

George Washington: Myths, Symbol and Reality

Lou Mroz Oyster River High School Durham, New Hampshire

I am in the process of one of the greatest educational experiences of my life. I was excited about having the opportunity of putting my favorite historical figure under a microscope. Prior to the institute, I believed that the greatness of George Washington was incomprehensible. As a result of what I've learned, his greatness is even more incomprehensible. You can tell a lot about a person by their beliefs and what they write. I have enjoyed pondering Washington's insightful words and thoughts:

1-“However unimportant America may be considered at the present,...there will assuredly come a day when this country will have some weight in the scale of empires” This man had foresight! We have become the most powerful, prosperous country in the history of our planet.

2-“Our cause is noble: it is the cause of mankind”
Once again, George knew what he was talking about...Liberty. Liberty back then only meant white Christian males who owned property. We have become much more democratic and inclusive in the past 200 plus years. I do not take the liberty that I have for granted. Unfortunately, billions of people on our planet today can only dream about liberty.

3-“Nor would I rob the fairer sex of their glory of a revolution so honorable to human nature, for, indeed, I think you ladies are in the number of the best patriots America can boast”

I am glad that Washington recognizes the important roles that women played in the revolution. The many years that Martha spent with George during the revolution served as an inspiration to women and his soldiers throughout our country. How many of his contemporaries acknowledged the roles that women played during the revolution?

4-“Our revolution was so distinguished for moderation, virtue, and humanity as to merit the eulogium...of being unsullied with crime”

George, you are stretching it to a great degree. Our troops committed their fair share of crimes. Let us not also forget that the revolution was a civil war. But, I was quite impressed that you said the British and Hessians should be treated with respect even though they committed many atrocities against our soldiers.

5-“There is no practice more dangerous than that of borrowing money”

George, if you were living today you'd have a heart attack! Our country is almost 12 trillion dollars in debt. The deficit this year is 1.3 trillion dollars. Next year it is projected to be 1.7 trillion. Was it providence that you named Hamilton as secretary of the treasury?

6-“Good moral character is the first essential in a man”

Washington walks the walk and talks the talk! Almost everyone, especially before your second term as president had nothing but superlatives to say about your character.

7-“Never let an indigent person ask without receiving something, if you have the means”

I have been impressed reading about your philanthropy and how many people you helped. A great example of the above is the provision in your will stating how your slaves when freed will be taken care of.

8-“The tumultuous populace of large cities are ever to be dreaded. Their indiscriminate violence prostrates for the time all public authority, and its consequences are sometimes extensive and terrible”

George, I don't know about that one. I moved out of New York City in 1974 because of all of the negative qualities I associated with cities. As a result of this institute, Boston is the first city I have lived in for 35 years. But...I have had an epiphany living in the city that you laid siege to during the revolution. I think you'd be pleased to see Boston today! It is a world class city inhabited by people from all over our planet with some of the most highly regarded educational institutions in the world!

9-“To correspond with those I love is among my highest gratifications”

Whew, you hit a game winning three pointer on that one! I just e-mailed my wife of 37 years to tell her how much I love her. Last evening we had a lovely conversation on the phone.

10-“Rise early, that by habit it may become familiar, agreeable, healthy, and profitable. It may for awhile be irksome to do this, but that will wear off and the practice will produce a rich harvest forever thereafter”

George, you nailed it again! I've been doing it my whole life and love it. I love to sit on my screened in porch and watch the sun come up and see the day unfurl. I am always serenaded by a multitude of birds. Yesterday my son and I left the house at 5:30 A.M. to hike the highest mountain in almost 1,000 miles. By the way, it is in New Hampshire and named after you!

11-“That a national university in this country is a thing to be desired has always been my decided opinion”

If you were living today you'd be depressed. Some universities charge more than \$50,000 per year! Teachers get paid far less than they deserve. Professional athletes make 100 times more money in a year than educators. Whew, we have our priorities mixed up.

12-“How much more delightful to an undebauched mind is the task of making improvements on the earth than the vain glory which can be acquired from ravaging it by the most uninterrupted career of conquests”

I have a feeling you'd be a member of the Sierra Club if you were alive today. Up until the late 1800's we totally raped and pillaged our natural environment. Thank Providence for laws that have helped to protect our environment.

13-“If men are to be precluded from offering their sentiments on a matter which may involve the most serious and alarming consequences,...the freedom speech may be taken away and, dumb and silent, we may be led, like sheep, to the slaughter”

What did you think about the Alien and Sedition Acts? You should read the philosophy of Frederic Nietzsche. Even with the freedoms we have today, most people are sheep and are easily manipulated by the media.

14-“The difference in our political sentiments never made any change in my friendship for you”

This is another example of why you are extraordinary! I have great difficulty being close friends with people who associate with the Republican Party.

15-“Good humor makes one dish of meat a feast”

I think you would love the Daily Show. Jon Stewart with his quick wit always has me laughing out loud. Frank Grizzard Jr. is our visiting Washington scholar from your

home state. We have had some great times and side splitting belly laughs these past few weeks.

16-“Happiness depends more upon the internal frame of a person’s own mind than on the externals of the world”

You are also a philosopher! True happiness is being at peace with your self. Abraham Maslow would surely say you are as self-actualized as anyone who has ever lived!

17-“The basis of our proceedings with the Indian nations has been, and shall be just, during the period I which I may have anything to do in the administration of this government”

George, sit down for this one. Many historians have used the word Genocide to describe the multitude of crimes we have committed against the Indians.

18-“It is a maxim founded on the universal experience of mankind that no nation is to be trusted farther than it is bound by its interest”

George, you hit a game winning grand slam on this one! Your Proclamation of Neutrality in 1793 could be interpreted as a violation of the treaty that we signed with France in 1778. But...The consensus of historians is that you did the right thing.

19-“No distance can keep anxious lovers long asunder”

George, you are also a romanticist! I drove 900 miles through the early morning and afternoon to see the woman I would eventually marry.

20-“I have always considered marriage as the most interesting event of one’s life, the foundation of happiness or misery”

It is obvious Martha and you were deeply in love. The 37 years I have been married is one of the pillars/foundation of my happiness. I also agree that a long term monogamous relationship is more fulfilling than a series of one night stands. Last but not least, no relationship is perfect. Although my wife and I have experienced many bumps in the road, we still love each other after 37 years of marriage.

21-“Once the woman has tempted us and we have tasted the forbidden fruit, there is no such thing as, checking our appetites, whatever the consequences may be”

Yes and no... Some presidents and many politicians past and present have ruined their careers as a result of that quote. Sigmund Freud created the Theory of Psychosexual Development. He believed that we are born with powerful sexual and aggressive urges and we need to learn to control them. Mr. President, it is obvious that you possessed the discipline/character that enabled you to refrain from temptation.

22-“Show not yourself glad at the misfortune of another though he were your enemy”

George, you’d hate watching NFL Football. After every play the athletes dance and pump their arms. A classic example of your class is that you restrained your men from cheering with the British surrender at Yorktown.

23-“I can truly say I had rather be at Mount Vernon with a friend or two about me than to be attended at the seat of government by the officers of state and the representatives of every power in Europe”

This is one example of why your greatness is incomprehensible. King George was correct. He said if you walked away from power, you would be, The Greatest Man in the World!

24-“I was summoned by my country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love”

How do you spell patriot? GEORGE WASHINGTON! If the revolution failed, you'd lose your beloved Mount Vernon and you'd be hanging by your neck.

25-"Future years cannot compensate for lost days. Every hour misspent is lost forever"

You win the U.S. Open with that one! We are but a blip between eternity. Pink Floyd said, 'one day closer to death.'" You'd enjoy watching Robin Williams in, Dead Poets Society. The theme of the movie was, Carpe Diem!

26-"My first wish is to see this plague to mankind (War) banished from this earth"

You and Howard Zinn and me and billions of other people! You'd be real depressed to learn how our nations history is chock full of wars.