HIS EXCELLENCY

George Washington

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CHAPTER ONE

Interior Regions

HISTORY FIRST noticed George Washington in 1753, as a daring and resourceful twenty-one-year-old messenger sent on a dangerous mission into the American wilderness. He carried a letter from the governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie, addressed to the commander of French troops in that vast region west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and south of the Great Lakes that Virginians called the Ohio Country. He was ordered to lead a small party over the Blue Ridge, then across the Allegheny Mountains, there to rendezvous with an influential Indian chief called the Half-King. He was then to proceed to the French outpost at Presque Isle (present-day Erie, Pennsylvania), where he would deliver his message "in the Name of His Britanic Majesty." The key passage in the letter he was carrying, so it turned out, represented the opening verbal shot in what American colonists would call the French and Indian War: "The Lands upon the river Ohio, in the Western Parts of the Colony of Virginia, are so notoriously known to be the Property of the Crown of Great Britain, that it is a Matter of equal Concern & Surprize to me, to hear that a Body of French Forces are erecting Fortresses, & making Settlements upon that River within his Majesty's Dominions."[1]

The world first became aware of young Washington at this moment, and we get our first extended look at him, because, at Dinwiddie's urging, he published an account of his adventures, *The Jour-*

nal of Major George Washington, which appeared in several colonial newspapers and was then reprinted by magazines in England and Scotland. Though he was only an emissary—the kind of valiant and agile youth sent forward against difficult odds to perform a hazardous mission—Washington's *Journal* provided readers with a firsthand report on the mountain ranges, wild rivers, and exotic indigenous peoples within the interior regions that appeared on most European maps as dark and vacant spaces. His report foreshadowed the more magisterial account of the American West provided by Lewis and Clark more than fifty years later. It also, if inadvertently, exposed the somewhat ludicrous character of any claim by "His Britanic Majesty," or any European power, for that matter, to control such an expansive frontier that simply swallowed up and spit out European presumptions of civilization.[2]

Although Washington is both the narrator and the central character in the story he tells, he says little about himself and nothing about what he thinks. "I have been particularly cautious," he notes in the preface, "not to augment." The focus, instead, is on the knee-deep snow in the passes through the Alleghenies, and the icy and often impassably swollen rivers, where he and his companions are forced to wade alongside their canoes while their coats freeze stiff as boards. Their horses collapse from exhaustion and have to be abandoned. He and fellow adventurer Christopher Gist come upon a lone warrior outside an Indian village ominously named Murdering Town. The Indian appears to befriend them, then suddenly wheels around at nearly point-blank range and fires his musket, but inexplicably misses. "Are you shot?" Washington asks Gist, who responds that he is not. Gist rushes the Indian and wants to kill him, but Washington will not permit it, preferring to let him escape. They come upon an isolated farmhouse on the banks of the Monongahela where two adults and five children have been killed and scalped. The decaying corpses are being eaten by hogs.[3]

In stark contrast to the brutal conditions and casual savagery of the frontier environment, the French officers whom Washington encounters at Fort Le Boeuf and Presque Isle resemble pieces of polite Parisian furniture plopped down in an alien landscape. "They received us with a great deal of complaisance," Washington observes,

the French offering flattering pleasantries about the difficult trek Washington's party had endured over the mountains. But they also explained that the claims of the English king to the Ohio Country were demonstrably inferior to those of the French king, which were based on Lasalle's exploration of the American interior nearly a century earlier. To solidify their claim of sovereignty, a French expedition had recently sailed down the Ohio River, burying a series of lead plates inscribed with their sovereign's seal that obviously clinched the question forever.[4]

The French listened politely to Washington's rebuttal, which derived its authority from the original charter of the Virginia Company in 1606. It had set the western boundary of that colony either at the Mississippi River or, even more expansively, at the Pacific Ocean. In either case, it included the Ohio Country and predated Lasalle's claim by sixty years. However persuasive this rather sweeping argument might sound in Williamsburg or London, it made little impression on the French officers. "They told me," Washington wrote in his *Journal,* "it was their absolute Design to take Possession of the Ohio, & by G____ they wou'd do it." The French commander at Fort Le Boeuf, Jacques Le Gardner, sieur de Saint Pierre, concluded the negotiations by drafting a cordial letter for Washington to carry back to Governor Dinwiddie that sustained the diplomatic affectations: "I have made it a particular duty to receive Mr. Washington with the distinction owing to your dignity, his position, and his own great merit. I trust that he will do me justice in that regard to you, and that he will make known to you the profound respect with which I am, Sir, your most humble and most obedient servant."[5]

But the person whom Washington quotes more than any other in his *Journal* represented yet a third imperial power with its own exclusive claim of sovereignty over the Ohio Country. That was the Half-King, the Seneca chief whose Indian name was Tanacharison. In addition to being a local tribal leader, the Half-King had received his quasi-regal English name because he was the diplomatic representative of the Iroquois Confederation, also called the Six Nations, with its headquarters in Onondaga, New York. When they had first met at the Indian village called Logstown, Tanacharison had declared that Washington's Indian name was Conotocarius, which meant "town

taker" or "devourer of villages," because this was the name originally given to Washington's great-grandfather, John Washington, nearly a century earlier. The persistence of that memory in Indian oral history was a dramatic reminder of the long-standing domination of the Iroquois Confederation over the region. They had planted no lead plates, knew nothing of some English king's presumptive claims to own a continent. But they had been ruling over this land for about three hundred years.[6]

In the present circumstance, Tanacharison regarded the French as a greater threat to Indian sovereignty. "If you had come in a peaceable Manner like our Brethren the English," he told the French commander at Presque Isle, "We shou'd not have been against your trading with us as they do, but to come, Fathers, & build great houses upon our Land, & to take it by Force, is what we cannot submit to." On the other hand, Tanacharison also made it clear that all Indian alliances with European powers and their colonial kinfolk were temporary expediencies: "Both you & the English are White. We live in a Country between, therefore the Land does not belong either to one or the other; but the GREAT BEING above allow'd it to be a Place of Residence for us."[7]

Washington dutifully recorded Tanacharison's words, fully aware that they exposed the competing, indeed contradictory, imperatives that defined his diplomatic mission into the American wilderness. For on the one hand he represented a British ministry and a colonial government that fully intended to occupy the Ohio Country with Anglo-American settlers whose presence was ultimately incompatible with the Indian version of divine providence. But on the other hand, given the sheer size of the Indian population in the region, plus their indisputable mastery of the kind of forest-fighting tactics demanded by wilderness conditions, the balance of power in the looming conflict between France and England for European domination of the American interior belonged to the very people whom Washington's superiors intended to displace.

For several reasons, this story of young Washington's first American adventure is a good place to begin our quest for the famously elusive personality of the mature man-who-became-a-monument. First, the story reveals how early his personal life became caught up in

larger public causes, in this case nothing less grand than the global struggle between the contending world powers for supremacy over half a continent. Second, it forces us to notice the most obvious chronological fact, namely that Washington was one of the few prominent members of America's founding generation—Benjamin Franklin was another—who were born early enough to develop their basic convictions about America's role in the British Empire within the context of the French and Indian War. Third, it offers the first example of the interpretive dilemma posed by a man of action who seems determined to tell us what he did, but equally determined not to tell us what he thought about it. Finally, and most importantly, it establishes a connection between Washington's character in the most formative stage of its development and the raw, often savage, conditions in that expansive area called the Ohio Country. The interior regions of Washington's personality began to take shape within the interior regions of the colonial frontier. Neither of these places, it turned out, was as vacant as it first appeared. And both of them put a premium on achieving mastery over elemental forces that often defied the most cherished civilized expectations.

GLIMPSES

Before 1753 we have only glimpses of Washington as a boy and young man. These sparsely documented early years have subsequently been littered with legends and lore, all designed to align Washington's childhood with either the dramatic achievements of his later career or the mythological imperatives of America's preeminent national hero. John Marshall, his first serious biographer, even entitled the chapter on Washington's arrival in the world "The Birth of Mr. Washington," suggesting that he was born fully clothed and ready to assume the presidency. The most celebrated story about Washington's childhood—the Parson Weems tale about chopping down the cherry tree ("Father, I cannot tell a lie")—is a complete fabrication. The truth is, we know virtually nothing about Washington's relationship with his father, Augustine Washington, except that it

ended early, when Washington was eleven years old. In all his voluminous correspondence, Washington mentioned his father on only three occasions, and then only cryptically. As for his mother, Mary Ball Washington, we know that she was a quite tall and physically strong woman who lived long enough to see him elected president but never extolled or even acknowledged his public triumphs. Their relationship, estranged in those later years, remains a mystery during his childhood and adolescence. Given this frustrating combination of misinformation and ignorance, we can only establish the irrefutable facts about Washington's earliest years, then sketch as best we can the murkier patterns of influence on his early development.[8]

We know beyond any doubt that George Washington was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, near the banks of the Potomac River, on February 22, 1732 (New Style). He was a fourth-generation Virginian. The patriarch of the family, John Washington, had come over from England in 1657 and established the Washingtons as respectable, if not quite prominent, members of Virginia society. The Indians had named him "town taker," not because of his military prowess, but because he had manipulated the law to swindle them out of their land.

The bloodline that John Washington bequeathed to his descendants exhibited three distinctive tendencies: first, a passion for acreage, the more of it the better; second, tall and physically strong males; and third, despite the physical strength, a male line that died relatively young, all before reaching fifty. A quick scan of the genealogy on both sides of young George's ancestry suggested another ominous pattern. The founder of the Washington line had three wives, the last of whom had been widowed three times. Washington's father had lost his first wife in 1729, and Mary Ball Washington, his second wife, was herself an orphan whose own mother had been widowed twice. The Virginian world into which George Washington was born was a decidedly precarious place where neither domestic stability nor life itself could be taken for granted. This harsh reality was driven home in April 1743, when Augustine Washington died, leaving his widow and seven children an estate that included ten thousand acres divided into several disparate parcels and forty-nine slaves.[9]

Washington spent his early adolescence living with his mother at

Ferry Farm in a six-room farmhouse across the Rappahannock from Fredericksburg. He received the modern equivalent of a grade-school education, but was never exposed to the classical curriculum or encouraged to attend college at William and Mary, a deficiency that haunted him throughout his subsequent career among American statesmen with more robust educational credentials. Several biographers have called attention to his hand-copied list of 110 precepts from *The Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation,* which was based on rules of etiquette originally composed by Jesuit scholars in 1595. Several of the rules are hilarious (#9, "Spit not into the fire . . . especially if there be meat before it"; #13, "Kill no vermin, or fleas, lice, ticks, etc. in the sight of others"); but the first rule also seems to have had resonance for Washington's later obsession with deportment: "Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect to those that are present." As a reminder of an earlier era's conviction that character was not just who you were but also what others thought you were, this is a useful point that foreshadows Washington's flair for disappearing within his public persona. But the more prosaic truth is that *Rules of Civility* has attracted so much attention from biographers because it is one of the few documents of Washington's youth that has survived. It is quite possible that he copied out the list as a mere exercise in penmanship.[10]

The two major influences on Washington's youthful development were his half brother, Lawrence, fourteen years his senior, and the Fairfax family. Lawrence became a surrogate father, responsible for managing the career options of his young protégé, who as a younger son had little hope of inheriting enough land to permit easy entrance into the planter class of Chesapeake society. In 1746, Lawrence proposed that young George enlist as a midshipman in the British navy. His mother opposed the suggestion, as did his uncle in England, who clinched the negative verdict by observing that the navy would "cut him and staple him and use him like a Negro, or rather, like a dog."[11]

Lawrence's two other contributions to Washington's future career were richly ironic. In 1751 he traveled to Barbados, seeking a tropical cure for his tuberculosis, and took Washington along as a companion. This turned out to be Washington's one and only trip abroad and the

occasion for his contraction of smallpox. He carried barely discernible pockmarks on his face for the rest of his life, but also immunity against the most feared and fatal disease of the era. Then, in 1752, Lawrence lost his bout with tuberculosis, thereby sustaining the family tradition of short-lived males. His 2,500-acre plantation, now named Mount Vernon, became part of the estate that Washington eventually inherited. Lawrence's premature death made possible his greatest legacy.[12]

The Fairfax influence also had its ironies. At about the age of fifteen Washington began to spend much of his time at Mount Vernon with Lawrence, who had married Ann Fairfax of the Fairfax dynasty at nearby Belvoir. The patriarch of the clan was Lord Thomas Fairfax, an eccentric member of the English peerage whose disdain for women and love for horses and hounds soon carried him across the Blue Ridge to pursue his passion for foxhunting undisturbed by the nettlesome duties of managing his estates. His cousin William Fairfax assumed that responsibility, which was a truly daunting task. The much-disputed Fairfax claim, only recently validated by the Privy Council in London, gave Lord Fairfax proprietary rights to more than five million acres, including the huge Northern Neck region between the Potomac and Rappahannock. The Fairfaxes, in short, were a living remnant of European feudalism and English-style aristocracy, firmly imbedded within Virginia's more provincial version of country gentlemen. As such, they were the supreme example of privileged bloodlines, royal patronage, and what one Washington biographer has called "the assiduous courting of the great." Though Washington was destined to lead a revolution that eventually toppled this whole constellation of aristocratic beliefs and presumptions, he was initially a beneficiary of its powers of patronage.[13]

In 1748, William Fairfax gave sixteen-year-old Washington his first job. He accompanied William's son, George William Fairfax, on a surveying expedition of the Fairfax holdings in the Shenandoah Valley. Washington's first diary entries date from this time, so we get our initial glimpse of his handwriting and prose, as well his impression of the primitive conditions on the far side of the Blue Ridge: "Went into the Bed as they call'd it when to my Surprize I found it to be nothing but a Little Straw—Matted together without Sheets or

any thing else but only one Thread Bare blanket with double its Weight of Vermin such as Lice Fleas & c." The few settlers in this frontier region struck him as strange creatures, who wore tattered clothes and tended to speak German rather than English. He also saw an Indian war party, returning from a skirmish with one scalp and celebrating their victory by dancing around their campfire to the music of a kettledrum.[14]

If the Fairfax family represented the epitome of English civilization, the area west of the Blue Ridge represented the far edge of civilization's progress. Beyond that edge lay the Ohio Country, where anything that Europeans called civilization ceased to exist altogether. The previous year, in 1747, Lawrence had joined a group of investors to form the Ohio Company, which obtained a royal grant of half a million acres to bring Virginia's version of civilization to that distant place west of the Alleghenies, where Washington would soon test his manhood against the elements in the name of the British king. For now, however, and for the next three years, he remained on the eastern edge of Virginia's frontier, surveying the Fairfax holdings in the Northern Neck and Shenandoah Valley, mastering his new trade by conducting more than 190 surveys, usually camping under the stars, doing well enough financially to permit his first purchase of land, a 1,459-acre plot on Bullskin Creek in the lower Shenandoah.[15]

Again, the historical record affords only glimpses of the emerging young man. There are pieces of adolescent doggerel about his "Poor Resistless Heart" pierced by "cupid's feather'd Dart," perhaps a reference to an unknown "Low land Beauty" that stirred his passions, perhaps a reference to his futile pursuit of Betsy Fauntleroy, a sixteen-year-old coquette who found him unacceptable. His name appears as plaintiff in a Fredericksburg court case, filing charges against one Mary McDaniel for rifling through his clothes while he was bathing in the local river. (She received fifteen lashes.) Later on women would swoon at his appearance, but at this early stage he struck them as awkward, even oafish, and paralyzingly shy.[16]

No full physical description exists for this period, but accounts from a few years later allow us to project backward to envision a very tall young man, at least six feet two inches, which made him a head higher than the average male of the time. He had an athlete's body,

well proportioned and trim at about 175 pounds with very strong thighs and legs, which allowed him to grip a horse's flanks tightly and hold his seat in the saddle with uncommon ease. His eyes were grayish blue and widely set. His hair was hazel brown, destined to darken over the years, and usually tied in a cue in the back. He had disproportionately large hands and feet, which contributed to his awkward appearance when stationary, but once in motion on the dance floor or in a foxhunt the natural grace of his movements overwhelmed the initial impression. Well-muscled and coordinated, he never threw a silver dollar across the Potomac (to do so at the Mount Vernon shore would have been physically impossible), but he did throw a rock over the Natural Bridge in the Shenandoah Valley, which was 215 feet high. He was the epitome of the man's man: physically strong, mentally enigmatic, emotionally restrained.[17]

In June 1752, while Lawrence lay dying at Mount Vernon, Washington petitioned Governor Dinwiddie for one of the adjutant-general posts in the Virginia militia. He had no military experience whatsoever, and, apart from being an impressive physical specimen, no qualifications for the job. Here the two major influences on his early years converged in their customary ways. Lawrence's death created an opening in the adjutancy corps, and William Fairfax used his influence to assure Dinwiddie that the young man was up to the task. As Washington himself put it: "I am sensible my best endeavors will not be wanting." Dinwiddie concurred, made himself Washington's new mentor and patron, then dispatched Major Washington into the western wilderness the following year.[18]

ASSASSINATION AND NECESSITY

OVER THE COURSE of the next five years, from 1754 to 1759, Washington spent the bulk of his time west of the Blue Ridge, leading a series of expeditions into the Ohio Country that served as crash courses in the art of soldiering. They also provided him with a truly searing set of personal experiences that shaped his basic outlook on the world. Instead of going to college, Washington went to war. And

the kind of education he received, like the smallpox he had contracted in Barbados, left scars that never went away, as well as immunities against any and all forms of youthful idealism.

The first adventure began in the spring of 1754, when the Virginia House of Burgesses voted funds to raise a regiment of three hundred men to protect settlers in the Ohio Country from the mounting French threat. Washington was made second in command with the rank of lieutenant colonel. In April he left Alexandria at the head of 160 troops charged with the mission of securing the strategic location at the juncture of the Allegheny and Monongahela, where the Ohio Company had already begun to construct a fort. Soon after he completed the difficult trek over the Alleghenies, Washington learned that a French force of more than a thousand had seized the half-built fort, renamed it Fort Duquesne, and were proceeding to radiate French influence over the several Indian tribes in the region. The best intelligence came from his former companion and major Indian ally, Tanacharison, who apprised Washington that the situation was truly desperate: "If you do not come to our Assistance now," he wrote, "we are entirely undone, and imagine we shall never meet again." Faced with a vastly superior enemy force, Washington decided to build a makeshift fort near Tanacharison's camp, rally whatever Indian allies he could find, and wait for reinforcements. Tanacharison promised his support, but also warned that the odds were stacked against them.[19]

On May 27, Tanacharison reported the appearance of French troops in the vicinity and brought a delegation of warriors to join Washington's garrison at Great Meadows about forty miles from Fort Duquesne. On the morning of May 28, Washington found a French patrol of thirty-two soldiers encamped in a forest glen that Tanacharison described as "a low obscure place." His detachment of forty, plus the Indian allies under Tanacharison, encircled the French camp. Washington's report on the action that ensued, sent to Dinwiddie the next day, was succinct: "I there upon in conjunction with the Half-King . . . formed a disposition to attack them on all sides, which we accordingly did and after an Engagement of abt 15 minutes we killed 10, wounded one and took 21 Prisoners, amongst those that were killed was Monsieur De Jumonville, the Commander." His

diary account, even more succinct, was also more revealing: "we killed Mr. de Jumonville—as also nine others . . . the Indians scalped the Dead."[20]

What actually happened at what came to be called Jumonville Glen soon became an international controversy about who fired the first shot in the French and Indian War. It has remained a scholarly debate ever since, in part because it was Washington's first combat experience, in part because there is good reason to believe that he found himself overseeing a massacre. Though the eyewitness accounts do not agree—as they seldom do—the most plausible version of the evidence suggests that the French troops, surprised and outgunned, threw down their weapons after the initial exchange and attempted to surrender. The French commander, Joseph Coulon de Villiers, sieur de Jumonville, though wounded in the exchange, tried to explain that he had come on a peace mission on behalf of his monarch, Louis XV, exactly the same diplomatic mission that Washington had performed the previous year on behalf of the British monarch, claiming sovereignty over the disputed Ohio Country.

As Washington sought to understand the translation of this diplomatic message, Tanacharison, who apparently spoke fluent French and therefore grasped Jumonville's point before Washington did, decided to take matters into his own hands. He stepped up to where Jumonville lay, in French declared, "Thou art not yet dead, my father," then sank his hatchet into Jumonville's head, split his skull in half, pulled out his brain, and washed his hands in the mixture of blood and tissue. His warriors then fell upon the wounded French soldiers, scalped them all, and decapitated one and put his head on a stake. All this happened under the eyes of the shocked and hapless commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Washington.[21]

While he did not tell an outright lie to Dinwiddie, neither did Washington speak the whole truth about the episode. In his diary he attempted to convince himself that Jumonville's claim to be on a diplomatic mission was "a pure Pretence; that they never intended to come to us but as Enemies." In effect, he was rationalizing the massacre to himself. In a letter home to his brother, he glossed over the killings by focusing on his own personal response to the sense of danger: "I heard Bullets whistle and believe me there was something

charming in the Sound." This self-promoting statement made it into the Virginia newspapers, prompting a flurry of stories depicting Washington as America's first war hero. The bravado remark even made the rounds in London, where no less than George II reportedly dismissed it as youthful bragging: "He would not say so, if he had been used to hear many."[22]

Whether he was a hero, a braggart, or an accomplice in murder, the skirmish at Jumonville Glen had convinced Washington that his detachment, though outnumbered by the French forces in the area, could hold its own until reinforcements arrived. "We have just finish'd a small palisaded Fort," he wrote Dinwiddie, "in which with my small Numbers I shall not fear the attack of 500 Men." He named the crude circular stockade where he intended to make his stand Fort Necessity, a glancing recognition of his precarious situation. In early June, Dinwiddie endorsed the decision to defend the fort, while also sending word that the commander of the Virginia Regiment, Joshua Fry, had recently died after falling off his horse, making Washington the new man in charge, with the rank of colonel. (Yet again, another's death led to his own advancement.) A militia detachment of about two hundred was also on the way to reinforce him.[23]

To his credit, Washington realized that his fate depended less on the British reinforcements than on the support of local Indians, who continued to control the balance of power in the region. On June 18, Tanacharison arranged a Council of Indians at which Washington responded to questions about English intentions toward the Ohio Country. He apprised the several chiefs that the sole purpose of the English military effort was "to maintain your Rights . . . to make that whole Country sure to you." He claimed that the English had no other goal than to recover for the various Indian tribes "those Lands which the French had taken from them." This was a bald-faced lie, rendered necessary by Washington's recognition, as he put it, "that we can do nothing without them." Apparently the chiefs found the argument unpersuasive, or perhaps they simply knew that the size of the advancing French force made any alliance with Washington's embattled troops a bad gamble. At any rate, Tanacharison led all the Indians into the woods, leaving Fort Necessity to its fate. Captain James McKay arrived with his reinforcements shortly thereafter, whereupon

Washington and McKay began to debate command authority, McKay claiming that his commission as a captain in the British army trumped Washington's colonial rank as a colonel.[24]

They could not argue for long, because by early July they learned what Tanacharison had probably known earlier, namely that a force of about eleven hundred French and Indians led by Louis Coulon de Villiers, who happened to be Jumonville's aggrieved brother, was about to descend upon them. On the morning of July 3 the first French soldiers appeared on the horizon about six hundred yards from the fort. Accounts disagree as to who fired the first shots. Because Washington had only cleared the trees and brush sixty yards around Fort Necessity, the entire French and Indian force closed to the edge of the perimeter, took refuge behind trees and stumps, and began to pour a murderous fire down upon the beleaguered defenders. The result was a slow-paced slaughter lasting for nine hours. A driving downpour filled up the trenches inside and outside Fort Necessity, rendering much of the gunpowder useless. By dark nearly a third of Washington's force had been killed or wounded, and the survivors, sensing imminent catastrophe, broke into the rum supply to bolster their courage. Rumors spread within the garrison that four hundred Indian warriors were marching to join the French, anticipating a massacre laden with trophies and scalps. The defenders faced not just humiliating defeat, but total annihilation.[25]

Washington's version of what happened next, reiterated and revised throughout his life, does not fit the bulk of the evidence. He claimed that the defenders of Fort Necessity were inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy—more than three hundred dead or wounded by the end of the day—so the French commander, Captain de Villiers, decided to call a truce and propose generous terms of surrender. In return for promising to remove themselves from the Ohio Country for one year, the defenders were permitted to evacuate the fort carrying their arms, their colors, and their honor. In Washington's version, the battle at Fort Necessity was not a defeat so much as a stalemate, in which the Virginians and British conducted themselves with gallantry and composure despite the superior French force arrayed against them.[26]

The more unattractive truth was that Washington had placed his

troops in a hopelessly vulnerable position at Fort Necessity. He had suffered one hundred casualties compared with only five deaths on the enemy side. The relentless musket fire and horrible weather conditions had caused the defenders to panic, and the panic only intensified when news of imminent Indian reinforcements created the prospect of a wholesale massacre of the garrison. (In the Articles of Capitulation the French promised to "restrain, as much as shall be in our power, the Indians that are with us.") Most awkwardly, the Articles of Capitulation referred to "the Assassination of M. de Jumonville," meaning that Washington's signature on the surrender document endorsed the conclusion that the British in general and he in particular were responsible for murdering a diplomatic emissary of the French crown, which in turn meant that the British were responsible for the hostile action that launched the French and Indian War.[27]

Washington went to his grave claiming that he never realized that the word "assassination" was included in the Articles of Capitulation, and blamed the misunderstanding on a poor translation from the French original and the rain-soaked character of the document. He claimed that he would never have agreed to such terms if he had known their full meaning. Given the utterly desperate situation he faced, however, it is difficult to imagine what choice he had, which is probably one reason why he felt obliged to deny any sense of desperation.

He led the beleaguered remnant of his regiment out of Fort Necessity on July 4—a day he surely never thought he would celebrate—with his reputation up for grabs. Horatio Sharpe, the governor of Maryland, published a critical account of Washington's conduct at Fort Necessity, describing the battle as a debacle and Washington himself as a dangerous mixture of inexperience and impetuosity. The French, for their part, found him a convenient symbol of Anglo-American treachery for his role in the Jumonville massacre. They had confiscated his journal at Fort Necessity and cited the misleading section on the Jumonville incident as evidence of his duplicity. The French commander in North America, General Duquesne, identified Washington as the epitome of dishonor: "He lies very much to justify the assassination of sieur de Jumonville, which has turned on him, and which he had the stupidity to confess in his

capitulation. . . . There is nothing more unworthy and lower and even blacker, than the sentiments and the way of thinking of this Washington. It would have been a pleasure to read his outrageous journal under his very nose." For French propaganda purposes Washington became the ideal villain, and he was featured as such in an epic poem published in France designed to demonstrate the evil character of the enemy.[28]

Back in Williamsburg, on the other hand, William Fairfax was using his influence to depict Fort Necessity as a noble, if futile, effort to block the French invasion of Virginia's western lands. After all, if the French regarded Washington as a diabolical character, did that not constitute a recommendation of sorts? Responding to pressure from Fairfax and Dinwiddie, in September the House of Burgesses issued an order recognizing Washington and several of his officers at Fort Necessity "for their late gallant and brave Behavior in the Defense of their Country." Whatever happened at Jumonville Glen, however ill-advised the futile stand at Fort Necessity, the young man was unquestionably brave, and with the outbreak of war on the frontier, Virginia needed a hero who also happened to look the part.[29]

Though vindicated, Washington himself felt frustrated: "What did I get by this?" he asked his brother. "Why, after putting myself to a considerable expense in equipment and providing Necessarys for the Campaigne—I went out, was soundly beaten, lost them all—came in, and had my Commission taken from me." The latter lament referred to the decision by the burgesses not to vote new taxes for a major expedition against the French, which meant that the Virginia Regiment was disbanded into several independent companies, leaving Washington to serve at a lower rank. This struck him as a gross insult. He was touchy about his rank; lacking aristocratic credentials like Fairfax, or London connections like Dinwiddie, his military position was his primary indication of social standing in the Virginia hierarchy. Rather than accept the demotion, he preferred to resign. He did so in November 1754, all the while convinced that he had found his proper calling as a soldier. "My inclinations," he acknowledged, "are strongly bent to arms." Events were about to demonstrate that he was in the ideal location to exercise those inclinations.[30]

MASSACRE AT THE MONONGAHELA

THE CATALYST for these events arrived in Virginia in February 1755 with two regiments of British regulars, a sweeping mandate to assume supreme authority over British military policy for all of North America, and specific orders to launch the campaign against the French menace by capturing Fort Duquesne. His name was General Edward Braddock, a thirty-five-year veteran who knew all there was to know about drilling troops in garrison, something about waging war in the arenas of Europe, and nothing whatsoever about the kind of savage conditions and equally savage battlefields he would encounter in the American interior.

His superiors, hunched over maps in London, had described his mission as a triumphal procession through the Ohio Country, the capture of Fort Duquesne, and then a campaign to roll up the string of French forts on the Great Lakes and the eventual seizure of all of French Canada. No one even remotely familiar with the mountains, rivers, and Indian tribes within this terrain would have drawn up such orders. Braddock's mission, in effect, was inherently impossible. He made it even more so by proceeding to issue imperious commands to the respective governors and legislatures of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania for additional funds, thereby alienating all the colonial governments. He sealed his fate completely at a meeting with a delegation of Indian chiefs by telling them that their historic claims to land in the Ohio Valley were worthless and that British troops had no need for aid from savages, prompting most of the tribes in the region to go over to the French. As Braddock saw it, he commanded the largest and best equipped military force ever assembled on the North American continent, making victory inevitable. In fact, the campaign was doomed from the start.[31]

In the spring of 1755, Washington had no inkling of these larger intractables. He was living at Mount Vernon, which he was leasing from Lawrence's widow, trying to decide what to do with his life. His letterbook for this phase is a somewhat contaminated document, because he went back to revise his language on two later occasions, 1786–87 and 1797–98, in order to improve his spelling and syntax and

conceal his youthful ambivalence. By restoring his original language alongside the revisions, the modern editors of his papers allow us to recover his confusion at this moment, along with his solicitous and awkwardly deferential attitude toward British authority as embodied in Braddock.

In March he wrote Robert Orme, Braddock's chief of staff, in somewhat stilted fashion: "I must be ingenuous enough to confess that . . . I wish earnestly to attain some knowledge of the Military Profession and, believing a more favourable oppertunity cannot offer than to serve under a Gentleman of General Braddock's abilities and experience." More than the educational experience of serving under a veteran British officer, Washington wanted the patronage that Braddock's stature could provide. "I have now a good oppertunity," he wrote his brother, "and shall not neglect it, of forming an acquaintance which may be serviceable hereafter, if I shall find it worth while to push my Fortune in the Military line." His sensitivity about rank—once a colonel, he would now be only a captain—was resolved when Orme assured him that Braddock "will be very glad of your Company in his Family"—meaning as aide-de-camp on his staff—"by which all inconveniences of that kind [rank] will be obviated." He joined Braddock's swelling entourage of horses, wagons, and men at Frederick, Maryland, in early May 1755.[32]

Braddock recognized that he faced a massive logistical problem. In order to mount a proper siege of Fort Duquesne according to orthodox European-style standards for success, he required overwhelming superiority in both manpower and artillery. His main force of more than two thousand men needed to be fed along the route, his heavy cannon needed to be pulled by horses, and all the food for them needed to be carried on wagons, which required more horses—about 2,500 in all—plus the wagon masters and ubiquitous camp women following in the rear. This cumbersome cavalcade, stretching out over six miles, had to carve its own road through more than one hundred miles of wilderness terrain that Washington knew to be almost impassable and that even Braddock acknowledged "would occasion great Trouble and retard me considerably." All of Braddock's extensive military experience worked against him: he knew in considerable

detail how to conduct a conventional campaign in Europe, but in the Ohio Country everything he knew proved either irrelevant or wrong.[33]

After stepping off at a brisk pace in mid-May, Braddock's column ground to a near halt once it hit the Alleghenies in June. Washington began to sense disaster at this time, writing his brother that "this prospect was soon clouded & all my hopes brought very low indeed when I found . . . they were halting to Level every Mole Hill, & to erect Bridges over every brook; by which means we were 4 Days gttg 12 Miles." Stragglers were also being killed and scalped routinely, a sign that the Indian intelligence network was fully aware of their location and destination. Washington apprised Braddock that the ponderous pace of the baggage train virtually assured that they would be marooned in Indian country once the snows in the mountains began to make any advance at all impossible. He recommended that a "flying column" of twelve hundred lightly equipped troops be disengaged from the main body and proceed at full speed toward Fort Duquesne. Braddock accepted this advice, probably one of the reasons why Washington never engaged in the widespread Braddock bashing that haunted subsequent accounts of the eventual debacle. Just as the flying column went forward, Washington came down with dysentery and had to remain with the wagons in the rear. He extracted a promise from Braddock that, once they approached striking distance of their objective, he would be brought forward to participate in the attack. On July 8, as the advance party prepared to cross the Monongahela, though he was still feverish and afflicted with a painful case of hemorrhoids that required him to place cushions on his saddle, Washington rode forward to join Braddock.[34]

The disaster occurred the following day. Subsequent accounts of the battle, blaming Braddock for a tactical blunder in maneuvering his troops carelessly across several streams, have been discredited. Braddock's mistake was not tactical but strategic—not understanding that European rules of war could not be imposed on America without translation. The engagement began as an accident of war rather than a planned ambush. A large reconnaissance detachment from Duquesne of nearly nine hundred men, two-thirds of them Indians,

stumbled upon Braddock's vanguard at the edge of a clearing in the forest, immediately spread out in a semicircle around the clearing, then started firing.

The Virginia troops rushed into the woods to engage the enemy at close quarters. The British regulars, obedient to their training, formed themselves into concentrated rows in the open field. Within the first ten minutes their ranks were decimated and panic set in. Despite heroic efforts by their officers to rally them, the regulars broke. The Virginia troops ended up being caught in the crossfire between the Indians and the British. Entire companies were wiped out by "friendly fire" from British muskets. As Washington described it later, "they behavd like Men, and died like Soldiers," while the regulars "broke & run as sheep before Hounds." Braddock himself, as fearless as he was obstinate, rode into the center of the killing zone and was quickly cut down with wounds in his shoulder and chest.[35]

With Braddock down and the other aides-de-camp casualties, it fell to Washington to rally the remnants. Riding back and forth amidst the chaos, two horses were shot out beneath him and four musket balls pierced his coat, but he miraculously escaped without a scratch, while, as he put it, "death was levelling my companions on every side of me." Irony as well as destiny made its appearance on the battlefield that day. One of the few British officers to survive unhurt was Captain Thomas Gage, whom Washington would encounter as commander of the British army outside Boston twenty years later. In the rear, supervising the horses for the baggage train, was Daniel Boone, who also survived to become an American legend.[36]

It was a complete debacle. Out of a total force of thirteen hundred men, the British and Americans suffered over nine hundred casualties while the French and Indians reported twenty-three killed and sixteen wounded. For the rest of his life, Washington remembered the scenes of the dead and the screams of the wounded as they were being scalped. Braddock died three days into the retreat, and Washington buried him in the middle of the road, then ran wagons over the grave in order to prevent his body from being desecrated and his scalp claimed as a trophy. After reaching safety, Washington wrote his mother and brother to assure them he was alive: "As I have heard . . . a circumstantial acct of my death and dying Speech, I take

this first opportunity of contradicting the first and assuring you that I have not, as Yet, composed the latter."[37]

This piece of understated bravado masked Washington's dominant reaction to the defeat, which initially was disbelief that a force so large and well equipped could be so thoroughly routed. Dinwiddie concurred, confessing that "it appears to me as a dream, wn I consider the Forces & the train of artillery he had with him." But the more Washington thought about it, the more he realized that the very size of Braddock's force, plus his cumbersome artillery train, which eventually proved useless, actually contributed to the fiasco. Braddock himself was not personally to blame, but rather the entire way of waging war he carried in his head, which simply did not work in that foreign country "over the Mountains," where the forest-fighting tactics of the Indians reigned supreme. The relationship between officers and troops had to change in the frontier environment because "in this kind of Fighting, where being dispersd, each and every of them . . . has greater liberty to misbehave than if they were regularly, and compactly drawn up under the Eyes of their superior Officers." For now, given the obvious fact that most of the Indian tribes were allied with the French, any conventional campaign on the Braddock model into the Ohio Country would meet the same fate. The massacre at the Monongahela was a costly and painful way to learn this hard lesson, but Washington learned it deep down, which was becoming his preferred way to absorb all the essential lessons.[38]

As for his reputation, for the second time he emerged from a disastrous defeat with enhanced status. No one blamed him for the tragedy—Braddock was the obvious and easy target—and he came to be called "the hero of the Monongahela" for rallying the survivors in an orderly retreat. His specialty seemed to be exhibiting courage in lost causes, or, as one newspaper account put it, he had earned "a high Reputation for Military Skill, Integrity, and Valor; tho' Success has not always attended his Undertakings." There was even talk—it was the first occasion—that his remarkable capacity to endure marked him as a man of destiny. "I may point out to the Public," wrote Reverend Samuel Davies, "that heroic youth Col. Washington, who I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so signal a Manner for some important Service to his Country." This proved

prescient later on, but for now it underlined the young man's chief characteristic, which was a knack for sheer survival.[39]

THE REGIMENT

In August 1755, though he was only twenty-three, Washington's ascending reputation made him the obvious choice to command the newly created Virginia Regiment. In the next three and a half years he recruited, trained, and led what became an elite unit of, at times, over a thousand men which combined the spit-and-polish discipline of British regulars with the tactical agility and proficiency of Indian warriors. During this time the main theater of the French and Indian War, now officially declared, moved north to the Great Lakes, New England, and Canada, making the Virginia frontier a mere sideshow and Washington himself what one biographer has called "the forgotten man on a forgotten front."[40]

But if he languished in obscurity from some larger strategic and historical perspective, the experience as commander in chief of Virginia's army provided his most direct and intensive schooling in military leadership prior to his command of the Continental army twenty years later. Moreover, in part because the historical record begins to thicken during this phase, and in part because the young man was growing up, the mere glimpses we had before become fuller pictures, though still fuzzy at the edges. Finally, the Virginia Regiment itself was very much his own creation, the first institution over which he exercised executive authority, and in that sense was a projection of his own developing convictions as both an officer and an aspiring gentleman.

From start to finish, he complained, as he would throughout the War for Independence, he had been given responsibilities without the resources to meet them. "I have been posted . . . upon our cold and Barren Frontiers," he lamented, "to perform I think I may say impossibilitys, that is, to protect from the Cruel Incursions of a Crafty Savage Enemy a line of Inhabitants of more than 350 Miles extent with a force inadequate to the taske." What he meant was that the

dominant Indian tribes of the Ohio Country, chiefly the Shawnee and Delaware, had interpreted Braddock's defeat as a mandate to maraud and plunder all the English settlements west of the Blue Ridge. The initiative, the numbers, and the tactical advantage were on the enemy's side: "No troops in the universe can guard against the cunning and wiles of Indians," he explained. "No one can tell where they will fall, 'till the mischief is done, and then 'tis vain to pursue. The inhabitants see, and are convinced of this; which Makes each family afraid of standing in the gap of danger." There were no set-piece battles, just savage skirmishes that often ended in massacres. As he saw it, he was responsible for providing security over a region that was inherently indefensible, the epitome of mission impossible.[41]

His effort to change this fatal chemistry began with a plea to Dinwiddie for more Indian allies. "Indians," he claimed, "are the only match for Indians." This was less a statement of racial or ethnic enlightenment than a practical assessment that ten Indians were worth more than one hundred Virginia soldiers in a forest fight. He strongly supported the attempt to recruit Catawba and then Cherokee warriors from the Carolinas and gave orders to his troops "to be cautious what they speak before them: as all of them understand english, and ought not to be affronted." Despite his best efforts, the Indian populations of the region remained resolutely pro-French and the decisive factor in making his mission a wholly defensive holding action, which eventually took the shape of multiple forts or stockades strung out on the west side of the Blue Ridge and garrisoned by detachments of his Virginia "blues."[42]

They were called that because of their distinctive uniforms, which Washington designed himself: "Every officer of the Virginia Regiment is, as soon as possible, to provide himself with uniform Dress, which is to be of fine Broad Cloath: The Coat Blue, faced and cuffed with Scarlet, and Trimmed with Silver: The Waistcoat Scarlet, with a plain Silver Lace, if to be had—the Breeches to be Blue, and every one to provide himself with a silver-laced Hat, of a Fashionable size." The officers' uniforms were but the outward manifestation of Washington's larger goal, which was to make the Virginia Regiment a truly special unit, "the first in Arms, of any Troops on the Continent, in the present War." They were to look sharper and drill with greater preci-

sion than any group of British regulars, and they were to master the mobile tactics of "bushfighting" with Indian-like proficiency. Within a year Washington believed he had created just such an elite force, which, because it was constantly engaged in combat operations patrolling the Virginia frontier, had a battle-tested edge no other colonial or British troops could match.[43]

His pride in them was both professional and personal. "If it shou'd be said," he wrote Dinwiddie, "that the Troops of Virginia are Irregulars, and cannot expect more notice than other Provincials, I must beg leave to differ, and observe in turn, that we want nothing but Commissions from His Majesty to make us as regular a Corps as any upon the Continent." He had come to regard himself as superior to anyone, British or American, in conducting this kind of guerrilla war, and it rankled him that neither he nor his troops were paid at the same rate as British regulars. "We cannot conceive," he complained to Dinwiddie in what turned out to be prophetic language, "that because we are Americans, we shou'd therefore be deprived of the Benefits Common to British Subjects." His protest on this score was more personal than ideological; that is, it derived less from any political convictions about colonial rights than from his own disappointment that neither he nor his regiment were sufficiently appreciated. In the spring of 1756 he traveled all the way to Boston, his first trip to the northern colonies, to plead his case for equal pay and higher rank as a British officer to William Shirley, then acting commander for North America, who listened attentively but did nothing. He was a serious young man who took himself and his Virginia Regiment seriously, and expected others to do the same.[44]

He also managed to combine a broad-gauged grasp of his mission, in all its inherent frustrations, with a meticulous attention to detail. He drafted literally thousands of orders that all began "You are hereby ordered to . . ." and then proceeded, in language more incisive and grammatically cogent than his earlier writing, to focus tightly on a specific assignment: If you come upon a massacred settlement, harvest the corn crop before moving on; when constructing stockades, clear the surrounding trees and brush beyond musket range (a lesson he had learned from Fort Necessity); when a ranger in the regiment is killed in action, continue his salary for twenty-eight days to pay for

his coffin; if ambushed in a clearing, rush toward the tree line from which the shots came while the enemy is reloading. Officers were held to a higher standard of deportment, to include controlling their wives: "There are continual complaints to me of the misbehavior of your wife," he apprised one captain. "If she is not immediately sent from the camp . . . I shall take care to drive her out myself, and suspend you." The old adage applied: if God were in the details, Colonel Washington would have been there to greet Him upon arrival.[45]

The raw material from which Washington recruited his regiment was raw indeed. He kept several rosters of the enlisted men, that reveal that most of his recruits were recently arrived immigrants, primarily from England, Ireland, or Scotland, or second-generation carpenters, bricklayers, and tanners from the Pennsylvania or Virginia backcountry. Washington duly recorded their names, age at enlistment, height, trade, place of origin, then a brief physical description: "Dark Complexion & Hair, lame in his right thigh by a wound"; "Fair Complexion, sandy Hair, well made"; "Red face, pitted with the small pox, Red Hair." Though he maintained a proper social distance from the enlisted men, he knew most of them personally. And though most of them were older than he was, he cultivated the image of a caring but strict father toward his children.[46]

Discipline was harsh. Those found guilty of drunkenness or lewd behavior sometimes received up to a thousand lashes. Deserters, even those who returned voluntarily, faced death by hanging. A surge in desertions in the summer of 1757 produced a string of public executions. "I have a Gallows near 40 feet high erected," Washington boasted to a British officer, "and I am determined . . . to hang two or three on it, as an example to others." He suffered no sleepless nights after endorsing the executions, even when a condemned man made a special plea based on previous bravery in combat. There were clear lines in his mind, and if you crossed them, there was no forgiveness.[47]

He routinely contrasted the discipline of his own regiment with the undependable militia, whom he described as "those hooping, hallowing, Gentleman-Soldiers!" The ranks of most militia units were actually filled with yeomen farmers a notch above his own troops in the pecking order of Chesapeake society. But their short terms of enlistment and inveterate independence made them virtually worth-

less, as he saw it, in a war that put a premium on staying power. They were the wind. His Virginia Regiment was the wall. He described one scene in which a thirty-man militia unit refused to assist in the construction of a fort unless paid forty pounds of tobacco for each day of labor, this despite the fact that the fort was designed to protect their own families from annihilation. On another occasion, when reports of a large Canadian and Indian patrol arrived at his headquarters at Winchester, most of the militia assigned to his command declared their enlistments up and simply walked out. Washington resented that his Virginia Regiment was frequently mistaken for a mere militia unit. He did not believe you could trust in the principle of voluntarism, or the spontaneous expression of public virtue, to meet a wartime crisis. This was one youthful conviction that he never saw fit to abandon; indeed, it foreshadowed his low estimate of militia throughout the Revolutionary War.[48]

His abiding respect for civilian authority, most especially his insistence on strict obedience to the principle of civilian control over the military, eventually became one of his greatest legacies. But when he commanded the Virginia Regiment he violated the principle on several occasions, beginning with the whispering campaign he instigated against Dinwiddie when his requests for higher pay, more troops, and greater discretion in choosing the location of forts were routinely rejected. He opened a separate channel of communication with John Robinson, Speaker of the House of Representatives, blaming Dinwiddie for decisions that left the entire Shenandoah Valley, "the best land in Virginia," vulnerable to Indian domination.[49]

Washington understood the open secret of Virginia politics, which was that the governor's sovereign authority was more theoretical than real, because the legislature had managed to use its constitutional control over money bills as a weapon to limit gubernatorial power. So there were really two power sources to appease, and Washington's covert communications with Robinson represented his realistic response to the bifurcated character of Virginia politics. For over a year he demonstrated considerable dexterity in negotiating a two-track approach without Dinwiddie's knowledge.[50]

By 1757, however, the relationship with Dinwiddie had deteriorated badly, and the official correspondence became loaded with

mutual accusations of deceit. Washington charged Dinwiddie with encouraging hostile gossip among the burgesses about his conduct of the war, which was precisely what he was doing to Dinwiddie. In fact, Dinwiddie had resolutely supported Washington in the backrooms of Williamsburg, despite gossipy criticisms from some burgesses that he was submitting inflated estimates of Indian strength in order to promote greater tax levies. Through it all, Washington maintained a posture of absolute probity: "But this know," he wrote Dinwiddie, "that no man that ever was employed in a public capacity has endeavored to discharge the trust reposed in him with greater honesty, and more zeal for the country's interest, than I have done." There was truth in this claim, but not the whole truth, which would have included the behind-the-scenes machinations. Two features of the emerging Washington personality come into focus here: first, a thin-skinned aversion to criticism, especially when the criticism questioned his personal motives, which he insisted were beyond reproach; second, a capacity to play politics effectively while claiming total disinterest in the game.[51]

There was yet another political game he found himself playing, which operated by a wholly different set of rules and at a higher level in the imperial hierarchy. This was the aristocratic game of deference and patronage that he had played successfully with the Fairfax family and had hoped to play with Braddock. The eventual successor to Braddock as the commander of His Majesty's forces in North America was John Campbell, the Earl of Loudoun, who turned out to be another ill-fated and short-lived emissary from London, brimming over with that wicked combination of confidence in his abilities and ignorance of his theater of operations. Upon his arrival in 1756, Washington wrote him in the properly deferential style: "We the officers of the Virginia Regiment beg leave to congratulate your Lordship on your safe arrival in America: And to express the deep Sense We have of his Majesty's Wisdom and paternal Care for his Colonies in Sending your Lordship to their Protection at this critical Juncture." He concluded his letter with a special plea based on the loyalty to Britain's goals embodied in the Virginia Regiment, "as it in a more especial Manner entitles Us to Your Lordship's Patronage."[52]

Lord Loudoun represented the privileged and presumptive aristo-

cratic culture that beckoned to Washington as the epitome of influence. In the Virginia Regiment, on the other hand, officers and rangers were promoted on the basis of their performance, and Washington often resisted efforts by Fairfax to have unqualified friends given commissions. But Britain, and to a great extent Virginia as well, still operated within a social matrix where power flowed within bloodlines and where coats-of-arms trumped merit. Loudoun would have been hard-pressed to distinguish the Alleghenies from the Alps, but by a combination of royal whim and family fortune he controlled British policy and therefore the fate of the Virginia Regiment and its commander. Washington's attempt to solicit his attention and support for a regular commission was almost comical in its fumbling effort to affect the proper deferential style:

> Although I have not the Honour to be known to Your Lordship: Yet your Lordship's Name was familiar to my Ear, on account of the Important Services performed to His Majesty in other parts of the World—don't think My Lord I am going to flatter. I have exalted Sentiments of your Lordship's Character, and revere your Rank; yet, mean not this (could I believe it acceptable). My nature is honest, and Free from Guile.[53]

Loudoun not only ignored the request, but even decided temporarily to disband the Virginia Regiment in order to send several companies to fight in South Carolina. Still determined to make an impression, Washington named one of his forts after Loudoun, which then proved a lingering embarrassment when Loudoun's failure to mount a successful campaign against Cape Breton caused London to recall and replace him. It seems safe to conclude that Washington understood the rules of the aristocratic game, felt obliged to play by its rules to further his career, but often came off as the provincial American incapable of mastering the deferential vocabulary.

For the truth was that he had come to feel superior to his superiors, just as he had come to regard his Virginia Regiment as perhaps the finest fighting unit in North America. He and his "blues" had learned the hard way how to fight this kind of war and what it would take to win it. Ultimately, the strategic key remained that fountain-

head of French power at the forks of the Ohio. But another Braddock-style campaign would surely end up in the same heap of blood and sorrow. Washington believed that he, more than anyone else, knew how to mount a successful campaign against Fort Duquesne, and he expressed only disdain for the various schemes British officers proposed. When he received one such proposal in March 1758, he apprised his purported superior that the plan was "absurd," and "A Romantick whim that may subsist in Theory, but must fail in practice." He ended on a sarcastic note, speculating that perhaps the tactical genius who dreamed up the plan "intended to provide them first with Wings, to facilitate their Passage over so Mountainous & extensive a Country; else whence comes this flight?"[54]

Nevertheless, something big was obviously brewing, something designed to move the Virginia frontier off the back burner of British strategy and make the Ohio Country a major theater of operations once again. In April 1758, Washington learned that General John Forbes, a Scotsman with more than thirty years of experience in the British army, had been given the mission of capturing Fort Duquesne with a force over twice the size Braddock had commanded three years earlier. Washington immediately wrote Thomas Gage, a fellow survivor of the Monongahela massacre, requesting an introduction to Forbes. This time he dispensed with the awkwardly obsequious tone of the Loudoun letter and suggested he was not asking a favor so much as offering one himself:

> I mean not, Sir, as one who has favors to ask of him—on the contrary, having entirely laid aside all hopes of preferment in the military line (and being induced at present to serve this campaign from abstract motives, purely laudable), I only wish to be distinguished in some measure from the general run of provincial Officers, as I understand there will be a motley herd of us. This, I flatter myself, can hardly be deemed an unreasonable request, when it is considered, that I have been much longer in the Service than any provincial officer in America.[55]

Forbes and his extremely capable second in command, Henry Bouquet, welcomed Washington's advice, in part because they found

it compelling, in part because the entire expedition moved beneath the shadow of the Braddock tragedy and needed to avoid his mistakes. First, they agreed to retain a large detachment of Cherokees as scouts, which Washington insisted were "the only Troops fit to Cope with Indians on such Ground." Second, they adopted the ranger uniforms of enlisted men in the Virginia Regiment instead of the traditional redcoats of the British army. Forbes called it "Indian dress," adding that "wee must comply and learn the Art of Warr, from Enemy Indians, or anything else who have seen the Country and Warr carried on in it." In effect, Forbes was acknowledging that the Virginia Regiment was the professional model and the British regulars the rank amateurs in this kind of campaign. Third, Forbes and Bouquet agreed to train their lead units in the forest-fighting tactics Washington had developed. If ambushed, the troops should "in an Instant, be thrown into an Order of Battle in the Woods," meaning they should advance in two groups to the tree line and flank the enemy on the left and right while the Indian scouts circled to the rear. Finally, the Virginia Regiment would be included in the vanguard, since, as Washington put it, "from long Intimacy, and scouting in these Woods, my Men are as well acquainted with all the Passes and difficulties as any Troops that will be employed."[56]

In all respects save one, Washington got his way, but the one exception drove a wedge between him and Forbes that eventually caused him to display his bottled-up contempt for British superiors in a form that verged on gross insubordination. The contentious issue was the proper route to Fort Duquesne. Washington presumed the expedition would follow Braddock's course across northern Virginia and southern Maryland, then northwest across Pennsylvania to the forks of the Ohio. Braddock's Road seemed the obvious choice to Washington because it had already been cut. And it was vastly preferable to all Virginians because it linked the prospective bounty of the Ohio Country to the Old Dominion. The clinching argument, as Washington saw it, was that Braddock's Road followed an old Indian path, so that the people who knew the region better than anyone else had identified it as the preferred route.[57]

The trouble was that Forbes's main force was based at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and British engineers had proposed cutting a new road

straight across that colony which would be about thirty miles shorter than Braddock's Road and did not require an initial detour south to the Shenandoah Valley. (It follows much the same course as the modern-day Pennsylvania Turnpike.) Washington proposed a special meeting with Bouquet to protest this decision, which he believed had been unduly influenced by Pennsylvanians eager to make their colony the permanent gateway to the American interior. Bouquet agreed, presuming that, whatever the resolution, Washington would accept it as final. "I See with utmost Satisfaction," wrote Bouquet, "that you are above all the influences of Prejudices and ready to go heartily where Reason and judgment Shall direct." Bouquet listened to Washington's case for Braddock's Road, describing it as sensible and "deliverd with that openness and candor that becomes a Gentleman and a Soldier." Four days later, after consulting with Forbes, Bouquet apprised Washington that his advice had been heard and rejected: "I cannot therefore entertain the least doubt that we shall all now go on hand in hand and that some zeal for the service that has hitherto been so distinguishing a part of your character will carry you . . . over the Alligeny Mountains to Fort Du Quesne."[58]

Bouquet could not have been more wrong. Washington immediately wrote Francis Fauquier, who had recently replaced Dinwiddie as governor of Virginia, to register his vehement opposition to the Pennsylvania route and his "moral certainty" that the entire campaign was now doomed. He used much the same language with Speaker of the House Robinson, describing the decision as a corrupt bargain designed to swindle Virginia out of its rightful role as the archway to the west, calling Forbes an "evil genius" in cahoots with the Pennsylvanians, even threatening to go all the way to London in order to expose and discredit him. Throughout the fall of 1758, as Forbes's army hacked its way across the Alleghenies, Washington kept up a steady stream of criticism: Forbes and Bouquet were both incompetent idiots; the pace of the march, slowed by the need to cut the new road, virtually assured that the campaign would stall in the mountains when the snows came and never reach Fort Duquesne; no one should blame him when this inevitable failure happened and all the world witnessed a repeat of the Braddock fiasco.[59]

The truth of the matter was that both Forbes and Bouquet were

excellent and honorable officers, had very much acknowledged Washington's expertise, and made the decision about the route for logistical rather than political reasons. (Forbes, it turns out, was dying, probably of cancer, and made the difficult trek in a blanket stretched between two horses.) If anyone were guilty of allowing political considerations to color his judgment, it was Washington, whose Virginia prejudices were blatantly exposed in his letters to Williamsburg. Moreover, his prediction that the expedition would never reach its objective proved wrong. The lead elements of Forbes's column, including Washington's Virginia Regiment, reached the outskirts of Fort Duquesne in early November. What happened next might serve as a classic illustration of the unpredictable fortunes of war.

Forbes called a council of war to solicit the advice of his officers about how to proceed. The ghost of Braddock had hung over the campaign from the start, and the officers urged caution. Washington himself argued that an assault would be "a little Imprudent" because no one knew the size of the garrison inside Fort Duquesne. Forbes reluctantly agreed. Matters were now at a stalemate, and Washington expressed personal satisfaction that his intimations of futility were coming true, even though he had a hand in the apparent outcome.[60]

But on the next day, November 12, the Virginia Regiment encountered a reconnaissance patrol out from the fort. In the skirmish that ensued, Washington stepped between two groups of his own troops that were mistakenly firing at each other, using his sword to knock up their muskets. (Many years later, in 1786, he claimed that his life was in greater danger at this moment than at the Monongahela or at any time during the American Revolution.) The regiment suffered heavy casualties, most the result of "friendly fire," but captured three prisoners who reported that Fort Duquesne was undermanned and vulnerable. Forbes ordered an immediate assault with Washington and his troops part of the vanguard. (Washington was so concerned about surprise that he ordered all the dogs in the regiment killed before the attack.) But when they reached Fort Duquesne, it was deserted and burning. There was no battle because the French troops, recognizing they were outnumbered, had fled down the Ohio the previous day. It was an empty, anticlimactic victory-of-sorts. Critical of Forbes to the end, Washington complained to Fauquier that not enough troops

were left behind to rebuild and garrison the fort, which would probably be recaptured and lead to a repeat of the whole bloody business on the Virginia frontier the following year.[61]

How to explain Washington's insubordinate behavior during the Forbes campaign, which proved to be an atypical chapter in his long career as a soldier and statesman? Three overlapping explanations suggest themselves, each perhaps containing a portion of the answer. First, he was still very young, only twenty-six, headstrong about his own prowess as the founder of the Virginia Regiment, and overeager to ingratiate himself with the planter elite in Virginia, which had vested interests in making Braddock's Road the preferred route into the Ohio Country. Second, he mistakenly regarded Bouquet and Forbes as updated versions of Braddock and Loudoun, imperious symbols of British privilege who thought of American colonists in much the same way colonists thought of Indians, namely as a semi-civilized inferior people. He was factually wrong on this score, but his experience of British authority still smoldered, and his own sense of pride gave that experience a special edge of resentment. Third, and finally, he was in emotional turmoil at this moment, because he had fallen in love with one woman and was about to marry another.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

THE WOMAN he was planning to marry was Martha Dandridge Custis, probably the wealthiest widow in Virginia, with an inherited estate of eighteen thousand acres valued at £30,000, making her the prize catch of Chesapeake society. (All the other eligible women Washington had previously pursued were also wealthier than he was, extending the male tradition in his line of marrying up.) Washington had begun courting her in the spring of 1758. The preceding year he had launched major renovations at Mount Vernon in anticipation of creating a more suitably lavish household, a risky wager on his future prospects made before he knew of Martha's availability, but a sign that he was confident that an appropriate consort would turn up soon. He probably proposed in June. The following month he stood

successfully for election to the House of Burgesses in Frederick County. On one previous occasion he had permitted his name to be put forward, but had made no concerted effort to win. This time he mobilized his friends to campaign for him and opened accounts with four taverns in Winchester to provide impressive quantities of rum, wine, and beer at the polls. Even as the Forbes campaign was getting underway, he had already decided to surrender command of the Virginia Regiment for a more settled life on the banks of the Potomac with an attractive and much-coveted partner. His thoughts were on the new chapter he planned to open up in his life, east rather than west of the Blue Ridge.[62]

His emotions, on the other hand, were swirling around another subject altogether. Her name was Sally Fairfax, wife of George William. The evidence is scanty, but convincing beyond any reasonable doubt, that Washington had fallen in love with his best friend's wife several years earlier. Just when the infatuation began, and whether it ever crossed the sexual threshold, has resisted surveillance by generations of historians and biographers. What we do know is based primarily on two letters Washington wrote to Sally in September 1758 while serving in the Forbes campaign, and one letter he wrote near the end of his life in an uncharacteristically sentimental mood. In the latter he confessed to an elderly Sally that she had been the passion of his youth, that he had never been able to forget her, "nor been able to eradicate from my mind those happy moments, the happiest in my life, which I have enjoyed in your company."[63]

The earlier letters of 1758 are convoluted documents, in part because the act of writing them threw Washington into such emotional disarray that his grammar and syntax lost their customary coherence, in part because he deliberately used imprecise and elliptical language to prevent any prying eyes from knowing his secret. Here are the most salient passages:

> 'Tis true, I profess myself a Votary to Love—I acknowledge that a Lady is in the Case—and further I confess that this Lady is known to you.—Yes Madam, as well as she is to one, who is too sensible of her Charms to deny the Power, whose Influence he feels and must ever Submit to. I feel the force of her amiable

> beauties in the recollection of a thousand tender passages that I coud wish to obliterate, till I am bid to revive them.—but experience alas! Sadly reminds me how Impossible this is.—and evinces an opinion which I have long entertained, that there is a Destiny, which has the Sovereign Controul of our Actions—not to be resisted by the Strongest efforts of Human Nature.
>
> The World has no business to know the object of my Love, declard in this manner to you—you when I want to conceal it—One thing, above all things in this World I wish to know, and only one person of your Acquaintance can solve me that, or guess my meaning.—but adieu to this, till happier times, if I shall ever see them. . . .
>
> Do we still misunderstand the true meaning of each others Letters? I think it must appear so, tho I would feign hope the contrary as I cannot speak plainer without—but I'll say no more, and leave you to guess the rest. . . . I should think my time more agreable spent believe me, in playing a part in Cato with the Company you mention, & myself doubly happy in being the Juba to such a Marcia as you must make.[64]

In Joseph Addison's *Cato* (1713), Marcia is the daughter of Cato, and Juba is the Prince of Numidia, who is required to conceal his secret love for her. Only someone dedicated to denying the full import of this evidence could reject the conclusion that Washington was passionately in love with Sally Fairfax.

The titillating "consummation" question is almost as irrelevant as it is unanswerable. The more important and less ambiguous fact is that Washington possessed a deep-seated capacity to feel powerful emotions. Some models of self-control are able to achieve their serenity easily, because the soul-fires never burned brightly to begin with. Washington became the most notorious model of self-control in all of American history, the original marble man, but he achieved this posture—and sometimes it *was* a posture—the same hard-earned way he learned soldiering, by direct experience with difficulty. Unlike Thomas Jefferson, he wrote no lyrical tribute to the interior struggle entitled "Dialogue Between the Head and Heart," but he lived that dialogue in a primal place deep within himself. Appearances aside, he

was an intensely passionate man, whose powers of self-control eventually became massive because of the interior urges they were required to master.

Nothing was more inherently chaotic or placed a higher premium on self-control than a battle. He had played a leading role in four of them: one a massacre that he oversaw; the other a massacre that he survived; one an embarrassing defeat; the other a hollow victory. Whether it was a miracle, destiny, or sheer luck, he had emerged from these traumatic experiences unscathed and with his reputation, each time, higher than before. He had shown himself to be physically brave, impetuously so at Fort Necessity, and personally proud, irrationally so in the Forbes campaign. His courage, his composure, and his self-control were all of a piece, having developed within that highly lethal environment that was the Ohio Country, where internal shields provided the only defense against dangers that came at you from multiple angles.

One of the reasons he proved clumsy and ineffectual at playing the patronage game with British officials was that deference did not come naturally to him, since it meant surrendering control to a purported superior, trusting his fate and future to someone else. Though capable of obeying orders, he was much better at giving them. Though fully aware of the layered aristocratic matrix ruled by privileged superiors in Williamsburg and London, he was instinctively disposed to regard himself as better than his betters. The refusal of the British army to grant him a regular commission did not strike him as a statement of his own unworthiness, but rather a confession of their ignorance. His only experience of complete control was the Virginia Regiment and—no surprise to him—it was his only unqualified success.

If we are looking for emergent patterns of behavior, then the combination of bottomless ambition and the near obsession with self-control leaps out. What will in later years be regarded as an arrogant aloofness began in his young manhood as a wholly protective urge to establish space around himself that bullets, insults, and criticism could never penetrate. Because he lacked both the presumptive superiority of a British aristocrat and the economic resources of a Tidewater grandee, Washington could only rely on the hard core of his own merit, his only real asset, which had to be protected by posting multi-

ple sentries at all the vulnerable points. Because he could not afford to fail, he could not afford to trust. For the rest of his life, all arguments based on the principle of mutual trust devoid of mutual interest struck him as sentimental nonsense.

A few other abiding features were also already locked in place. He combined personal probity with a demonstrable flair for dramatic action whenever opportunity—be it a war or a wealthy widow—presented itself. He took what history offered, and was always poised to ride the available wave in destiny's direction. Speaking of direction, he looked west to the land beyond the Alleghenies as the great prize worth fighting for. And although he did not know it at the time, the rewards he received for his soldiering in the form of land grants in the Ohio Country would become the lifetime foundation of his personal wealth. Though he was still developing—the sharp edges of his ambitions were inadequately concealed, his sense of honor was too anxious to declare its purity—the outline of Washington's mature personality was already assuming a discernible shape.

When he resigned his commission in December 1758, the officers of the regiment composed a touching tribute, lamenting "the loss of such an excellent Commander, such a sincere Friend, and so affable a Companion." Washington responded in kind, observing that their final salute "will constitute the greatest happiness of my life, and afford in my latest hour the most pleasing reflections." The regiment had been his extended family for more than three years, but now he was moving on to Mount Vernon to establish a more proper family, over which he intended to exercise equivalent control. Whatever he felt toward Sally Fairfax, she was a forbidden temptation who could not be made to fit into the domestic picture he had formed in his head; memories of her had to therefore be safely buried deep in his heart, where they could not interfere with his careful management of his ascending prospects. Whatever he felt toward Martha Dandridge Custis, she did fit, indeed fit perfectly. They were married on January 6, 1759. Writing from Mount Vernon later that spring, he described his new vision: "I have quit a Military Life; and shortly shall be fix'd at this place with an agreable Partner, and then shall be able to conduct my own business with more punctuality than heretofore as it will pass under my own immediate supervision."[65]

CHAPTER TWO

The Strenuous Squire

OVER THE COURSE of his long public career, Washington made several decisions that shaped the basic contours of American history, but nothing he ever did had a greater influence on the shape of his own life than the decision to marry Martha Dandridge Custis. Her huge dowry immediately catapulted Washington into the top tier of Virginia's planter class and established the economic foundation for his second career as the master of Mount Vernon. His first career as a professional soldier still hovered about his reputation in the form of the title "Colonel Washington." And it apparently still hovered about in his own head as well, since in 1759 he ordered four large busts of military heroes—Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, and Frederick the Great—to decorate the mansion he was already in the process of enlarging. The invoice to his London agent requesting the busts included requests for kid gloves, negligee, a velvet cape, and several purgatives for intestinal disorders. The agent was able to find all the other items, but not the military busts. This was prophetic, because for the next sixteen years Washington devoted his energies to perfecting the elegant lifestyle of a Virginia aristocrat, making his military experiences into memories, but eventually worrying himself sick that he and his fellow Virginia grandees were trapped in an imperial network designed to reduce them all to bankruptcy and ruin.[1]

DOMESTICITIES

HE WAS ENTERING what turned out to be the most settled period of his life. The physical centerpiece for his newfound stability was, of course, Mount Vernon, both the mansion itself and the lands surrounding it. Renovations in the mansion had proceeded apace during his absence in the Forbes campaign, effectively adding a full story to the home he had inherited from Lawrence—or, more accurately, from Lawrence's widow, who died in 1761. Though not in the same league with brick mansions like the Fairfaxes's Belvoir or Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, the enlarged and embellished interiors of the new Mount Vernon were designed to make a statement. The home now visited by more than a million tourists a year looks different than the home that the newly married couple inhabited in 1759—the distinctive cupola, piazza, and several of the grandest rooms were not added until later—but Mount Vernon still effectively announced the arrival of an impressive new member of Virginia's elite. Passing through in the summer of 1760, the inveterate English traveler Andrew Burnaby was suitably impressed: "This place is the property of Colonel Washington, and truly deserving of its owner. The house is most beautifully situated upon a very high hill on the banks of the Potowmac, and commands a noble prospect of water, of cliffs, of woods and plantations."[2]

Burnaby spoke of plantations in the plural because Mount Vernon, like most Virginia estates in the revolutionary era, was not a centralized agrarian factory like the cotton plantations of the antebellum South, but a series of loosely connected farms, each with its own distinctive name, slave workforce, and overseer. Between the time he moved in with Martha and the time he departed for the war against Great Britain in 1775, Washington more than doubled the size of Mount Vernon, from about 3,000 to 6,500 acres, chiefly by buying up adjoining parcels of land when they became available. He more than doubled the size of the slave population, from fewer than fifty to well over a hundred, much of the increase coming from the forty-six new slaves he purchased during this time. Although appearances turned out to be deceptive, the newly ensconced master of Mount Vernon appeared to hold sway over a burgeoning and flourishing enterprise.[3]

The emotional centerpiece of Washington's new world was Martha, who came complete with two young children, Jackie (four) and Patsy (two). If the main source of Martha's appeal was initially more economic than romantic, there is reason to believe that the relationship soon developed into an intimate and mutually affectionate bond of considerable affinity. We cannot know for sure—matters of this sort can seldom be known for sure—because Martha destroyed their private correspondence soon after her husband's death. (Only three letters between them survive, compared to over a thousand between John and Abigail Adams, the most fully revealed marriage of the age.) But later efforts to suggest that Washington's marriage lacked passion, and that the slogan "George Washington slept here" had promiscuous implications, have all been discredited by most scholars.

The fact that they had no children of their own is almost certainly not a sign that they were sexually incompatible, but rather that Washington himself was most probably sterile. Although these are not the kind of questions we can answer conclusively, and it is possible that Martha lost the capacity to conceive after delivering her last child, it is more likely that the man who would become known as the "Father of his Country" was biologically incapable of producing children of his own. As for the suppressed feelings for Sally Fairfax, all the evidence indicates that everyone behaved themselves. Sally and George William Fairfax were the closest neighbors and became good friends of George and Martha, the most frequent guests at Mount Vernon, intimate accomplices in the hurly-burly of the ambitiously genteel social life within the Northern Neck. It seems likely that both Martha and George William realized that their respective partners had a past, but the longer no one mentioned it, the more it became history.[4]

As a stepfather, Washington was dutiful and engaged, especially when it came to Jackie, whom he wanted to receive the kind of classical education that he had missed. In fact, the boy was raised with all the advantages and privileges that Washington himself had been denied: his own personal servant; a private tutor who resided at Mount Vernon; the newest toys and finest clothes, all ordered from

London; his own horses and hounds for foxhunting. The only item Jackie was denied was adversity, and the predictable result began to surface soon after he went to study Latin and Greek with Jonathan Boucher, first at Fredericksburg and then Annapolis. "His mind is a good deal relaxed from Study," Washington admitted to Boucher, "& more than ever turned to Dogs, Horses & Guns." Boucher wrote back to apprise Washington that it was worse than he knew: "I must confess to You I never did in my Life know a Youth so exceedingly indolent or so surprisingly voluptuous: one wd suppose Nature had intended Him for some Asiatic Prince."[5]

If Jackie had been his own son, perhaps Washington would have raised him differently. But he consistently deferred to Martha on all final decisions concerning the children. He was their guardian; she was their parent. He was to provide, but not to decide. So off Jackie went to King's College (now Columbia) in New York—the College of William and Mary was not good enough for him—where he lasted only a few months. In 1773, at age nineteen, he announced his decision to marry Eleanor Calvert, the daughter of Benedict Calvert, a descendant of Maryland's founding family. Under prodding from Martha, Washington acquiesced, then did everything he could to establish Jackie and Nelly in proper style on one of the inherited Custis estates. Poor Jackie predictably failed at managing his plantation and died young, in 1781, just when Washington was sealing American victory in the American Revolution at nearby Yorktown.[6]

Patsy's story was even sadder than Jackie's. Even as a little girl she began to experience seizures that only worsened with time and eventually took the form of almost weekly epileptic fits. The latest London dolls and toys were ordered for her every year, along with medicinal potions, to include—a clear sign of parental desperation—a medieval iron ring with allegedly magical curative power. Even with these efforts, and despite several trips to different doctors and health spas that Washington personally supervised, nothing worked. She died suddenly after one of her seizures in 1773 at the age of seventeen. Washington ordered a black cape for Martha to wear in mourning for the following year.[7]

THE SQUIRE

BEYOND THE DOMESTIC centerpieces of Washington's world at Mount Vernon there lay a broad spectrum of different roles and responsibilities that, taken together, allow us to conjure up several different mental pictures of the mature man in his pre-icon phase. Perhaps the most jarring picture, because it clashes so dramatically with his subsequent reputation as the epitome of public virtue, is that of the indulged Virginia gentleman for whom the phrase "pursuit of happiness" meant galloping to hounds.

And the foxhunt is not just a metaphor. According to his diary, Washington spent between two and five hours a day for forty-nine days in 1768 on horseback pursuing the elusive fox. He also devoted considerable energy to breeding his hounds, who frequently confounded him with their ingenuity at linking up—what he called "lining"—with partners of their own choosing. Especially after 1765, when Lund Washington, a distant relative, assumed many of the managerial responsibilities at Mount Vernon, Washington enjoyed a great deal of leisure time. He traveled to Alexandria, Annapolis, and Williamsburg to take in the horse races. After 1768 his trips were often made in an expensive chariot, custom-made in London, with leather interiors and his personal crest emblazoned on the side. His record of card-playing expenses from 1772 to 1774 reveals that he played twenty-five times a year and just about broke even in his wagers. He purchased his wine, usually Madeira, by the butt (150 gallons) and the pipe (110 gallons). On any given day he enjoyed the attention of two manservants, Thomas Bishop, a white servant who had been with him since the Braddock campaign, and Billy Lee, a mulatto slave, who came on the scene in 1768.[8]

This picture of the provincial aristocrat at play would not be complete without noticing his clothing. His coats, shirts, pants, and shoes were all ordered from a London tailor, but they invariably did not fit. He complained that "my Cloaths have never fitted me well," but the reason for the persistent problem was that the instructions he customarily gave his tailor were misleading. For example, when ordering an overcoat he directed the tailor to "make it to fit a person Six feet high and proportionally made, & you cannot go much amiss." But

Washington was at least two inches taller than six feet and disproportionately made, with very broad shoulders and huge hips. When Charles Willson Peale came down from Philadelphia to paint his portrait in 1772, Washington chose to wear his old military uniform from the Virginia Regiment days. Biographers have speculated that his decision to be depicted as a soldier might have been a premonition of his looming role in the American Revolution. It is also possible that he wore the only suit of clothes that fit him.[9]

The clothing scene is comical, but so is any one-dimensional picture of Washington as a laconic embodiment of Virginia's leisure class. (The Peale portrait, by the way, which is generally regarded as a poor likeness, reinforces the laid-back image, paunch and all.) Most of the time Washington was on horseback he was not foxhunting but riding out to his farms, in effect overseeing his own overseers, offering meticulous instructions about when to harvest his tobacco crop, what fields to plant with corn and peas, how many hogs to slaughter. Or he was riding over to Truro Parish to perform his duties as a vestryman. (A lukewarm Episcopalian, he never took Communion, tended to talk about "Providence" or "Destiny" rather than God, and—was this a statement?—preferred to stand rather than kneel when praying.) Or he was traveling down to a session of the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, where he served on two standing committees and handled most of the veterans' claims. Though his diary entries are usually devoted to the weather—when he describes which way the wind is blowing, he is not being metaphorical—they also record the busy, fully engaged life of a typical Virginia planter with multiple responsibilities to his family, neighbors, and workers.[10]

Most of those workers were African slaves, at least some recently arrived in Virginia, with distinctive tribal markings and little command of English. Later in his career, especially after his experience in the American Revolution exposed him to a broader set of opinions on the matter, Washington developed a more critical perspective on the institution of slavery. At this stage of his life, however, there is no evidence of any moral anxiety about owning other human beings. Like most Chesapeake planters, Washington talked and thought about his slaves as "a Species of Property," very much as he described his dogs and horses. When they ran away, he posted notices for their

recapture, included descriptions (which is how we know about the African markings), and if they ran away again, he sold them off. One recalcitrant slave named Tom, for example, was shipped off to the Caribbean. Washington's instructions to the ship captain described Tom as "a Rogue & Runaway," but also a hard worker who should fetch a decent price "if kept clean & trim'd up a little when offered to Sale." Washington estimated that Tom was worth one hogshead of molasses, one of rum, a barrel of limes, a pot of tamarinds, ten pounds of sweetmeats, and a few bottles of "good old spirits."[11]

His one concession to the humanity of his slave workers, an attitude shared by Jefferson and many of the wealthier Virginia planters, was that he would not sell them without their consent if it broke up families. He was also solicitous about their health, warning overseers not to overwork them in bad weather and taking personal charge if disease broke out in the slave quarters. But even here his motives were mixed, for if his slaves were incapacitated for an extended period, or died, it hurt the productivity of his plantation. There were trusted slaves who enjoyed considerable freedom of movement and personal discretion, like his servant Billy Lee, and a favorite messenger empowered to make minor business transactions named Mulatto Jack. But these were the exceptions. Most of the slaves who worked his farms he treated as cattle and referred to only by their first names. His instructions concerning the criteria for purchasing new slaves expressed his detached attitude with unintended candor: "Let there be two thirds of them Males, the other third Females. . . . All of them to be straight Limb'd & in every respect strong and likely, with good teeth & good Countenances—to be sufficiently provided with cloathes."[12]

If his views on slavery were typical of his time and his class, there was one area in which he proved an exception to the pattern of behavior expected of a prominent Virginia gentleman: he was excessively and conspicuously assiduous in the defense of his own interests, especially when he suspected he was being cheated out of money or land. He took out an indictment against the local iron maker for fraud when he concluded, wrongly as it turned out, that the iron had been improperly weighed. He disputed the terms of a contract to purchase Clifton's Neck, one of the parcels adjoining Mount Vernon, generating a tangled legal conflict that stayed in the courts for thirty

years. He accused his wine dealer of thievery for not filling one cask of Madeira to the top. Ship captains delivering his wheat and flour for sale in the Caribbean never got the price he thought he deserved. When he hired a friend, Valentine Crawford, to assist in the management of his western lands, he drafted the following instructions:

> as you are now receiving my Money, your time is not your own; and that every day or hour misapplied, is a loss to me, do not therefore under a belief that, as a friendship has long subsisted between us, many things may be overlooked in you. . . . I shall consider you in no other light than as a Man who has engaged his time and Service to conduct and manage my Interest . . . and shall seek redress if you do not, just as soon from you as an entire stranger.[13]

Neither Jefferson nor most other members of Virginia's planter elite could have written such words, for they convey an obsessive concern with his own economic interests that no proper gentleman was supposed to feel, much less express so directly. (Perhaps this is the underlying reason why Jefferson and so many other Virginia planters would die in debt, and Washington would die a very wealthy man.) The picture one conjures up on the basis of this kind of evidence contrasts completely with the Peale portrait of a serenely nonchalant Virginia squire, about to discard his old uniform for his riding clothes, then go off with his horses and hounds. This is not a man "to the manor born," but a recently arrived aristocrat who, before he married a fortune, was accustomed to scrambling, literally dodging bullets; a man unwilling, indeed unable, to take anything for granted. It is not that he was insecure, quite the opposite; but the security he enjoyed had a sharp edge designed to clear the ground around it of any and all threats to its survival. He is the kind of man who will impose impossibly meticulous expectations on his overseers, even on his hounds, and always come away disappointed in their performance. Finally, this is the kind of man who will regard any failure to meet his exacting standards as a personal affront, and persistent failure as evidence of a conspiracy to deprive him of what is rightfully his. Pity the London merchant who has to deal with him.[14]

THE EMPIRE'S FACE

WASHINGTON'S MAN in London was Robert Cary, head of Cary & Company, one of the city's largest and most successful mercantile houses. The Cary connection was another legacy of the Custis estate, since the firm had handled the business of Martha's first husband, as well as her own business during her brief time as a widow. One of Washington's earliest letters to Cary set the tone and defined the subsequent direction of the relationship. He complained about the price his first tobacco shipment received and about the multiple charges for shipping, insurance, and freight, plus Cary's own commission. This was not the kind of arrangement that Washington had expected, and from the very start he threatened to take his business elsewhere. "I shall be candid in telling you," he warned, "that duty to the Charge with which I am entrusted as well as self Interest will incline me to abide by those who gives the greatest proof of their Abilities."[15]

His reference to "the Charge with which I am entrusted" did not just mean his patriarchal responsibility for Martha, Jackie, and Patsy. It also meant the Custis estate, three plantations totaling eighteen thousand acres spread out along the York River in the Tidewater region of Virginia, lands that were worked by more than two hundred, eventually nearly three hundred, slaves. His marriage to Martha made Washington the legal owner of one-third of these "dower plantations," and his status as legal guardian of her children made him responsible for managing the other two-thirds. Mount Vernon may have been his signature statement as a new member of the planter elite, but the Custis plantations in the Tidewater, devoted almost entirely to tobacco, produced the bulk of his cash crop.[16]

And it was the size of his annual tobacco production that made him eligible for the services of Cary & Company. Smaller growers, and by the middle of the eighteenth century the majority of Virginia planters, sold their crops to domestic buyers and purchased most of their consumer goods locally. But the planters with the largest estates, those at the very top of the social pyramid, preferred the consignment system, whereby they consigned or entrusted sale of their crop to mercantile houses in England. At least theoretically, this arrangement assured the highest price for one's crop. But the greatest

advantage of the consignment system was the access it offered to London's shops and stores.

A consumer revolution was brewing in England, producing newly affordable commodities like Wedgwood china for a burgeoning middle-class market. By consigning his tobacco crop to Robert Cary, Washington was joining the elite within the Virginia elite, who could wear the latest English fashions and, in their own provincial world, consume just as conspicuously as members of polite society back at the metropolitan center of the empire in London. A letter from Washington to Cary conveys the flavor of the enterprise: "Mrs. Washington would take it as a favor, if you would direct Mrs. Shelby to send her a fashionable Summer Cloak & Hatt, a black silk apron . . . and a pair of French bead Earings and Necklace—and I should be obliged to you for sending me a dozen and a half Water Plates (Pewter) with my Crest engraved."[17]

Even more eloquent as testimonials to the spending frenzy going on at Mount Vernon were the invoices of goods that were boxed, crated, and shipped by Cary & Company during the early 1760s, when Washington was furnishing and embellishing the house. A veritable cascade of essentials and fineries came pouring in: dessert glasses by the dozen, a hogskin hunting saddle, a custom-made mahogany case filled with sixteen decanters, a 124-pound cheese, sterling silver knives and forks with ivory handles, satin bonnets, custard cups, snuff, felt hats, engraved stationery, wineglasses by the score, prints of foxhunts in the English countryside, even six bottles of Greenough's Tincture with accompanying sponge brushes to clean Washington's notoriously bad teeth. In an average year Washington ordered more than £300 worth of goods from Cary & Company. And this did not include his expenses for new slaves and adjoining land. Modern dollar equivalencies are impossible to calculate with any precision, but a rough estimate would place his spending during five years in the early 1760s in the range of two to three million dollars.[18]

Gradually, it began to dawn on Washington that he was running through his entire Custis inheritance. In 1763 he rejected a request for a loan from an old army friend, explaining that his Mount Vernon expenses had "swallowed up before I knew where I was, all the money I got by marriage nay more." But he was truly stunned the following

year when Cary apprised him that his account was more than £1,800 in arrears, a debt that was only going to increase once Cary began charging 5 percent interest annually on the principal. Washington was caught in the trap that was snaring so many other Virginia planters and that Thomas Jefferson, another victim, described as the chronic condition of indebtedness, which then became "hereditary from father to son for many generations, so that the planters were a species of property annexed to certain mercantile houses in London." In Jefferson's version of the sad syndrome, once a planter crossed the line, it was virtually impossible to recover: "If a debt is once contracted by a farmer, it is never paid but by a sale," meaning bankruptcy proceedings.[19]

Washington's initial reaction to Cary's horrible news was the farmer's perennial lament: bad luck and bad weather. Then he began to question Cary about the tobacco market. He understood that markets fluctuated, almost by definition. But why was it that swings in the market always seemed to go against his interest? And why was it that the price he received for his tobacco stayed low while the prices he paid for Cary's shipments kept going up? He had been complaining about both the quality and the cost of the imported goods from the beginning—the linens wore out in a few months, the nails were brittle, the shoes fell apart after a few wearings, the clothes never fit—but now he accused Cary of deliberately selling him inferior goods and hiking the price by 20 percent because he was a mere American colonist, who presumably was too ignorant to know the difference. He also claimed that Cary and his kind sold him outdated items "that could only be used by our forefathers in the days of yore" instead of the fashionable styles requested. The goods shipped to him, in short, were inferior because Cary regarded him as inferior, a provincial rube, a soft touch, another one of those vapid and vacant Virginia grandees.[20]

The more Washington thought about it, the more he concluded that no amount of diligence on his part, no spell of excellent weather, no favorable fluctuations in the tobacco market, could combine to pull him out of debt, because the mercantile system itself was a conspiracy designed to assure his dependency on the likes of Cary. When Washington thought of that abstract thing called the "British

Empire," he did not think politically, envisioning the Hanoverian kings and the members of Parliament. He thought economically. The face he saw was Robert Cary's. And he did not trust him.

Was Washington's diagnosis of his predicament correct? As far as Robert Cary is concerned, all the evidence suggests that he was an honest merchant who provided his Virginia clients with fair market value for their tobacco, charged them appropriately for their purchases, and did not smuggle excessive charges into his invoices. What's more, historians of the planter class in Virginia have documented the inherent difficulties of growing tobacco as a cash crop. From the very origins of the colony, skeptical observers were troubled by an economy built on smoke and a plant that seemed to possess a unique capacity to deplete the fertility of the soil. More recently, economic historians have called attention to the vagaries of the tobacco market in Europe, chiefly because of Spanish production of cheap tobacco which drove down prices. And most recently, social historians have targeted the lavish lifestyles of the Virginia planters, which combined a blissful obliviousness to the proverbial bottom line with an apparently irresistible urge to imitate the styles and consumption levels of the English gentry.[21]

On the other hand, the consignment system, by its very definition, *did* place Washington's economic fate entirely in Cary's hands, providing him with total control over the price Washington got for his tobacco, the cost and quality of all the goods he received in return, and the debits and credits to Washington's account, as well as the separate accounts kept for Jackie and Patsy based on their Custis inheritance. All the risks of weather, spoilage, market fluctuations, and shipping mishaps fell on Washington's side of the ledger. All the leverage lay with Cary. Every time one of the invoices from Cary & Company arrived at Mount Vernon, it served as a stark statement of Washington's dependence on invisible men in faraway places for virtually his entire way of life. If the core economic problem was tobacco, the core psychological problem was control, the highest emotional priority for Washington, which, once threatened, set off internal alarms that never stopped ringing.

By sheer coincidence, in the fall of 1765, just as Washington was grappling with the bad news from Cary and his own response to it,

the much-despised Stamp Act was scheduled to go into effect in Virginia. This provocative piece of legislation, Parliament's first effort to impose a direct tax on the colonies in order to help defray the costs of managing its expanding empire, generated widespread opposition throughout Virginia and all the American colonies. Washington was not an active participant in the debate, but he was a strongly supportive witness for the opposition. "The Stamp Act Imposed on the Colonies by the Parliament of Great Britain engrosses the conversation of the Speculative part of the Colonists," he observed, "who look upon this unconstitutional method of Taxation as a doleful Attack upon their Liberties & loudly exclaim against the Violation." But while most outspoken opponents of the Stamp Act, those whom Washington called "the Speculative part," emphasized the constitutional argument, his response more directly reflected his personal experience with Cary & Company. Such "ill judged Measures" as the Stamp Act, he suggested, were likely to have the ironic but salutary effect of reducing American dependence on British imports: "And the Eyes of our People—already beginning to open—will perceive that many Luxuries which we lavish our substance to Great Britain for, can well be dispens'd with while the necessaries of Life are mostly to be had within ourselves." Others could make the legal arguments about taxation and representation. Washington's thinking, conditioned by his personal experience with the practical operation of the British Empire, moved instinctively to the much more palpable issue of economic independence.[22]

He also chose to act in a direct and personal fashion to recover his own independence from Cary & Company. Starting in 1766, he abandoned tobacco as his cash crop at Mount Vernon, one of the first of the major Virginia planters to make the change. From now on he would grow wheat, construct his own mill to grind it into flour, and sell the flour in Alexandria and Norfolk. Nor was that all. He built his own schooner—or, rather, had slaves build it for him—to harvest the herring and shad of the Potomac and sell the fish locally or in the Caribbean. He eventually purchased a ship, which he christened *The Farmer,* to carry his flour, fish, and corn to such distant markets as Lisbon. Along the way, he developed a full-scale spinning and weaving operation at Mount Vernon to produce linen and wool fabric for workers' clothing. He was not completely free of tobacco, since it remained the chief crop in his Custis plantations. Nor was he completely free of Cary & Company, which continued to fill annual orders for Washington until 1774, though usually for smaller shipments. Despite these lingering London dependencies, his preferred course after 1765 made it quite clear that this was a man determined to defy the pattern of indebtedness that swallowed up so much of the Virginia planter class, and hell-bent on freeing himself from the clutches of Robert Cary. If only in retrospect, he was already in personal rebellion against the slavish seductions of the British Empire.[23]

FACING WEST

In the first renovation of Mount Vernon, completed in 1759, the main entrance was switched from the east to the west side of the mansion. There were architectural and landscaping reasons for the change, to be sure, but the symbolism of the switch, from an eastward to a westward facing, accurately expressed one of Washington's deepest convictions; namely, that the future lay in those wild and wooded lands of the Ohio Country that he had explored and fought over as a young man. Gaining control of the vast American interior, after all, had been the central achievement of the French and Indian War, at least as Washington understood it. When John Posey, one of his fox-hunting companions, complained about the impoverished condition of his own debt-ridden plantation, Washington urged him to abandon his eastern prejudices and make a fresh start: "there is a large Field before you," he explained, "an opening prospect in the back Country for Adventurers . . . where an enterprising Man with very little Money may lay the foundation of a Noble Estate in the New Settlements upon Monongahela for himself and posterity." Even while ensconced on the eastern edge of the continent at Mount Vernon, Washington spent a good deal of his time and energy dreaming and scheming about virgin land over the western horizon.[24]

The dreaming received considerable inspiration when Washington looked out his back door at the majestic view Mount Vernon afforded of the Potomac. Though it might seem bizarre to modern students of American geography, Washington shared the eighteenth-century version of "Potomac fever" that was especially virulent among Virginians, believing that the very river that flowed past his mansion provided the most direct access to the interior waterways of North America. The illusion probably derived its credibility from the long-standing claim that the western borders of the Old Dominion extended to the Mississippi, or even to the Pacific, producing a habit of mind that regarded Virginia as the gateway to the West. Washington embraced this illusion with passionate intensity—so did Jefferson—and starting in 1762 began joining and leading several organizations for improving navigation on the upstream sections of the river. The Potomac mythology stayed with him all his life. (It even played a significant role in the decision to locate the national capital on the Potomac in 1790.) His strenuous efforts yielded no practical results—the natural water route to the interior did not exist, and the man-made version, the Erie Canal, turned out to be in New York—but they did reveal where his thoughts were flowing.[25]

In 1763 he briefly turned his attention south to an undeveloped plot of ground rather ominously called the Dismal Swamp, which was a geological anomaly, a kind of Louisiana bayou mistakenly plopped down on the border of Virginia and North Carolina. He joined a group of ten investors, most members of the Virginia Council or House of Burgesses, who used their influence as insiders to purchase forty thousand acres of swampland that they proposed to drain and develop. Each investor also agreed to provide five slaves to do the draining and dredging. As with his Potomac improvements, nothing much came of this venture, though Washington held on to his four thousand acres until 1795. An aberration within his more enduring obsession with western land, the story of the Dismal Swamp Company does expose his voracious appetite for acreage of any and all sorts, along with his willingness to use political connections in Williamsburg to get what he wanted.[26]

But the big prize lay over the mountains. Washington's several initiatives to acquire tracts in the Ohio Country crisscrossed in dizzying patterns of speculation, and the jurisdictional problem created by border disputes between Virginia and Pennsylvania, the overlapping claims of different Indian tribes, and the shifting policies of the British government all enhanced the confusion. But at bottom lurked a basic conflict about the future of the Ohio Country: Washington believed it was open to settlement; the British government believed it was closed; and the Indians believed it was theirs.[27]

In 1763, George III issued a proclamation, in effect making the enormous region from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi to the western slope of the Appalachians an Indian reservation, closed to Anglo-American settlers. From the beginning, Washington regarded the proclamation as a preposterous joke. "I can never look upon that Proclamation in any other light," he acknowledged, "than as a temporary expedient to quiet the minds of the Indians." He regarded the Indian tribes of the region as a series of holding companies destined to be displaced as the growing wave of white settlers flowed over the Alleghenies. There was nothing right or wrong about this development, as he saw it. It was simply and obviously inevitable. The Indians, understandably and even justifiably, would resist. After all, they had dominated the region for several centuries. But they would lose, not because they were wrong, but because they were, or soon would be, outnumbered. (Later on, during his presidency, he would attempt to guarantee tribal control over Indian enclaves, his effort to make a moral statement amidst a relentlessly realistic diagnosis of the demographic facts.) And if the strategists in London chose to block this manifest destiny, they were either stupid, not understanding what the French and Indian War had won, or sinister, plotting to reserve the bounty of the American interior for themselves, all the while confining the colonists to the Atlantic coastline.[28]

Washington's most grandiose western venture, called the Mississippi Land Company, was launched in 1763, the very year of George III's proclamation. Fifty investors requested proprietary control over 2.5 million acres on both sides of the Ohio River. In 1765 the company retained a London agent to lobby the Privy Council and Parliament on behalf of their proposal, which envisioned nothing less than the creation of a feudal kingdom in the Ohio Valley with the

settlers as serfs and the owners as lords. The British ministry not only rejected the proposal, claiming such a grant would violate treaties recently signed with the Iroquois and Cherokee, but then, in 1770, approved a similar request for 2.5 million acres by a group of English investors to create a whole new colony called Vandalia in the same region. Washington wrote off his investment as a loss in 1772, eventually describing the experience as clear evidence of the British government's "malignant disposition towards Americans."[29]

His singular triumph, in fact the result of multiple efforts over thirteen years of complex negotiations, was largely a product of his status as a veteran of the French and Indian War. In 1754, during the darkest days of the war, Governor Dinwiddie had issued a proclamation making available 200,000 acres of "bounty land" on the east side of the Ohio River to Virginians who answered the call. Moreover, the infamous Proclamation of 1763 had included one vaguely worded provision, granting 5,000 acres apiece to former officers who had served the cause. (The location of the land was never made clear.) Washington was relentless in pressing his claims according to these two proclamations. He organized the veterans of the Virginia Regiment and led the political fight in Williamsburg for patents on plots of land bordering the Ohio and Great Kanawha Rivers in what are now southwestern Pennsylvania, southeastern Ohio, and northwestern West Virginia. In the fall of 1770 he personally led an exploratory surveying expedition to the Ohio and Great Kanawha, and the following year commissioned William Crawford, another veteran of the regiment, to complete the survey. He devised a scheme, eventually abandoned, to transport immigrants from Germany as indentured servants who would settle his own plots and thereby deter poachers. When that idea fizzled, he gave orders to purchase ten white servants, four of them convicts in the Baltimore jail, to occupy his land on the Great Kanawha. The total domain he claimed for himself, all choice bottomland, exceeded twenty thousand acres.[30]

There were two sour notes. The first came from several veterans, who believed that Washington's land was too choice, meaning that he had reserved the most fertile acreage bordering the rivers for himself and relegated the other claimants to less valuable plots. Washington

effectively admitted the accusation was true, later acknowledging that he had taken "the cream of the country." But when one disgruntled veteran confronted him with the charge, it provoked a thunderous rebuke: "As I am not accustomed to receive such from any Man, nor would have taken the same language from you personally. . . . All my concerns is that I ever engag'd in behalf of so ungrateful & dirty a fellow as you are." As Washington saw it, he was the senior officer of the regiment who had almost single-handedly managed the entire operation to acquire the land. In effect, he deserved what he took. And everyone who questioned his integrity on any matter involving his own self-interest triggered internal explosions of seismic proportions.[31]

The other sour note came from Washington himself. As different governors in Virginia and different ministries in London came and went, different interpretations of British policy toward the American interior also came and went. The core issue was the Proclamation of 1763, which in one version rendered all of Washington's western claims null and void, all his time and energy wasted, because London had declared that the entire Ohio Country was off-limits to settlement. Washington, of course, regarded this version of British policy as a massive delusion that was also wholly unenforceable. The British monarch could proclaim whatever he wished, but the practical reality was that thousands of colonial settlers were swarming across the Alleghenies every year, establishing their claims, not by any legal appeal to colonial or British authority, but by the physical act of occupying and cultivating the land: "What Inducements have Men to explore uninhabited Wilds but the prospect of getting good Lands?" he asked. "Would any Man waste his time, expose his Fortune, nay life, in search of this if he was to share the good and the bad with those that came after him. Surely no!" Washington believed there was a race going on for the bounty of half a continent. If he were to play by British rules, which refused to recognize the race was even occurring, others who ignored the rules would claim the bounty. His solution, elegantly simple, was to regard the restrictive British policies as superfluous and to act on the assumption that, in the end, no one could stop him.[32]

Several biographers have looked upon this extended episode of land acquisitions as an unseemly and perhaps uncharacteristic display of personal avarice, mostly because they are judging Washington against his later and legendary reputation for self-denial, or against some modern, guilt-driven standard for treatment of Native Americans. In fact, Washington's avid pursuit of acreage, like his attitude toward slavery, was rather typical of Virginia's planter class. He was simply more diligent in his quest than most. And his resolutely realistic assessment of the Indians' eventual fate was part and parcel of his instinctive aversion to sentimentalism and all moralistic brands of idealism, an instinct that deservedly won plaudits in later contexts, as disappointing as it was in this one.

Two more telling and less judgmental points have greater resonance for our understanding of the different ingredients that would shape Washington's character. The first is that he retained his youthful conviction that careers, fortunes, and the decisive developments in America's future lay in the West, on a continental stage so large and unexplored that no one fully fathomed its potential. This was a prize worth fighting for. The second is that the interest of the American colonies and the interest of the British Empire, so long presumed to be overlapping, were in fact mutually exclusive on this seminal issue. Constitutional niceties did not concern him. The more elemental reality was that the colonies needed to expand and grow, and the British government was determined to block that expansion and stifle that growth.

Once again there was a personal edge to that conviction. In 1774, Washington learned that Earl Hillsborough, secretary of state for the American colonies, had ruled that land grants to veterans of the French and Indian War promised in the Proclamation of 1763 would be restricted to British regulars. Washington greeted the news with contempt: "I conceive the services of a Provincial officer as worthy of reward as a regular one," he observed, "and can only be witheld from him with injustice." And since Hillsborough's decision was, as he put it, "founded equally in Malice, absurdity, & error," Washington felt no obligation to obey it. As far as the American West was concerned, he was already declaring his independence.[33]

A LAST RESORT

If one were searching for early glimmerings of a broader belief in American independence, Washington's remarks about the Stamp Act—a clear and unequivocal denial of Parliament's authority to tax the colonies without their consent—might be offered up as evidence of his prescient premonitions as early as 1765. Such selective readings distort the larger pattern, however, which suggests that neither Washington nor any other colonist was thinking seriously about seceding from the British Empire at this early stage. Washington expressed his relief that the British government had come to its senses, in part because of pressure from merchants like Robert Cary, and repealed the Stamp Act in 1766. He seemed unconcerned about the lingering constitutional question of Parliament's authority, presumably believing that as long as it remained theoretical it could and would be completely ignored. "All therefore who were instrumental in procuring the repeal," he wrote Cary, "are entitled to the Thanks of every British Subject." He still considered himself such a creature. The wave, it seemed, had passed safely under the ship.[34]

For the next three years, from 1766 to 1769, Washington's mind remained focused on more proximate and pressing problems: cultivating his new wheat crop; worrying about Patsy's health; lobbying in Williamsburg for the "bounty lands" in the Ohio Country. He was not even present at the session of the House of Burgesses in April 1768 when the delegates protested the Townshend Act, a clever (ultimately too clever) measure imposing new duties on colonial imports which the British ministry claimed were not, strictly speaking, taxes. Over the next year, he did not participate in the public debate that raged in Virginia and that produced non-importation schemes in Massachusetts and New York.[35]

Then, in April 1769, he entered the debate in a major and quite distinctive way. In a letter to George Mason, his neighbor down the road at Gunston Hall, Washington began to use the language of a prospective revolutionary: "At a time when our Lordly Masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprevation of American freedom," he wrote, "it seems highly necessary that

something shou'd be done to avert the stroke and maintain the liberty which we have derived from our Ancestors." Petitions and remonstrances to the king or Parliament, he believed, were ineffectual. They had been tried before without success. And their plaintive character irritated Washington, because it seemed to reinforce the sense of subordination and subservience the colonists were protesting against and that he found so personally offensive. The only sensible course, he argued, was a comprehensive program of non-importation that, "by starving their Trade & manufacturers," would exert pressure on the British government to alter its course, as it had done after the Stamp Act. But if the "Lordly masters in Great Britain" persisted in their imperious policies—and here, for the first time, Washington did glimpse the future—then the two sides were on a collision course that could only end in war, which he called "a dernier resort."

Then he added a revealing corollary, very much rooted in his own experience with Cary & Company:

> That many families are reduced almost, if not quite, to penury & want, from the low ebb of their fortunes, and Estates selling for the discharge of Debts, the public papers furnish but too many melancholy proofs of. And that a scheme of this sort [i.e., non-importation] will contribute more effectually than any other I can devise to immerge [remove?] the Country from the distress it at present labours under, I do most firmly believe, it can be generally adopted.

In other words, a collective decision to stop purchasing British commodities would enforce a level of discipline and austerity on the Virginia planter elite that most of its members—and, truth be known, he himself—had shown themselves unable to enforce voluntarily. While such a scheme risked a collision course with the British Empire, it reduced the risk that so many Virginia planters were running of remaining on a collision course with bankruptcy. Washington was not just drawing on his own deep contempt toward English presumptions of superiority; he was also urging Virginians to embrace the same economic self-sufficiency he had decided to implement at Mount Vernon. This was the moment when Washington first began

to link the hard-earned lessons that shaped his own personality to the larger cause of American independence.[36]

It was also the occasion when Washington first played a leadership role in the House of Burgesses on an issue that transcended local election disputes or veterans' claims. On May 18, 1769, he presented the proposal calling for a colony-wide boycott of enumerated English manufactured goods, to include a cessation of the slave trade. George Mason had actually drafted the proposal, but he could not present it himself because his long-standing reluctance to leave the secure confines of Gunston Hall meant that he refused to stand for election to the House of Burgesses. This was an important moment in Washington's public career, for he now became an acknowledged leader in the resistance movement within Virginia's planter class. Back at Mount Vernon in July he wrote to Cary, ordering only a few new items, saying that he intended to observe the terms of the boycott "religiously," but giving Cary final approval, oddly enough, of what to include or exclude.[37]

There was then, in the strange way that history happens, a five-year hiatus. Though Washington himself observed the terms of the boycott "religiously," as he put it again to Cary, the Virginia Association proved as difficult to enforce as Great Britain had found the mercantile empire to regulate. Most importantly, Parliament had repeated its backpedaling pattern after the Stamp Act, this time disavowing all the Townshend duties except the one on tea, it being intended to remain as the principled symbol of British authority. Most observers, Washington included, believed that the wave had once again passed under the ship.

The next surge began in the summer of 1774, in response to parliamentary legislation the colonists called the Intolerable Acts, which closed Boston's port and imposed martial law on Massachusetts as punishment for the orchestrated riot that came to be called the Boston Tea Party. Writing to George William Fairfax, who had moved back to England with Sally the previous year, Washington vowed that "the cause of Boston . . . ever will be considered as the cause of America (not that we approve their conduct in destroying the Tea.)" The escalation of British repression produced an equally dramatic escalation in Washington's thinking, or at least in the lan-

guage he used to characterize British policy. In addition to his familiar themes—petitions were worse than worthless, abstract arguments must be accompanied by economic pressures—now he detected a full-blooded conspiracy against American liberty. "Does it not appear," he asked rhetorically, "as clear as the sun in its meridian brightness, that there is a regular, systematic plan formed to fix the right and practice of taxation upon us?" In a long letter to Bryan Fairfax, George William's half brother, he repeated the conspiracy charge, then added the provocative argument that, unless the colonies stood together against this challenge, Great Britain would "make us as tame, & abject Slaves, as the Blacks we rule over with such arbitrary Sway."[38]

The slavery analogy is startling, both because of its stark depiction of the power emanating from London, and because its potency and credibility grew directly out of Washington's personal familiarity with the exercise of just such power over his own slaves. During the American Revolution several English commentators called attention to the hypocrisy of slave owners wrapping their cause in the rhetoric of liberty. In Washington's case, the rhetoric was heartfelt precisely because he understood firsthand the limitless opportunity for abuse once control was vested in another. He did not see himself as a hypocrite so much as a man determined to prevent the cruel ways of history from happening to him.

His belief that a British conspiracy was afoot serves as an almost textbook example of the radical Whig ideology that historians have made the central feature of scholarship on the American Revolution for the past forty years. These historians have discovered a cluster of ideas about the irreconcilable tension between liberty and power that English dissenters, called "the Country Party," hurled at the Hanoverian court and the inordinately long-standing ministry of Robert Walpole in the middle third of the eighteenth century. There is now a well-established consensus that many prominent American revolutionary thinkers, including John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and George Mason, were familiar with the writings of such English Whigs as John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, and Viscount Bolingbroke, and that their response to Parliament's legislative initiative in the 1760s was at least partially shaped by what they read about the

inherently corrupt and conniving character of British government as depicted by the Country Party.[39]

There is some reason to believe that Washington's political vocabulary grew in this more radical direction because of increased interaction with Mason in the summer of 1774. Mason was generally regarded as Virginia's most learned student of political theory, well versed in all the Whig writers. He and Washington conferred several times in July as Mason was drafting the Fairfax Resolves, which also warned of a concerted British plan to make all colonists into slaves and imposed the dramatic dichotomy of English corruption and American virtue over all its recommendations. Washington actually chaired the meeting in Alexandria where the Fairfax Resolves were adopted. (The most important recommendation was for convening a Continental Congress to approve a comprehensive boycott of British imports.) Washington's escalating rhetoric, in short, probably reflected the intensive collaboration with Mason, who provided him with instruction on the language of radical Whig ideology.[40]

Interestingly, Washington himself acknowledged that he was an unsophisticated student of history and English politics, and that "much abler heads than my own, hath fully convinced me that it [current British policy] is not only repugnant to natural right, but Subversive of the Laws & Constitution of Great Britain itself." But he placed the emphasis for his radical evolution elsewhere, indeed inside himself: "an Innate Spirit of freedom first told me," he explained, "that the Measures which [the] Administration hath for sometime been, and now are, most violently pursuing, are repugnant to every principle of natural justice."[41]

While we cannot know, at least in the fullest and deepest sense, where that voice inside himself originated, it does seem to echo the resentful voice of the young colonel in the Virginia Regiment, bristling at the condescending ignorance of Lord Loudoun and the casual rejection of his request for a regular commission in the British army. It harks back to the voice of the master of Mount Vernon, lured by Cary & Company (and, truth be told, his own urge to replicate the lifestyle of an English country gentleman) into a mercantile system apparently designed to entrap him in a spiraling network of debt. (Indeed, less than a year earlier, in November 1773, when he had

instructed Cary to pay off the remainder of his debt with funds from Patsy's inheritance, Cary had refused, correctly claiming that the two accounts were not transferable.) The voice also resonates with the same outraged frustration he felt whenever some distant and faceless British official, the most recent version of the vile breed being Earl Hillsborough, blocked his claim for western lands, allegedly to protect Indian rights but more probably, he believed, to reserve the land for London cronies.

All of which is to suggest that Washington did not need to read books by radical Whig writers or receive an education in political theory from George Mason in order to regard the British military occupation of Massachusetts in 1774 as the latest installment in a long-standing pattern. His own ideological origins did not derive primarily from books but from his own experience with what he had come to regard as the imperiousness of the British Empire. Mason probably helped him to develop a more expansive vocabulary to express his thoughts and feelings, but the thoughts, and even more so the feelings, had been brewing inside him for more than twenty years. At the psychological nub of it all lay an utter loathing for any form of dependency, a sense of his own significance, and a deep distrust of any authority beyond his direct control.

He spent the first week of August in Williamsburg at the Virginia Convention, called to select seven delegates to the Continental Congress. When all the votes were counted, he came in third, just behind Richard Henry Lee and comfortably ahead of Patrick Henry. The vote was a measure of his growing stature as a stalwart, cool-headed leader of the protest movement in Virginia. (As one of his ablest biographers put it, his fellow burgesses knew that Henry could be counted on to say the magnificent thing, whereas Washington could be counted on to say little, but do the right thing.) Off he then went to Philadelphia, where he performed according to form: silent during the debates but thoroughly dedicated to opposing the Intolerable Acts and supporting a rigorous Continental Association against British imports.[42]

While in Philadelphia he received a letter from Robert McKenzie, a veteran of the Virginia Regiment who had subsequently obtained a commission in the British army, warning him that the colonial cause

was hopeless, that "all the best characters" were on the other side. Since Washington regarded himself as a charter member of that exclusive club, he diplomatically questioned McKenzie's assessment, then offered his own best guess at where history was headed: "more blood will be spilt on this occasion (if the Ministry are determined to push matters to an extremity) than history has ever yet furnished instances of in the annals of North America." Before he left town he purchased a new sash and epaulets for his military uniform, inquired about the price of muskets, and ordered a book by Thomas Webb entitled *A Military Treatise on the Appointments of the Army.* Though he still hoped it could be avoided, he was preparing for the last resort.[43]

THE SELF-EVIDENT EXCEPTION

ONCE BACK at Mount Vernon his mind moved along two separate tracks. While a political crisis of enormous magnitude was obviously in the air, there had been crises before, and each time the British government had stepped back from the precipice. Although newspaper reports were hardly encouraging, with some suggesting that George III had ordered his European ambassadors to regard the American colonies as already in a state of rebellion, Washington remained cautiously optimistic that cooler heads in London would again prevail. "There is reason to believe," he explained in February 1775, that "the Ministry would willingly change their ground, from a conviction the forcible measures will be inadequate to the end designed." Now at any rate was not the time for rash or provocative decisions. "A little time must now unfold the mystery," he cautioned, "as matters are drawing to a point."[44]

Washington chose to use that time to recover familiar rhythms. He chaired meetings of the Potomac Company, where fifty "Negro Men" were hired to dredge the upper reaches of the river. He worked extensively on settling business associated with the now empty Fairfax estate at Belvoir. He outfitted a new expedition to occupy and develop his large tract of land on the Great Kanawha, this despite the

fact that Lord Dunmore, the new governor of Virginia, apprised him that all his surveys of the land in the Ohio Country had been voided. Even more defiantly, he decided to go forward with another major renovation of Mount Vernon, the one that gave the mansion the size and style we recognize today. The decisions to pursue his land claims and renovate Mount Vernon on the cusp of an imperial crisis seem to suggest more than a guarded hope that the crisis would pass. They constitute a personal statement that his own agenda would not be dictated by men he had contemptuously described as those "Lordly Masters in Great Britain."[45]

The other track, just the opposite of his defiant recovery of routine, led toward war and what turned out to be destiny. During the winter and spring of 1775, county militia units, calling themselves "independent companies," were being organized throughout the colony. As Virginia's most famous war hero, Washington was the obvious choice as commander, and by March five independent companies had invited him to lead them. Also in March, a second Virginia Convention was called, this time in Richmond, and ordered that the colony "be immediately put into a posture of Defence." This was the occasion when Patrick Henry gave his famous "liberty or death" speech, but it also marked the moment when military preparation replaced political argumentation in Virginia as the highest priority. With that change, Washington succeeded orators like Henry as the most crucial figure. In the balloting to select delegates to the Second Continental Congress he received 106 of the 108 votes cast.[46]

Throughout April and May, Mount Vernon became the unofficial headquarters for planning Virginia's response to the burgeoning crisis and Washington became the acknowledged central player. One small event captured the headiness of the times, as well as Washington's emerging role as the singular, soon to become transcendent, leader. Mason had drafted a proposal for the Fairfax Independent Company, recommending that all officers be elected annually and rotate between officer and enlisted status on a regular basis. The notion that an army should be organized democratically was a truly radical suggestion, and one that Washington himself regarded as ridiculous, but Mason coupled his proposal with a corollary designed to disarm critics who doubted that such an arrangement could ever work: namely,

that Washington would be the exception to the rotation principle, thereby providing the enduring stability required. As Mason put it, "the exception made in favor of the gentleman who by the unanimous vote of the company now commands it, is a very proper one, justly due to his public merit and experience . . . , peculiarly suited to our circumstances, as was dictated, not by compliment, but conviction." It was a prophetic premonition of Washington's abiding role throughout his subsequent career as the elite exception that proved the egalitarian rule.[47]

The late spring of 1775 was an intense time for both American independence and the public career of George Washington, a crowded moment when a great deal of history happened quickly, when events dictated decisions that in turn determined the direction of an emerging nation and the character of its preeminent hero. For all those reasons, this is an extended moment worth lingering over, searching through the dizzying details of the story for at least the outline of answers to the three most salient questions: First, when did Washington conclude that war with Great Britain was inevitable? Second, how and why was Washington singled out to lead what soon became known as the Continental army? And third, what was Washington's response, not just publicly, but personally, to this assignment?

The answer to the first question is reasonably if not perfectly clear. When the British troops occupied Boston in 1774, Washington believed an important line had been crossed. After that date, war became a distinct possibility that could only be avoided if the British ministry altered its course. Over the course of the following year, as the evidence mounted that George III and his ministers fully intended to make Massachusetts an object lesson of where sovereign power resided within the British Empire, Washington believed that war had become a probability. When he departed Mount Vernon for Philadelphia on May 4, 1775, he took along his military uniform, both a sign and a statement of his aggressive intentions.

But the truly clinching evidence came in mid-May, when reliable news of the actions at Lexington and Concord reached Philadelphia, along with reports from London that a major British force was on the way to support General Thomas Gage's beleaguered garrison in Boston. As he wrote to George William Fairfax in London, Wash-

ington's mind was made up: "Unhappy it is though to reflect, that a Brother's Sword has been sheathed in a Brother's breast, and that, the once happy and peaceful plains of America are either to be drenched with Blood, or Inhabited by Slaves. Sad alternative! But can a virtuous Man hesitate in this choice?" His cash accounts for early June show purchases of a tomahawk, several cartouch boxes, new coverings for his holsters, and five books on the military art. He was preparing to go to war.[48]

But how was he selected to lead the entire American army? That question has provoked a lively debate across several generations of biographers and historians. In his autobiographical recollection of the decision, John Adams claimed the lion's share of credit for choosing Washington, suggesting that he overruled the New England delegation in the Continental Congress, which had presumed that one of their own would be chosen because the current battle was raging around Boston. Adams's claim is almost surely a self-serving piece of mischief designed to exaggerate his own influence; it obscures the more elemental fact that, once the members of the Congress realized that they were facing a military as well as political crisis, the selection of Washington as the military commander was a foregone conclusion. In fact, at that confused and highly improvisational moment within the Congress, more delegates could agree that Washington should lead the American army than that there should be an American army at all. His unanimous elevation to the position as commander in chief actually preceded the creation of a national military force that he could command.[49]

Why did the choice seem so obvious? The short answer is that the appointment of a Virginian was politically essential in order to assure the allegiance of the most populous and wealthiest colony to the cause, and Washington was unquestionably the most eligible and qualified Virginian. Another short answer, subsequently offered by Adams as a joke, was that Washington was always selected by deliberative bodies to lead, whatever the cause, because he was always the tallest man in the room. Even as a joke, however, Adams was making a serious point that a veritable legion of his contemporaries made, especially upon first meeting Washington; namely, that he was physically majestic. As Benjamin Rush, the Philadelphia physician and

staunch revolutionary, put it: "He has so much martial dignity in his deportment that you would distinguish him to be a general and a soldier from among ten thousand people." First impressions and appearances are often described as misleading, but in Washington's case they established the favorable initial context for all subsequent judgments. In the highly charged atmosphere of the Continental Congress, where nervous men—all prominent figures in their own respective colonies—tended to talk too much, Washington's sheer physicality made his reserve and customary silence into a sign of strength and sagacity.[50]

Looking backward from June 1775, with all the advantage of hindsight, one can see it coming. During the sessions of the Congress in May, Washington was the only delegate to attend in military uniform and was asked to chair four committees charged with military readiness. (In the First Continental Congress he had been given no committee assignments at all.) When he approached Philadelphia in his custom-built chariot in early May, a throng of five hundred riders escorted him into the city, a tribute accorded no other delegate. Nearly a year earlier, at the First Continental Congress, he had been the beneficiary of a widely circulated rumor that Adams recorded in his diary: "Coll Washington made the most eloquent Speech at the Virginia Convention that ever was made. Says he, 'I will raise 1000 Men, Subsist them at my own Expence, and march myself at their Head for the Relief of Boston.' " This was a complete fabrication. Washington had made no such speech, in fact had made no speech at all. But the mythology was already starting to build. As the need intensified for a symbol of inter-colonial unity who could consolidate the disparate and even chaotic response of thirteen different colonies to the British military threat, he satisfied the requirements visually and politically more completely than anyone else.[51]

Finally, what was going on inside Washington's own mind and heart? His diary entries for June 15 and June 16, respectively the day he was appointed and the day he delivered his brief acceptance speech to Congress, are characteristically unhelpful, telling us only where he dined and spent his evenings. The speech itself makes two distinctive points: that he did not feel qualified for the position, and that he would serve without pay. Here is the most revealing passage:

"But lest some unlucky event should happen unfavourable to my reputation, I beg it may be remembered by every Gentn in the room, that I this day declare with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the Command I (am) honoured with."[52]

One is tempted to read this kind of public modesty with a skeptical eye, as a ritualized statement of humility designed to demonstrate gentlemanly etiquette, rather than as a candid expression of what he truly felt. After all, Washington had been talked about as the leading candidate for the job of military commander for several weeks, had done nothing to discourage such talk, and had been wearing his uniform as a rather conspicuous statement of his candidacy. But in his private correspondence to his wife and brother Washington also described his appointment as "a trust too great for my capacity" and even claimed that he had done everything in his power to avoid it. He said much the same thing to his brother-in-law, Burwell Bassett:

> I am now Imbarked on a tempestuous Ocean from whence, perhaps, no friendly harbour is to be found. . . . It is an honour I wished to avoid. . . . I can answer but for three things, a firm belief of the justice of our Cause—close attention to the prosecution of it—and the strictest Integrity—If these cannot supply the places of Ability & Experience, the cause will suffer & more than probably my character along with it, as reputation derives its principal support from success.[53]

What, then, is going on here? It helps to recognize that Washington engaged in the same pattern of postured reticence on two subsequent occasions: when he agreed to chair the Constitutional Convention; and when he accepted the office of the presidency. In all three instances he denied any interest in the appointment, demeaned his own qualifications, and insisted that only a unanimous vote left him no choice but to accept the call. The pattern suggests he had considerable trouble acknowledging his own ambitions. His claim that he had no interest in the commander-in-chief post was not so much a lie as an essential fabrication that shielded him from the recognition that, within a Continental Congress filled with ambitious delegates, he was the most ambitious—not just the tallest—man in

the room. He needed to convince himself that the summons came from outside rather than inside his own soul.

If Washington was playing hide-and-seek within himself on the question of his own ambition, he was being honest and realistic about his qualifications to lead the American army to victory. Though a battle-tested veteran, he had never commanded any unit larger than a regiment. He had no experience deploying artillery or maneuvering cavalry and no background whatsoever in the engineering skills required to construct defensive positions or conduct sieges. Compared to the British officers he was sure to face on the battlefield, he was a rank amateur. We do not know the specific titles of the military books he purchased before departing Philadelphia, but they represented his effort to teach himself how to organize an army. The misgivings he expressed in the wake of his appointment, then, were not affectations of false humility, but rather rigorously realistic assessments during an intense moment of self-evaluation in which he was mercilessly honest about his prospects for success. While everyone around him was caught up in patriotic declarations about the moral supremacy of the American cause, Washington remained immune to the inflated rhetoric, keenly aware that a fervent belief in the worthiness of a crusade was no guarantee of its ultimate triumph.

And he was right. For the larger truth was that no one was qualified to lead an American army to victory, because the odds against such an outcome appeared overwhelming. No matter how glorious the cause, the prospects of thirteen disparate and contentious colonies defeating the most powerful army and navy in the world were remote in the extreme. It would take almost exactly a year before Thomas Jefferson would draft the document in which the delegates in the Continental Congress pledged "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor" on behalf of American independence. Washington fully recognized that by accepting the appointment as commander in chief he was making a personal pledge before anyone else. And if he failed in the high-stakes gamble, his Mount Vernon estate would be confiscated, his name would become a slur throughout the land, and his own neck would almost surely be stretched.[54]

If the decision to marry Martha Custis most shaped his own life, the decision to take command of the Continental army most shaped

his place in history. He made it with his eyes open, with a realistic sense of how much was at stake and with a keen appreciation of what he was up against. In late June, as he was preparing to leave Philadelphia, his thoughts turned momentarily to those lands on the Great Kanawha which royal officials were attempting to deny him. If the military campaign floundered at the start, and he was able to avoid capture, that was the place to which he would flee, taking with him as many troops as he could salvage, holding out as a guerrilla band in wilderness terrain he knew so well and that no British army could conquer. If he was looking for omens, the first one was not encouraging. He assumed command of sixteen thousand militia outside Boston on July 3, 1775, the twenty-first anniversary of his ignominious defeat at Fort Necessity. This time he could not afford to lose.[55]

CHAPTER THREE

First in War

ALTHOUGH THERE WAS no way he could have known it at the time, Washington was assuming command of the army in the longest declared war in American history. He was forty-three years old when he rode out of Mount Vernon toward Philadelphia. He was fifty-one when he arrived back at Mount Vernon on Christmas Eve, 1783, the most famous man in the world. He started his odyssey with the presumption that he was fighting a war for American independence, nothing more and nothing less. He ended it with the realization that the war for independence had become the American Revolution. Which is to say that the cause he headed had not only smashed two British armies and destroyed the first British Empire, it had also set in motion a political movement committed to principles that were destined to topple the monarchical and aristocratic dynasties of the Old World.

The American Revolution was the central event in Washington's life, the crucible for his development as a mature man, a prominent statesman, and a national hero. And while zealous students of the Civil War might contest the claim, the movement that Washington found himself heading was also the most consequential event in American history, the crucible within which the political personality of the United States took shape. In effect, the character of the man and the character of the nation congealed and grew together during an extended moment of eight years. Washington was not clairvoyant