of his shop in safety, ascribes the privilege to Washington. The house which, uninvaded, shelters us from the storm, the cheerful fireside surrounded by our little ones, the table spread in quiet with the bounties of his Providence, the bed on which we repose in undisturbed security, utters, in silent but expressive language, the memory and praise of Washington. Every ship bears the fruits of his labors on its wings, and exceedingly spreads its streamers to his honor. The student meets him in the still and peaceful walk; the traveler sees him in all the prosperous and smiling scenes of his journey; and our whole country in her thrift, order, safety, and morals, bears, inscribed in sunbeams, throughout her hills and her plains, the name and glory of Washington."<sup>161</sup>

Washington's eulogists used effectively the metaphor of painting a portrait of the great man to describe their literary efforts to construct the biographical sketches of him that were to be central to most of the eulogies and funeral orations and sermons. Their prose portraits, however, differed significantly from the artistic efforts of American portrait painters of the middle to late eighteenth century. Most sitters for portraits of the colonial and early republic periods were merchants and landowners and their families and professional men including

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<sup>161</sup> Timothy Dwight, New Haven, Connecticut, 22 February 1800.

lawyers and ministers who commissioned their portraits to be painted for private use. Of course, some portraits, like those of Washington, were painted for public display. George Washington himself had commissioned Charles Willson Peale to paint him in his French and Indian War uniform in 1772, more than a decade after Washington's resignation of his commission as lieutenant colonel of the Virginia Regiment. The sitters for these formal portraits were part of a social or intellectual world that saw the role of a portrait as a statement of status.<sup>162</sup>

Selecting the size of the portrait, appropriate pose, clothing, and the attributes represented was a decision of both the sitter and the artist, and there was a direct relationship between poses and gestures in portraits and codes of manners.<sup>163</sup>

Important attributes of the sitters were communicated through objects seen with the sitter or through backgrounds such as pictures of the country estates of planters or the ships of the merchants. But, for the most part, the portraits represented passive sitters with little or no representation of any physical action in the paintings. In contrast, the model the eulogists followed for their prose portraits of Washington was not the formal, passive poses of the men and women who sat for the great contemporary portrait painters like John Singleton Copley, Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, and Charles Willson Peale. Instead, the eulogists' biographical sketches were written in the grand manner artistic style of Benjamin West, the best known American artist of his generation, whose important history painting, *The Death of Wolfe*, pictured an epic scene of action and battlefield drama that portrayed General James Wolfe expiring from his wounds received at

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<sup>162</sup> Richard Saunders and Ellen G. Miles, *American Colonial Portraits: 1700-1776* (Washington, DC: Published by the Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1987), 44.

the battle of Quebec in 1759. West's seminal painting had captured the imagination of its viewers at the Royal Academy in London in 1771, and it was reproduced and widely distributed in the form of popular engravings in America in the late eighteenth century.<sup>164</sup> To his eulogists, Washington was a dynamic action figure whose larger-than-life public roles had significantly influenced nearly all of the important events of the early history of the American republic. Benjamin West claimed that "the same truth that guides the pen of the historian should govern the pencil of the artist,"<sup>165</sup> and the eulogists' portraits of Washington can be viewed as in the tradition of this dynamic approach to history painting and to writing biography.

In the absence of information about Washington's childhood and youth or his activities between the French and Indian War and the outbreak of the Revolution, the eulogists were unable to sketch the development of Washington as an individual over time and to show how the man emerged from the youth.<sup>166</sup> Although none of the eulogists mentioned the role of the "Rules of Civility" in shaping Washington's conduct from the time of his youth, Richard L. Bushman has written persuasively of the early influence on Washington's personal conduct of his copying in his exercise book, sometime before he reached the age of

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-68.

<sup>164</sup> Charles Mitchell, "Benjamin West's Death of General Wolfe and the Popular History Piece," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institution*, VII (1944), 20-33.

<sup>165</sup> The Baltimore Museum of Art, *Benjamin West: American Painter at the English Court* (Baltimore: Catalog of Exhibition held at the Baltimore Museum of Art, 1989), 52-56.

<sup>166</sup> Scott Casper's insights suggest that even if they possessed this information, the eulogists would probably have ignored this perspective in light of the eighteenth-century practice of biography in which Americans avoided any interest in the private man. Casper writes, "even as critics, basing their views on Samuel Johnson's theory of biography, argued that biography should avoid eulogy, tell the truth, and seek the private man, they also wanted American biographies that would glorify the nation and its early heroes." See Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 35-36.

sixteen, 110 numbered “Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation,” excerpted from a seventeenth-century book of etiquette.<sup>167</sup> The historian Paul K. Longmore argues that Washington self-consciously and deliberately shaped his public image from the time of the French and Indian War to embody the ideals of his age and to shape contemporary perceptions of him. Longmore writes that over his lifetime, Washington pursued a conscious and purposeful role in the process of shaping his public and historic self to incarnate the republican and national beliefs of Americans of the early republic.<sup>168</sup> He argues that the Washington who emerged is “a Washington different from the one his biographers have presented; politically shrewd, closely in touch with the beliefs, aspirations and fears of his contemporaries, a consummate political leader and public actor who sought to embody and to be perceived as embodying their highest ideals.”<sup>169</sup> Of his hundreds of eulogists, only Washington’s old friend and associate, Gouverneur Morris, touched on this aspect of Washington’s motivation and personal aspirations. In his eulogy delivered in New York City on December 31, 1799, Morris observed that Washington “did not have the failings usually attached to man—he was not a slave to avarice and ambition. . . . But he had indeed one frailty—the weakness of great minds. He was fond of fame, and had reared a colossal reputation. It stood on the rock of his virtue. This was dear to his heart. There was but one thing dearer. He loved glory, but still he loved more

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<sup>167</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 31-46.

<sup>168</sup> Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, x.



his country. That was the master passion, and with resistless might, it ruled his every thought, and word, and deed.”<sup>170</sup>

Although Washington’s personal aspirations may have been somewhat obscure to his contemporaries, what the eulogists’ biographical sketches offered were scenes painted in the grand manner from his life, in each of which Washington acted out his character in the great metaphor of life as a stage and displayed his virtues. In their portraits of Washington, the eulogists rarely addressed how he arrived at each defining moment, what mistakes he made, what lessons he learned from the past, and how he prepared himself for the challenges ahead. But Washington’s eulogists found him to be the model of civic republicanism—an enlightened republican who was moderate, self-restrained, prudent, disinterested, and always courageous, self-sacrificing, utterly devoted to the public good. It was these strong personal characteristics that defined the man whose portrait the eulogists painted for thousands of grieving Americans in memorial services held throughout the nation during the winter of 1799-1800. The eulogists’ biographical portraits were written to serve as sentimental mementos of the First American, General George Washington, the beloved and revered hero whose death at Mount Vernon on December 14, 1799 had left behind an “America in Tears.”

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<sup>170</sup> Gouverneur Morris, New York City, 31 December 1799.

## APPENDIX

PARTIAL LISTING<sup>1</sup> OF FUNERAL RITES HELD IN MEMORY  
OF GEORGE WASHINGTON  
December 18, 1799 to February 22, 1800

<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>
<b>Connecticut</b>		<b>Delaware</b>	
Bozrah	22 Feb. 1800	Dover	22 Feb. 1800
Colchester	22 Feb. 1800	George-Town	22 Feb. 1800
Danbury	2 Jan. 1800	Newcastle	6 Jan. 1800
East Haddam (2)	22 Feb. 1800	Wilmington	27 Dec. 1799
East Windsor	22 Feb. 1800	Wilmington	22 Feb. 1800
Franklin	22 Feb. 1800	<b>District of Columbia</b>	
Guilford	22 Feb. 1800	Washington	5 Feb. 1800
Hartford	27 Dec. 1799	George-Town (2)	22 Feb. 1800
Hartford	22 Feb. 1800	<b>Georgia</b>	
Litchfield	22 Feb. 1800	Augusta	14 Jan. 1800
Middletown	26 Dec. 1799	Augusta	22 Feb. 1800
Middletown	22 Feb. 1800	Columbia	11 Feb. 1800
New Haven	22 Feb. 1800	Savannah	19 Jan. 1800
New London	11 Jan. 1800	Savannah	22 Feb. 1800
New London	22 Feb. 1800	Washington	22 Feb. 1800
New Milford	22 Feb. 1800	Waynesborough	21 Jan. 1800
North Haven	29 Jan. 1800	<b>Kentucky</b>	
Norwich (2)	5 Jan. 1800	Frankfort	22 Feb. 1800
Norwich	22 Feb. 1800	Garrard Co.	22 Feb. 1800
Preston	29 Jan. 1799	Lexington	25 Jan. 1800
Saybrook	22 Feb. 1800	<b>Maryland</b>	
Stamford	22 Feb. 1800	Annapolis (2)	22 Feb. 1800
Stonington	29 Dec. 1799	Baltimore	20 Dec. 1799
Stonington-Port	14 Jan. 1800	Baltimore	22 Dec. 1799
Suffield	22 Feb. 1800	Baltimore	1 Jan. 1800

<sup>1</sup> This listing is not intended to be a comprehensive compilation of all Washington commemorative events held in America during the period of national mourning. The list consists of the locations and dates of the 419 Washington funeral rites that were documented by the primary sources on which this study is based, 300 eulogies and orations and 42 complete newspaper runs printed around the country during the mourning period. It should be noted that in addition to these funeral events, there were undoubtedly hundreds of other commemorative rituals held throughout the nation, although not specifically documented by this study.

Tolland	22 Feb. 1800	Baltimore (4)	22 Feb. 1800
Wallingford	22 Feb. 1800	Calvert Co.	22 Feb. 1800
Wethersfield	22 Feb. 1800	Cambridge	22 Feb. 1800
Windham	22 Feb. 1800	Frederick-Town	24 Dec. 1799

**Maryland (cont.)**

Prince George Co.

22 Feb. 1800

**Massachusetts (cont.)****Massachusetts**

		Haverhill	22 Feb. 1800
Abington	22 Feb. 1800	Hingham	6 Jan. 1800
Andover	22 Feb. 1800	Hingham	22 Feb. 1800
Bedford	22 Feb. 1800	Holden	22 Feb. 1800
Billerica	10 Jan. 1800	Ipswich	7 Jan. 1800
Boston (6)	29 Dec. 1800	Ipswich	22 Feb. 1800
Boston	30 Dec. 1799	Lancaster	22 Feb. 1800
Boston (2)	2 Jan. 1800	Leicester	22 Feb. 1800
Boston	5 Jan. 1800	Lenox (2)	22 Feb. 1800
Boston	9 Jan. 1800	Leominster	22 Feb. 1800
Boston	27 Jan. 1800	Lexington	26 Jan. 1800
Boston	4 Feb. 1800	Lunenburg	22 Feb. 1800
Boston	8 Feb. 1800	Lynn	7 Jan. 1800
Boston	11 Feb. 1800	Lynn	13 Jan. 1800
Boston	19 Feb. 1800	Malden	8 Jan. 1800
Boston (2)	22 Feb. 1800	Marblehead	2 Jan. 1800
Boylston	22 Feb. 1800	Medford	29 Dec. 1799
Braintree	22 Feb. 1800	Medford	13 Jan. 1800
Brookfield	22 Feb. 1800	Mendon	? Dec. 1799
Brookline	22 Feb. 1800	Methuen	?Jan. 1800
Byfield	22 Feb. 1800	Milton	22 Feb. 1800
Cambridge (4)	24 Dec. 1799	Montague	9 Jan. 1800
Cambridge	21 Feb. 1800	Newbury	22 Feb. 1800
Cambridge (2)	22 Feb. 1800	Newburyport	29 Dec. 1800
Canton	22 Feb. 1800	Newburyport (3)	22 Feb. 1800
Charlestown	31 Dec. 1799	Newton	22 Feb. 1800
Charlestown	22 Feb. 1800	Northborough	22 Feb. 1800
Chelsea	14 Jan. 1800	Northampton	22 Feb. 1800
Colerain	22 Feb. 1800	Orleans	22 Feb. 1800
Concord	16 Jan. 1800	Oxford	15 Jan. 2800
Conway	8 Jan. 1800	Plymouth	22 Feb. 1800
Danvers	29 Dec. 1799	Quincy	22 Feb. 1800
Danvers (2)	22 Feb. 1800	Randolph	22 Feb. 1800
Dedham	22 Feb. 1800	Reading	22 Feb. 1800
Dorchester	29 Dec. 1799	Rowley	22 Feb. 1800
Dorchester	7 Jan. 1800	Roxbury	14 Jan. 1800
Dorchester	22 Feb. 1800	Salem	24 Dec. 1799
East Sudbury	5 Jan. 1800	Salem (5)	29 Dec. 1799
Fitchburg	22 Feb. 1800	Salem	2 Jan. 1800

Franklin	22 Feb. 1800	Salem (2)	22 Feb. 1800
Gloucester	25 Dec. 1799	Scituate	22 Feb. 1800
Gloucester	22 Feb. 1800	Sharon	22 Feb. 1800
Greenfield	22 Feb. 1800	Sheffield	22 Feb. 1800
Harvard (2)	22 Feb. 1800	Shrewsbury	1 Jan. 1800
<b>Massachusetts (cont.)</b>		<b>Mass. [District of Maine] (cont.)</b>	
Springfield	?Dec. 1799	Wiscasset	22 Feb. 1800
Springfield	29 Dec. 1799	<b>Mississippi District</b>	
Springfield	22 Feb. 1800	Natchez	n.d.
Sterling	22 Feb. 1800	<b>New Hampshire</b>	
Taunton	22 Feb. 1800	Amherst	22 Feb. 1800
Tewksbury	22 Feb. 1800	Arundel	12 Jan. 1800
Topsfield	5 Jan. 1800	Bedford	22 Feb. 1800
Warren	22 Feb. 1800	Boscawen (2)	22 Feb. 1800
Watertown	2 Jan. 1800	Charlestown	19 Jan. 1800
Wendell	2 Jan. 1800	Concord	5 Jan. 1800
Western	22 Feb. 1800	Concord	22 Feb. 1800
Weston	17 Jan. 1800	Conway	16 Jan. 1800
Weymouth	22 Feb. 1800	Enfield	23 Jan. 1800
Woburn	16 Jan. 1800	Exeter	28 Dec. 1799
Worcester	22 Feb. 1800	Exeter	22 Feb. 1800
Wrentham	22 Feb. 1800	Gilmanton	22 Feb. 1800
<b>Massachusetts [District of Maine]</b>		Greenland	22 Feb. 1800
Alfred	5 Feb. 1800	Hanover	9 Jan. 1800
Augusta	22 Feb. 1800	Henniker	22 Feb. 1800
Bath	?Jan. 1800	Keene	22 Feb. 1800
Bath	22 Feb. 1800	Londonderry	1 Jan. 1800
Berwick	4 Jan. 1800	Londonderry	22 Feb. 1800
Brunswick	22 Jan. 1800	Merrimac	22 Feb. 1800
Brunswick	22 Feb. 1800	Pittsfield	22 Feb. 1800
Castine	22 Feb. 1800	Plymouth	19 Jan. 1800
Freeport	1 Jan. 1800	Portsmouth	29 Dec. 1799
Hallowell	8 Jan. 1800	Portsmouth	31 Dec. 1799
Kittery (3)	22 Feb. 1800	Portsmouth (3)	5 Jan. 1800
Machias	22 Feb. 1800	Portsmouth	26 Jan. 1800
Mount Hope	30 Dec. 1800	Portsmouth (2)	22 Feb. 1800
North Yarmouth	3 Jan. 1800	Rye	22 Feb. 1800
North Yarmouth	22 Feb. 1800	Salisbury	31 Dec. 1799
Old York	2 Jan. 1800	Sandbornton	22 Feb. 1800
Pepperelborough	5 Jan. 1800	Sutton	22 Feb. 1800
Pepperelborough	22 Feb. 1800	Temple	22 Feb. 1800
Pittston	22 Feb. 1800	Walpole	27 Dec. 1799
Portland	27 Dec. 1799	Warner	22 Feb. 1800
Portland	8 Jan. 1800	Westmoreland	29 Dec. 1799
Portland	22 Feb. 1800	Westmoreland	22 Feb. 1800
Thomaston	22 Feb. 1800	<b>New Jersey</b>	

Topsham	22 Feb. 1800	Bellville	29 Dec. 1799
Warren	22 Feb. 1800	Bellville	5 Jan. 1800
Wells	22 Feb. 1800	Bellville	22 Feb. 1800
Winthrop	22 Feb. 1800	Bridgetown	30 Jan. 1800
Wiscasset	2 Jan. 1800	Burlington	22 Dec. 1799
<b>New Jersey (cont.)</b>		<b>New York (cont.)</b>	
Burlington	22 Feb. 1800	Troy	12 Jan. 1800
Cape May	22 Feb. 1800	<b>North Carolina</b>	
Elizabeth	25 Dec. 1799	Chapel Hill	22 Feb. 1800
Johnsbury	22 Feb. 1800	Charlotte	22 Feb. 1800
Newark	27 Dec. 1799	Duplin Co.	n. d.
Newark	29 Dec. 1799	Fayetteville	22 Feb. 1800
Newark	5 Jan. 1800	Hillsborough	12 Jan. 1800
Newark (2)	22 Feb. 1800	Martinsville	22 Feb. 1800
New Brunswick	?Dec. 1799	Morgantown	27 Jan. 1800
New Brunswick	31 Dec. 1799	Raleigh	22 Feb. 1800
New Brunswick	22 Feb. 1800	Salisbury	22 Feb. 1800
Newton	5 Jan. 1800	Tarborough	22 Feb. 1800
Oxford	18 Jan. 1800	Thyatira	12 Jan. 1800
Rockaway	29 Dec. 1799	Warrenton	26 Dec. 1799
Scotch Plains	26 Dec. 1799	Williamsborough	22 Feb. 1800
Scotch Plains	22 Feb. 1800	Windsor	22 Feb. 1800
Springfield	1 Jan. 1800	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	
Trenton	14 Jan. 1800	Carlisle	n. d.
Woodbury	22 Feb. 1800	Greebsburgh	22 Feb. 1800
<b>New York</b>		Lancaster	7 Jan. 1800
Albany	9 Jan. 1800	Lancaster	22 Feb. 1800
Albany	?Jan. 1800	Neshanock	22 Feb. 1800
Albany (5)	22 Feb. 1800	Northampton	22 Feb. 1800
Flatbush	22 Feb. 1800	Philadelphia	n. d.
Fort Plain	28 Jan. 1800	Philadelphia (2)	22 Dec. 1799
Greenbush	22 Feb. 1800	Philadelphia (3)	26 Dec. 1799
Hudson	27 Dec. 1799	Philadelphia (3)	29 Dec. 1799
Jamaica	22 Feb. 1800	Philadelphia	1 Jan. 1800
Lansingburgh	29 Dec. 1799	Philadelphia(5)	22 Feb. 1800
Lebanon/Canaan	22 Feb. 1800	Pittsburgh	8 Jan. 1800
New Rochelle	1 Jan. 1800	Pottstown	12 Jan. 1800
Newtown	22 Feb. 1800	Pottstown	22 Feb. 1800
New York City	22 Dec. 1799	Somerset	22 Feb. 1800
New York City	29 Dec. 1799	<b>Rhode Island</b>	
New York City (2)	31 Dec. 1799	Bristol	6 Jan. 1800
New York City (4)	22 Feb. 1800	East Greenwich	22 Feb. 1800
Oldenbarneveld	22 Feb. 1800	Newport (2)	29 Dec. 1799
Petersburgh	22 Feb. 1800	Newport	6 Jan. 1800
Plattsburgh	1 Jan. 1800	Providence	27 Dec. 1799
Rhinebeck Flats	22 Feb. 1800	Providence	5 Jan. 1800

Salem	n. d.	Providence	7 Jan. 1800
Schoharie	15 Jan. 1800	Providence	12 Jan. 1800
Scipio	22 Feb. 1800	Providence	9 Feb. 1800
Spencertown	19 Jan. 1800	Providence (3)	22 Feb. 1800
Stratford	1 Jan. 1800	Tiverton	11 Jan. 1800
<b>Rhode Island (cont.)</b>		<b>Virginia</b>	
Tiverton	22 Feb. 1800	Alexandria	27 Dec. 1799
Westerly (2)	22 Feb. 1800	Alexandria (2)	29 Dec. 1799
<b>South Carolina</b>		Alexandria	5 Jan. 1800
Charleston	1 Jan. 1800	Alexandria	22 Feb. 1800
Charleston	12 Jan. 1800	Augusta Co.	22 Feb. 1800
Charleston (2)	15 Jan. 1800	Charlotte C. H.	22 Feb. 1800
Charleston	21 Feb. 1800	Frederick Co.	22 Feb. 1800
Charleston(2)	22 Feb. 1800	Fredericksburg	29 Dec. 1799
Columbia	3 Feb. 1800	Halifax C H.	22 Feb. 1800
Georgetown	22 Feb. 1800	Harper's Ferry	22 Feb. 1800
<b>Tennessee</b>		<i>Mount Vernon</i>	18 Dec. 1799
Nashville	22 Feb. 1800	Norfolk	22 Feb. 1800
Tellico	22 Feb. 1800	Petersburg	29 Dec. 1799
<b>Vermont</b>		Petersburg	22 Feb. 1800
Bennington	27 Dec. 1799	Pittsylvania C. H.	22 Feb. 1800
Bennington	22 Feb. 1800	Richmond	22 Dec. 1799
Burlington	22 Feb. 1800	Richmond	22 Feb. 1800
Castleton	22 Feb. 1800	Staunton	22 Feb. 1800
Danville	26 Feb. 1800	Westmoreland Co.	27 Dec. 1799
Johnson	22 Feb. 1800	Williamsburg	22 Feb. 1800
Newbury	22 Feb. 1800	Winchester	22 Feb. 1800
Peacham	22 Feb. 1800		
Rutland	1 Jan. 1800		

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### EULOGIES AND FUNERAL ORATIONS

The first bibliography of eulogies and funeral orations delivered at memorial services for George Washington was compiled in 1865 by the historian Franklin Benjamin Hough. See his *Memorials of the Death of George Washington* (Roxbury, Massachusetts: Printed for W. Elliot Woodward, 1865). Hough listed about 250 titles including 239 separate eulogies. He also included accounts of the official proceedings of Congress, various states, and foreign countries, "poetic tributes," and reprints or extracts of about 16 selected eulogies.

In 1916, Margaret Bingham Stillwell, who was associated with the New York Public Library, compiled a listing of Washington eulogies that she said "probably comprises the fullest record of Washington eulogies and funeral orations which has been made up to the present time." See her *Washington Eulogies: A Checklist of Eulogies and Funeral Orations on the Death of George Washington, December 1799—February 1800* (New York: New York Public Library, 1916). In the introduction to her bibliography, Ms. Stillwell asserted that there were 346 separate eulogies (probably greatly understated) known to have been delivered or written during the period of national mourning for Washington, the texts of only thirty-eight of which were not known to be extant. Stillwell compiled her bibliography of Washington eulogies using the extensive collections of the New York Public Library as the basis for the listing. She supplemented the list by contacting historical societies and antiquarian libraries to gather an inventory of the eulogies in their collections. These other organizations included: The American Antiquarian Society, Boston Athenaeum, Boston Public Library, Harvard College Library, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, John Carter Brown Library, Library of Congress, Library Company of Philadelphia, New York Historical Society, Pequot Library, and the Collection of Mr. Walter U. Lewisson.

Stillwell's bibliography of Washington eulogies includes a number of related printed materials like poems, odes, hymns, and prayers. It also includes many duplicate entries to account for various printings of some of the most popular eulogies. When the list is edited to exclude the poetry, hymns and prayers, and duplicate entries, Stillwell included 280 eulogies and funeral sermons in her bibliography of Washington memorial orations. Copies of a total of 248 eulogies included in the Stillwell bibliography were located for use in this study, 230 of which are available in microform on Readex cards as part of the Early American Imprints, 1<sup>st</sup> series (Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1993). In addition to the Early American

Imprints series, other sources of copies of the eulogies included miscellaneous microforms and the following four anthologies of Washington funeral sermons and orations published shortly after the national mourning period.

*Eulogies and Orations on the Life and Death of General George Washington, First President of the United States of America.* Boston: Printed by Manning & Loring, 1800.

*Memory of Washington: Comprising a Sketch of His Life and Character; and the National Testimonials of Respect. Also, A Collection of Eulogies and Orations. With a Copious Appendix.* Newport, Rhode Island: Printed by Oliver Farnsworth, 1800.

*The Washingtoniana: Containing a Sketch of the Life and Death of the Late Gen. George Washington; with a Collection of Elegant Eulogies, Orations, Poems, Etc. Sacred to His Memory. Also, an Appendix, Comprising All His Most Valuable Public Papers and His Last Will and Testament.* Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Printed and Sold By William Hamilton, 1802.

*The Washingtoniana: Containing a Biographical Sketch of the Late Gen. George Washington, with Various Outlines of his Character, from the Pens of Different Eminent Writers, both in Europe and America; And an Account of the Various Funeral Honors devoted to His Memory. To Which Are Annexed His Will and Schedule of His Property. Embellished with a good Likeness.* Baltimore: Printed and Sold by Samuel Sower, 1800.

In addition to the 280 eulogies listed in Margaret Stillwell's thorough and still reliable bibliographic effort, forty more Washington funeral orations were identified during the course of the research for this study. Therefore, the following forty Washington eulogies and funeral orations should be considered as supplemental to Stillwell's *Checklist of Eulogies and Funeral Orations on the Death of George Washington*.

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Caldwell, Joseph. Eulogy of Washington delivered at The University of North Carolina On 22 February 1800. In *The Raleigh Register*, 1 April 1800.

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