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Willard Sterne Randall, whose biography of Thomas Jefferson was hailed as “outstanding” by *The Wall Street Journal* and whose *Benedict Arnold: Patriot and Traitor* was praised as “riveting” by *The New York Times*, turns his attention to the founding father of our country—George Washington. Randall tells the fascinating tale of a man who turned an impoverished childhood into a life of creative rebellion. He follows Washington’s rise to greatness as he turns from managing plantations to becoming a professional soldier and eventually joining in the fight against taxation without representation, which would spark the American Revolution.

George Washington Details

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From Reader Review George Washington for online ebook

Kevin Kizer says

George Washington's mom was kind of a bitch: she didn't want the States to separate from the Crown and she didn't think her son should be president.

Katbus says

I sought this book out knowing hardly anything about Washington. I was looking for a general understanding of him as a person, not just as a president, founding father, and war hero. This book hit that on the nose. It includes details of the time and about people in his life that make it approachable to people without much foreknowledge of the subject. Since most of those details come from direct sources, mostly letters, conclusions can be drawn without too much objectivity from the author. He manages to present the information in a way that explains why historians tend to glorify Washington, without doing it himself. While sticking to the facts makes the narrative sometimes a bit dry, I would not say that it is ever actually boring. It is a bit of a slow read. I was tempted at times to pick up something lighter to read as a break. Overall, though, I feel that I have a much greater understanding of the man I set out to get to know. If you've got some time and determination it's worth a read.

Michelle says

Read this as a young History teacher & used sections of it in my classes to prep my students for their "mock trial" of Benedict Arnold. This particular bio delves into the people in his life & his relationships with many of them.

Chuck Heikkinen says

An account of the Washington, the man, in both his private and public life. The narrative of the Revolutionary War and the political battles behind the scenes between the Continental Congress and Washington over supplies and cooperation gives a very different view (from the secondary education history texts I had) of how united the colonies were during the War, and the difficulties that inflicted on the progress of the fighting. It also is enlightening regarding the British commanders' reluctance to pursue the revolutionaries, thus allowing Washington and his army to regroup and eventually win.

Heather Baldus says

After reading the first chapter I found it filled with many assumptions, presumptions and worse the horrible unnecessary dramatization....one of the most absurd in the first chapter...
"Into Wakefield, the Washington's modest brick house on Pope's Creek, Mary crowded all the furniture she

had inherited, jammed alongside the Washington family's accumulation. When she was pregnant with George Washington, she experienced a shock that may have shaped her relationship with the large child taking shape in her womb. One summer Sunday afternoon, while the family was having dinner with guests from church, a thunderstorm rolled in. A bolt of lightning struck the house and traveled down the chimney and hit a young girl who was visiting the Washingtons for Sunday dinner. The electric current was so strong it fused the knife and fork she was using to cut her meat. She died instantly. The lightning hit with such force that it severely jolted the pregnant Mary Washington, who was sitting only a few feet away. From that time on, Mary Ball Washington cringed and tried to hide whenever lightning passed overhead, burying her face in her hands. For the moment, she recovered, but she became increasingly fearful over the years. She was so happy a few months later when a strong, sound baby was born that she traveled around the Tidewater showing off George Washington to all his cousins for an entire month, before she even had him baptized.

Mary Ball Washington never recovered fully from the shock she had seen and felt. She rarely traveled any farther than church on Sunday and her timorousness touched off a number of clashes with her family, especially her sons, whom she discouraged from taking any risks. In his choice of a military career, George Washington faced a long struggle against a mother who kept him from going to sea as a boy and embarrassed him in front of senior British officers when he was a young aide-de-camp. Even when he became a hero in the American Revolution, she could not understand; in fact she resented his desire to stray from her side and leave the safety of the farm to go off to war."

The unbelievable amount of bullshit in those two paragraphs is astounding. His story about Mary is completely and utterly made up. If you can make any sense of Mr. Randall's citations system you will find that he cites "Memoirs of the Mother & Wife of Washington" by Margaret Conkling (1850), pg 44 for his tale.

Excerpt from Conkling: "But one of the many weaknesses that usually characterize humanity was manifested by this heroic woman. Upon the approach of a thunder-storm she invariably retired to her own apartment and remained there until calmness was restored to the elements. This almost constitutional timidity, was occasioned by a singularly distressing incident of her youth - the instant death, from the effects of lightning, of a young friend, who was, at the moment when the accident occurred, sitting close beside her"

Ms. Conkling makes absolutely no mention of Mary being pregnant or knives and forks melting together which by the way is just wrong because at the time (1732) the colonists would not have used forks and knives to eat meals because they did not become popular in America until decades later.

In fact, of all the times this myth has been repeated (repeated by George Washington Parke Custis in his Memoirs of Washington) none of the "information" included in Randall's telling was every part of it. He inserted this false information so he could make his narrative more dramatic and support his conclusion that it somehow caused Mary to become unreasonable cautious and try to impeded in her son's life and make sure he never left. That is absolutely ridiculous and wrong and is a pathetic attempt to portray Mary as a shrew, unloving woman who her children did not love and could barely tolerate. I cannot believe this man teaches history. The sheer amount of books that he and his wife have churned out in so few years leaves me to believe that they do not put much effort into researching primary sources or checking authenticity.

Bryson says

If you are looking for the definitive Washington biography, look elsewhere. In 560 pages Randall covers Washington's entire life from boyhood through the presidency. By packing 60+ years of critical American

history into a biographical narrative, many fascinating figures such as Ethan Allen and Henry Knox are given only passing descriptions. Randall avoids cumbersome detail and leaves the reader curious to learn more about the man and the time. By that measure, it is a great biography. I would recommend it to anyone who feels like they don't know the Father of Our Country as well as they should. This book is a perfect jumping off point from which to dive into more detailed histories of the early Republic, the Revolutionary War, the Constitutional Convention, the French and Indian War or the crises of the late colonial period. The author is at his best describing the precarious and dangerous pre-Revolutionary decade.

Richard says

An excellent biography chock full of insights and great information that makes our history understandable. For example, how did we get an official separation from Church and State? Without the understanding that the people had to support the official church of England in this nascent country this is hard to understand. So it was not just that people here wanted freedom of religion it was also that they did not want to pay for the establishment religion.

Joe says

An excellent read but not nearly as good as the Ron Chernow book. Reading his Hamilton bio now and again it's good but nowhere near Chernow's Hamilton.

Jodi says

Simply put, this book is amazing. Never before has the real George Washington been presented, and you'll really see what a real-life super hero is all about. If you read any book on Washington, make sure this one is it.

Tom says

This is an excellent Washington biography although probably too in depth for casual readers. Anyone with an interest in American History, Biographies, or World History should read at least one Washington biography in their lives.

Broughps says

Gave me a balanced look at George Washington with lots of new info. New info to me anyway.

Jason says

This is an excellent, one volume, scholarly approach to the life of George Washington. Writing about Washington, and even reading about him, has its difficulties. You immediately are confronted with the myth of the man, THE founder, who seemingly overlooks the shoulder of every leader since then. You are also confronted with the idea that maybe he is not as great as he has been described, that Washington was simply a poor military leader, slave owner, who happened to be at the right place at the right time.

What this 450+ page biography attempts to do is to show why and how Washington became the singular colossus of the United States, while showing him as a complex individual. In this sense, what makes this book different is that Randall has come up with a third way to understand Washington. He shows why some of the early biographers would write of Washington in almost mythological terms, for what he achieved, both personally and professional was so unique. And Randall shows why some of the 20th century's early biographers would have an interest in de-mythologizing Washington.

What Randall pieces together, with a fine, and inviting writing style, is a study of who Washington was, in as close a portrait as possible. He does this by relying heavily on primary sources such as letters, to and from Washington. So the reader will get a fair representation of what Washington was like, put into context of his time, his family, the social expectations on him, and as much as can possibly be ascertained, what Washington's views of himself were. Washington was a very private individual. This made the type of leadership that he wanted to project: quiet, calm, confident and organized; easier to follow and to believe in. Unfortunately, Washington's private personality has made interpreting him much harder for the generations that have passed, hence why he has been mythologized into someone greater than he could be, and at times, debunked by critical scholars. Randall simply, and effectively writes of a man, above his peers, of his time.

This book was written in 1997. Since 1969, the University of Virginia has been editing Washington's papers. As of 2008, most of Washington's post Revolutionary papers, including his two terms as President, have not been edited. Because Randall's book relies heavily on primary sources, the reader will be able to tell a marked difference in the quality of the sections dealing with Washington's early adult hood and as a General, than his later life. So in many ways, this is half a book, a great detailed, one volume account of Washington's early life. But because the biographical community is still years away from having access to much of the primary sources of Washington's later life, the important Presidential years in this book have little to add to a general understanding of his life.

That said, this is a fine, one-volume biography for the general reader who especially wants to understand why Washington's leadership worked so effectively. The reader will come away with a greater understanding of Washington as a driven businessman, military leader, politician, and family man; in many ways ashamed of his lack of formal education compared to his peers; but with unique character and understanding of his age, meshed with his personality, that no one else was capable of putting together on a personal level. The reader will see, probably because of the importance that Washington placed on personal character, why he picked subordinates so poorly at times, either in the military or in politics, for at times Washington valued loyalty over competence or trustworthiness. But Randall also does an effective job of telling why Washington's early life, his development of self control and work to understand and respect so many different types of people made him uniquely qualified to lead the first real Republic in nearly 2000 years.

Shawn says

I read an e-book version of this biography and was disappointed in the number of uncorrected conversion errors. Aside from that, this was a great biography for the reader who is looking for the story of Washington's entire life and not just his presidency or military career. The author presented a balanced view of Washington's life, showing both his failures and his successes. The most important events of his life are covered and there are many selections from Washington's own writing to illustrate the subject's views. Occasionally, the book seems to bog down in superfluous detail. If you are looking for a more scholarly footnoted biography for research, this would not be the book for you. All in all I would recommend this as an excellent introduction to the life, times, and influence of George Washington.

Michelle Sampson says

I really wanted to broaden my book choices and read something non-fiction. I read this last year and can't remember why I picked it up. Nonetheless, some of the book was fascinating. I learned so much about Washington that you don't hear much about. I struggled to finish it though. I can usually get through a book pretty quickly but this one took me a couple of months. The battles he fought, with the exception of the descriptions of the revolutionary war, were difficult to get through. I almost skipped those parts! I am not sure if it was the author's writing or because this was a biography that I struggled to finish it. I was proud that I did finish it!

Margaret says

Better understanding of American history
