



# Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington

*Richard Brookhiser*

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## **Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington** Richard Brookhiser

In this thought-provoking look at George Washington as soldier and statesman, Richard Brookhiser traces the astonishing achievements of Washington's career and illuminates how his character and his values shaped the beginnings of American politics.

Brookhiser recaptures the real George Washington in this against-the-grain biographical study that chronicles a remarkable quarter-century career in public life—a record of achievements that is virtually unmatched by any modern leader. Brookhiser recounts Washington's heroic deeds as general and president, his temperament and training, and reflects upon his legacy.

## **Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington Details**

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# From Reader Review Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington for online ebook

## Danette says

Honestly, much of this was over my head. Or, maybe it just isn't conducive to reading in snatches which is how I have to read.

A biography

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## Rob says

Brookhiser is among my favorite authors. He is concise yet informative. Melodic writing style makes for an easy read.

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## Mary Mimouna says

I'm so glad that I chose this particular biography of George Washington. Not only did I learn about Washington's behavior and actions in the presidency, I also learned a lot about his interior character. The only thing I missed in this biography was I would have liked to know more about the personal relationship George had with his wife. I later learned from the internet that Martha (George's wife) had herself destroyed all of their correspondence, so this probably limits the information available on his personal relationship with her.

Some of the things I enjoyed most about this book were learning that in spite of a very basic education, George continued to self-educate, reading many books on widely ranging topics, and then often writing to the authors for further discussion. Even after retirement, he subscribed to ten newspapers.

Washington had a temper, and learned at a young age to control it. As he was not good at small talk, he kept his mouth closed, and said nothing. He realized that people hung on his every word, and took great care about what he permitted himself to say.

His manners were impeccable. The wife of the British Ambassador wrote that, "Washington had perfect good breeding, and the correct knowledge of even the etiquette of a court, though HOW he had acquired it, heaven knows." The answer was that he had been practicing his manners for half a century since the age of 15.

He was spiritual, rather than overtly religious. He was a great believer in divine providence, as well as good morals. He looked to the ancient Romans for inspiration, as well as to Shakespeare. He was also a Freemason. After some outside reading on Freemasonry, my own conclusion about it was that it was a widespread men's organisation of the the time, populated by rational, intellectual, educated men of good character, professing a belief in God (but less so in miracles and divine revelation), sharing discussion of ideas, and doing charitable good works. I don't see a problem with belonging to such an organization.

I enjoyed seeing Washington's behavior during the Constitutional Convention, and a detailed discussion of the issues during the Convention. I enjoyed learning the details of the problems Washington faced in his presidencies. These included too many visitors, which he solved with weekly receptions for whoever chose to come. The two big problems in his second term included the Whiskey Rebellion, and the fight over Jay's Treaty. I had heard of these, but only learned about them in detail reading this book.

This book was packed full of information, so I read it slowly, and took lots of notes. For this reason, it took me quite some time to read it. I appreciated that it was only 200 pages, yet contained nearly all I needed to make me feel like I really knew Washington and why he was so admired. I highly recommend this book for anyone who is looking to know George Washington and his presidency better. I found Brookhiser a good writer. Every sentence in the book was meaningful and interesting.

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### **Jimmy Reagan says**

This volume makes the perfect primer on why we should care about Washington. It is not a biography per se, but it seeks to rescue Washington from the caricature that he has too often been presented as. I actually read this when I was in my late twenties, but I still recall the impact it made. I had read a biography of Washington in High School, though I have since forgotten the author, that I enjoyed. Too often, however, I reduced Washington to the Parson Weems recreation as cherry-tree chopper instead of the vibrant man he was. Washington is anything but cardboard and cold!

Brookhiser holds conservative principles that some will dislike, but only made the book better for me. He drew a good parallel between Washington and today and illustrated where we ought to return to the wisdom he showed. The 20 years that have passed since he wrote this book only make it more so.

It was this book that taught me that reading about presidents beyond textbooks could be both enjoyable and rewarding. I can't imagine how you could not enjoy this book.

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### **Alisa says**

Reading Richard Brookhiser's *Founding Father* in 2016 was interesting. If you want to see what the opposite of what George Washington is, just look at Donald Trump. Brookhiser explores three aspects of Washington: his career, his character, and his role as the founding father. In every chapter, we see Washington as a man who could control his passions, who was unfailingly polite, who literally put himself in the trenches with the men he commanded. In 2016 we've elected a man who has public temper tantrums, who bullies those weaker than he, who sets himself not only apart from but above the citizens he will lead.

Brookhiser dispenses with the story of Washington's youth and begins with Washington's career in the military. It's interesting to contemplate why Washington was chosen to lead the patriots' army. He had not had a particularly successful military career. But he was almost the only candidate for the job, and he did have some qualifications. First of all, he was committed to the cause. Second, he was tall and handsome (and Brookhiser spends some time explaining why this was such an important characteristic for a revolutionary leader). Third, Washington brought with him his experience in the French and Indian War. Not that he had been a particularly successful officer--he lost battles. But he was in the right place at the right time, Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh), when the British General Edward Braddock was killed. Washington led a small

group of men to safety, buried the general, and became the hope for the British war effort. He excelled in maintaining discipline in his troops.

It's probably a good thing Washington had experience losing battles. From 1776 to 1778, he fought seven battles against the British and won only two. The Continental Congress did not grant him sufficient sums to supply and pay his soldiers. Washington won the war for American independence through strategic loss and retreat. He knew when to fight, and he knew when to retreat, so that he could keep an army in the field. A lesser man, given the seeming hopelessness of the situation, would have retreated. Aside from knowing how to lose, Washington had a couple of other things going for him. One was the sheer incompetence of the British officers sent to America to fight. The other was growing distaste in England for financially supporting the war.

After he left the field, Washington attended the first Constitutional Convention, where he was unanimously elected president. He proved to be an excellent leader, knowing when to let discussion continue, knowing when to cut it off. He commanded discipline from this group of politicians--one wonders what our Congress would be like now if Washington was in command of it. Washington also knew when to keep his own mouth shut. As the Convention discussed the role of the Executive, he remained silent, even though he must have known his next job was being created for him. His endorsement of the Constitution was a guarantee that it would pass. He didn't need to make any speeches--his nod of approval was enough.

As America's first president, it fell upon Washington to create an "etiquette" appropriate to republican government. He would be entertaining foreign visitors, so he sent a man to buy appropriate adornment from the dining table. He was presented with twelve porcelain ornaments, allegories of the arts and sciences. Washington's personal shopper reported that he had purchased items "of a noble Simplicity" "substantially good and majestically plain." A Dutch legate, however, reported that it seemed the president's household was managed "frugally" (not a compliment). Washington also accepted callers from the general public. Anyone could show up for these meetings to visit with the new president or other noteworthy American politicians. Washington dressed formally, in "black coat and dress sword in a white leather scabbard." He did not make a grand entrance, but mingled with the guests. The painter Gilbert Stuart attended one of these events, waiting for the new president to make a grand appearance, when Washington approached him and introduced himself. Stuart had not been able to identify Washington as being more important than anyone else in the room.

One of Washington's biggest problems was raising revenue for the country. Then as now, people were adverse to taxes. The Whiskey Rebellion arose as a result of a tax on whiskey. The nation threatened to tear itself apart over this issue. Washington persisted in putting it down, when some of his advisors thought he should just relinquish the tax. Instead, Washington insisted that the tax be paid and that the army should collect it if it couldn't be collected any other way. A force of twelve thousand men was put together, and three commissioners were sent to western Pennsylvania, the scene of the most contention. The rebels voted to capitulate. This is an important event in our nation's history. Washington was intent on showing not just the world, but the states, that there would be an over-reaching federal government that would truly unite the states. Brookhiser notes that Washington's strategy was also designed to discourage foreign meddling. Some of the leaders of the Whiskey Rebellion had actually approached the British ambassador and asked for help in rebelling against their new country! Washington was therefore not concerned only with foreign meddling, but with the formation of the American character. Yes, taxes had been one of the reasons for the Revolutionary War; however, those laws had been passed without the advice and consent of the governed. In the case of whiskey tax, the law had been passed by Americans, acting through their own government. If those opposed to the tax could persuade others that the tax was unfair, then they could work through the process of repeal. Washington wrote, if "a minority . . . is to dictate government . . . for some other man or

society may dislike another law and oppose it with equal propriety until all laws are prostrate, and everyone will carve for himself." Washington believed that men should truly govern themselves, and therefore they should not reverse their decisions willy-nilly. Washington said that "maintain[ing] the authority of the laws against licentious invasions" was just as important as "defend[ing] . . . rights against usurpation."

Had he wished, Washington could have been elected for a third term, but he chose to step aside. He freely let go of the power he held, and a peaceful transfer of power ensued as John Adams became the second president. King George III said that Washington's willing relinquishment of power, both by resigning as Command in Chief at the end of the war and by leaving the presidency after two terms, "placed him in a light the most distinguished of any man living." He possessed "the greatest character of the age." Washington went back to Mount Vernon, where he enjoyed the life of a gentleman planter, despite the crowds that still came to visit him.

Brookhiser spends about a third of the book discussing Washington's character traits. Washington had a fiery temper, and his success as a leader depended on his ability to control it. His success as a leader was also enhanced by his physical qualities. At 6'3", he was considerably taller than most men of the age. He rode a horse well, danced well, and participated in other sports. His physique made him easy to see on the battlefield, and his soldiers could always spot him and take note that he was there with them, in the thick of battle. Despite his temper, Washington was often described as amiable and affable, and women were certainly entranced by him.

In terms of his moral character, Washington was guided by the Romans, most notably Seneca's *Morals*, translated by Roger L'Estrange. But he was probably more influenced by a book he copied when he was 16, *The Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and in Conversation*. There are 110 rules, among them #105 "Be not angry at table whatever happens and if you have reason to be so show it not"; #23 "When you see a crime punished, you may be inward pleased, but show pity to the offending sufferer"; #44 "When a man does all he can, though it succeed not well, blame not him that did it." Washington also purchased books about manners into his adulthood. He was unfailingly courteous--it was a part of his moral code.

Keeping a good reputation was also a part of Washington's moral code. A reputation, to Washington and his contemporaries, was "a thing that might be destroyed or sullied--some valuable cargo carried in the hold of the self." It is a role one plays until one becomes it. Washington was not concerned about only his character and reputation; he was concerned about the character and reputation of America. He recognized that the years following the revolution were defining the American character, and he sought to make it one deserving of a good reputation.

Brookhiser ends his assessment of Washington by discussing the man as Father to our country. Washington had no biological children (perhaps the lack of sons helped him give up power more easily, as he had no one to pass it on to). Instead, Washington left a legacy to all Americans--self-government. He ended his farewell address with these words: "At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be intirely [sic] their own." These words resonate in 2016. The fault is entirely our own.

Brookhiser writes in an academic tone that may be off-putting to some. I found his style like that of an intelligent and much-loved professor, and I appreciated his dry humor. Brookhiser is obviously an ardent admirer of Washington, and his passion for the man and his accomplishments is present in every page.

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## **Sandra Strange says**

Well researched look at the role of Washington in founding the U.S. This book considers Washington's actual achievements, character, and especially, his legacy. The book examines the facts that show Washington's skill as general and leader, not ignoring his challenges and the times he didn't or couldn't achieve his purposes. The book takes on the "politically correct" way of looking at this founding father, who does indeed, as proved in this history, deserve that label.

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## **Mont says**

George Washington appears dull when compared with the genius of Jefferson, or the quirky personality of Benjamin Franklin. So why did all the Founding Fathers consider him indispensable to the cause of American independence? Brookhiser explores Washington's character, his accomplishments, even his physique and finds a lot to admire.

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## **Jim says**

Part of the appeal of studying American history for me, has always been in looking for ways to apply lessons learned about our past to today's issues. Partly for that reason my favorite form of historical reading is the biographical. It helps personalize history, and allows me, when trying to think about issues facing us today, to ask the question; "What would (fill in the blank) do?" At the top of the list for me is imagining how George Washington would have dealt with issues of prime importance to us today, but little thought of or non-existent in the eighteenth century such as abortion, gay rights, gun control, immigration reform, and globalism. I have no idea really what his position would be on these issues, but it helps me frame my thinking and I derive inspiration from the struggles he went through to arrive at solutions for the problems he had to grapple with. Richard Brookhiser, in his book *Rediscovering George Washington: Founding Father* attempts to look at the life of our first president in this light; "to shape the minds and hearts of those who read it...by showing how a great man navigated politics and life as a public figure." (Brookhiser, 12) With that as his goal, Brookhiser candidly admits he is not attempting a comprehensive biography of Washington, but instead is looking at his experiences and those who influenced him in order to develop a character portrait. The result is a lightly sources book that explores three aspects of Washington and his life. First, he looks at Washington's career during the Revolutionary War, the Constitutional Convention, and his Presidency. Second, he attempts an exploration of Washington's character in which he posits the co-dependence of nature, morals and ideas as an explanation for his success. And third, he looks at Washington's subsequent role, after his death, as "Founding Father."

While my conviction that it is vitally important we look at our history to help derive lessons useful for dealing with modern issues is unshaken, I have noted (as have many others), a disturbing trend in our modern media driven culture; the attempt by some groups to appropriate the legacy of our national figures for narrow ideological or partisan purposes. I am not naïve enough to claim this is a particularly new trend, after all, both North and South claimed inspiration from Washington at the outset of the Civil War. But, I do believe, spurred by multimillion dollar advertising campaigns, and a lazy, disinterested media, this trend is worsening. One only needs to look at the reliance of some media outlets on pseudo-historian David Barton for confirmation of this trend. In my mind this is a dangerous attempt to exclude those who do not toe a strict set of cultural and religious ideals, from the historical legacy of our country. This of course, if not

checked, will only exacerbate the political divisions our country is currently experiencing.

It was this fear that came to mind when I began reading this book. I am familiar with Mr. Brookhiser's work as a commentator and columnist for among other publications, the right leaning weekly magazine, *The National Review*. And while I think he is a very good writer and expositor of his views, in the interests of full candor I must say that I cannot recall a single instance where I agreed with anything written by him. I feared this book would be nothing but another attempt to claim the legacy of Washington in support of what I consider a narrow ideological agenda. I came away with mixed feelings. On one hand I found his use of Washington as a character study to be a refreshing change in the standard biographical form (as much as I enjoy those). This freed him from the necessities of extensive sourcing, and allowed him to look at Washington not from a chronological point of view, but by looking at different aspects of his life, out of sequence, in support of a "character" point of view. In other words, different facets of Washington's character drove the narrative, and Brookhiser was able to take pieces of Washington's life out of sequence to support his thesis. On the other hand he could not help but injecting modern conservative views into parts of his narrative, and I had the feeling that the entire study was subtly designed to lead readers to that point of view. He seemed to skip over events in Washington's life that contradicted his thesis, and those negative aspects he could not ignore he often attempted to re-orient as positive. The whole book for me had the feel of a preordained conclusion in search of evidence to support it. I also found it interesting that most of the reviews that were chosen for the cover of the book were from conservative leaning publications.

Brookhiser's strongest chapters look at Washington's career as soldier, president of the Constitutional Convention, and as President of the United States. The overarching theme of these chapters, though not explicitly stated, is that Washington was able to succeed not through brilliant intellect (though he was clearly a very intelligent man), but through the force of his character and personality. A primary aspect of this was Washington's ability to master his passions where he needed to in order to achieve his desired outcome. Brookhiser effectively cites incidents from Washington's career that bolster this point, especially in the way he cites Washington's Revolutionary War strategy, which he deftly sums up by noting that by 1778 Washington "had not won the war...[but] had made it unwinnable for the enemy." (Brookhiser, 25) In adopting this strategy, avoiding defeat in order to demoralize the enemy, Washington was going against his normally aggressive inclinations. So, as Brookhiser points out, while Washington lost all but two battles in the north (Trenton and Princeton), and Greene lost all but one battle in the south (Cowpens), he was, with the assistance of the French, able to finally force Britain to submit.

Brookhiser cites other examples that demonstrate the unique qualities of Washington's character, including his resistance to entreaties that he become King, the way he was able to dampen enthusiasm for a rebellion among his officers in Newburgh, NY in 1783 by appealing to their respect for him and by making common cause with them, by the example of "moderation and political cordiality" he set while presiding over the heated debates surrounding the adoption of a new constitution, and the fortitude he demonstrated as President, setting precedents of conduct that are followed to this day.

As he does throughout the book, Brookhiser tends to ignore or downplay incidents in Washington's life he believes would tend to diminish respect for Washington's character. He minimizes the relationship between Washington and Sally Fairfax, and most seriously, only lightly brushes over Washington's military career prior to the Revolution. He nearly completely ignores the Jumonville affair (mentioning it obliquely in Part 2) and Washington's defeat at Fort Mifflin. He makes no mention of Washington's constant angling for advancement in the British army, his petulant arguments with Governor Dinwiddie, and his self-serving attempt to convince British General Forbes to use the Braddock Road in their final advance on Fort Duquesne in order to, in part, protect his land interests. Instead, Brookhiser only mentions Washington's fame following the failed Braddock expedition. In my opinion ignoring an event as momentous as this in

Washington's life somewhat undercuts Brookhiser's character thesis.

In Part 2, Brookhiser more explicitly focuses on Washington's character, positing a theory that his success rests on a tripod of nature, morals, and ideas. Here in my opinion Brookhiser is less convincing, particularly relating to his evaluation of the importance of Washington's physical appearance to his success. While Washington's appearance – primarily his height and bearing, which at 6' 3" was imposing – was clearly important, particularly in eliciting a good first impression on those he met, I do not believe, as Brookhiser claims, that it was necessary for Washington's success. In making his point, Brookhiser cites the "primal importance of the body," for Americans when choosing their leaders. (Brookhiser, 114) He cites the sixteen Pressed who he believes passed the "ultimate physical test" in battle, two Presidents who were college athletes, and Roosevelt's struggles against polio as examples of this. While there is no doubt military experience was crucial for the electoral prospects of a number of these men, particularly Washington, Jackson, Harrison, Taylor, Grant, T. Roosevelt and Eisenhower, I know of no analysis which has cited the physical aspect of military experience as being important. And, I have no recollection of Fords or Reagan's experiences as college athletes even being mentioned in the context of their political campaigns. In fact, Ford's legendary "klutziness" received far more attention than his college football days. In addition, one can think of numerous highly successful leaders who had neither military success or great physical stature; John Adams, James Madison, James Monroe, James K. Polk, Woodrow Wilson, and Jimmy Carter spring to mind. It also, in my opinion, lessens the perceived importance of Washington's intellectual attributes, which were considerable. Overall I am left with the impression that Brookhiser thinks if Washington was 5' 6" rather than 6' 3" he would not have been as successful. I just do not find that argument convincing. In the interests of full disclosure however, when I made this assertion in his class, one of my graduate professors, renowned Washington scholar Dr. Peter Henriques flat out told me I was wrong.

Brookhiser does a better job exploring Washington's temperament, noting Washington had a notoriously thin skin but his fits of anger left as quickly as they came. It was Washington's ability to suppress this part of his personality that is the important point. Brookhiser does a good job here again, of showing how Washington was able to master his passions when he needed to. The argument would have been more powerful had he explored Washington's behavior during the French and Indian War more thoroughly, which would have revealed a man of increasing maturity and who was better able to master his passions.

In a short section on morals Brookhiser cites Washington's adherence to the Rules of Civility and evidence that he drew inspiration from L'Estrange's Seneca's Morals and Addison's Cato, as a factor in Washington's cultivation and protection of his reputation, and as an explanation for Washington's legendary stoicism. Here again Brookhiser would have been on surer ground had he not ignored Washington's early career. As part of his discussion of the Rules of Civility, he makes the point that Rule #32 is nominally about who gets the best bed, but ends "by announcing a principle of accepting honor only with reluctance and modesty, which Washington was to follow when he became Commander in Chief, president of the Constitutional Convention, and President of the United States." (Brookhiser, 129) Again Brookhiser undercuts his argument by ignoring Washington's early career. In attempting to advance his prospect during that time, Washington was anything but "reluctant and modest." Brookhiser appears to fear what an honest appraisal of those years would mean for Washington's reputation. He need not fear it. In fact, in my opinion, it would have bolstered Brookhiser's character analysis as it demonstrates growth and a strength of will many others lack.

Earlier I noted that the fear I had with this book was that it would turn out to be yet another attempt to co-opt the legacy of George Washington in service of a narrow ideological agenda. Up to this point my fears were largely, though not completely, allayed. However, in the section entitled "Ideas," my fears were again stoked. Brookhiser starts well enough, noting Washington was better read than most have given him credit for, and that while the intellectual foundation for the Revolution did not originate with him in any way, he

grasped their nature and importance very quickly. However, during a discussion of Washington's proposals for a national university and his view that "right ideas were a necessary attainment of public men," Brookhiser launches what can only be characterized as a sweeping and unnecessary attack on modern public education. (Brookhiser, 142 – 143) He argues, lamely in my opinion, that because the government, through its investment in public education is "interested chiefly in scientific research, in theories and techniques that might benefit the economy or the military," educators – read liberal educators – are left to "pursue what interests them." (Brookhiser, 143) He opines that the only ones interested in instilling a theory of public order are the "apostles of diversity," whose only goal is to carve a place for one's own group and not in the service of human rights. "Conservatives," he says, "who profess loyalty to the intentions of the founders," as if liberals do not, "have such a deep suspicion of the intentions of modern educators that most of them want the public education establishment broken up...and who, considering what educators teach, can blame them?" (Brookhiser, 143) In one paragraph, Brookhiser confirmed my fears about his true intentions. Unable to contain himself he succeeded in injecting modern conservative dogma into a discussion of George Washington's character. By implying that modern liberals are not interested in the original intentions of the founders, as they interpret them, Brookhiser is attempting to appropriate their legacy in service to his point of view. This is a dangerous road to follow as it can only lead to further division.

Brookhiser goes on to discuss the influence of Christian belief and Freemasonry in Washington's life. He proffers the view that Washington was a believer in God as an "Active agent and force." (Brookhiser, 146) While less blatant than the above examples, this too appears to be an attempt at appropriating Washington's legacy in support of modern conservative dogma. To his credit Brookhiser does note Washington's tolerance of other beliefs and notes his willingness to bend biblical teaching to political ends. However I believe he misses the mark trying to shoehorn Washington's beliefs into a modern fundamentalist mold. It doesn't fit. Washington rarely appealed to a divine being other than in rather oblique terms, is not known to have prayed or attended church regularly, and in no instance did he make mention of Jesus in any of his wartime correspondence. Dr. Henriques has described him as a "warm Deist," one who didn't believe the supreme being was actively involved in the daily concerns of men but one Washington felt a deeper connection with than the "celestial watchmaker" typical of Deist thinking. I know of no serious historian who would characterize Washington as a valid inspiration for modern fundamentalist dogma. However, because my reading on Washington's religious views is not comprehensive I will not comment further on Brookhiser's motivation other than to register my suspicion.

Brookhiser concludes with a discussion of Washington as the founding father, looking at how that legacy came about, how Washington himself viewed that "fatherhood," and noting the irony that the father of our country was himself childless and had been left fatherless at an early age. Again here, however, Brookhiser cannot help but inject more conservative thought into his analysis. IN juxtaposing Washington's position as the father of our country, Brookhiser notes the "contemporary failure of fatherhood." (Brookhiser, 12) Given what I know about Brookhiser's views I read this as a subtle swipe at modern secular (liberal) society and its alleged devaluing of traditional institutions such as marriage. A deeper analysis would of course look at poverty, class division, and the effects of capitalism as contributing causes for the breakdown of marriage. Brookhiser includes none of this of course, as it would make his analogy to Washington even more ridiculous.

Despite my deep reservations about the motivation of Mr. Brookhiser in pursuing an analysis of Washington's character, I actually enjoyed the book. It was well written, and in many places, particularly his analysis of the effect of Washington's character on the outcome of the Revolutionary War, quite insightful. As I noted above I believe his decision to give scant attention to Washington's early military career was a huge mistake, which served to undermine the strength of his argument. And of course his penchant for injecting modern conservative dogma into his analysis I find very disturbing.

It is always good to read history from a perspective at odds with your own, but it is important to read works that are serious in their intent rather than naked attempts to advance a partisan political agenda. While I do believe Brookhiser is trying to appropriate Washington's legacy to serve an ideology, I think the attempt is a sincere, if misguided, one, hence my recommendation of this book.

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### **EricW says**

I found this biography too short to be useful and a little dull. I recommend Ron Chernow's Washington biography instead.

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### **Miles Smith says**

Founding Father is a good primer on the character and life of George Washington. Brookhiser is as always concise. Founding Father is more uneven than his other works, but certain chapters still stand out. On the presidency, and on the first president's character, this work is quite good.

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### **James Christensen says**

Perceptive, yet succinct look at Washington's Career, Character & role as Founding Father.

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### **Jake W. says**

Jake Wayda  
B-5 English

My book is called "Rediscovering George Washington Founding Father". It obviously is about George Washington. The main reason why I chose this book is because I went back to Washington D.C. this summer and I also went to Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon is where George Washington lived and died. The house itself was very cool and so was the rest of the estate, I saw the room in which Washington died. I saw where his first tomb, they moved him in 1831 to his current location on the estate. I saw that tomb as well, there he lies next to his wife.

The book was written by Richard Brookhiser. His purpose for writing this book is very simple, he wanted to give a better education about George Washington to people. The way he wrote the book is by breaking Washington's life, essentially, into three main segments. Those segments are his Career, Character, and Founding Father. In the segments there are three groups. In the Career segment, the groups are called War, Constitution, and President. In Character the groups are Nature, Morals, and Ideas, and in the Founding Father segment, the groups are Fathers, Patriarchs and Masters, and Father of His Country. There is no theme really, but since I have to list one I will say that it is "Know your history".

The style of the book was very interesting. The description would have to be to set through his life since it was a biography. The narration, if there is one, would be in third person, because Brookhiser is telling the story of Washington, but he is outside of the story. The exposition was very good, every subject was clear and very detailed.

The effectiveness of this style of writing worked very well because it is a biography, and everything needs to be detailed. Here is an example, in the war part of this book all of Washington's moves and decisions were very detailed, especially the part when Washington made his daring crossing of the Delaware.

The writer is of the same opinion as I, we both believe that George Washington was a brilliant man. Brookhiser expresses this several times in the book.

Overall the book was good and I learned a lot more about George Washington, and I will continue to learn about him.

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### **Cecilia says**

I don't claim to be an expert on Washington, his biographies, or biographies in general, but in my opinion, this was a great depiction of the father of our country. While some of the parts were difficult to read, I really appreciated the way this biography was organized. It focused less on detailed logs of events and more on what influences shaped Washington's character and ideals. It's a moral biography, the story of Washington's ideals. The author makes point after point of fantastic musings on Washington's character and it was such an experience to read. There were so many good quotes and so much to ruminate on. I highly recommend this to anyone who wants to get a better picture of this most famous founder; you won't be disappointed.

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### **Erik Graff says**

This is a hagiography of George Washington written by a conservative American journalist. Not having read any biography of Washington since elementary school and having an occasional penchant for reading authors of the political Right, I opened it prior to essaying a more substantial, scholarly study.

There are a few pointed remarks concerning contemporary politics, but generally author Brookhiser sticks to his subject, painting "the father of our country" in broad, very complimentary strokes. I'm not sure what professional historians would say about his impressions, but I found the picture compelling, ending the book teary eyed.

Brookhiser writes well. The reading was entertaining and took but a single sitting.

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### **Jon says**

George Washington was apparently an idiot...

LET ME FINISH!....

from an academic stand-point. He had the level of education equivalent to an eighth grader (most of the founders had advanced college degrees). He was a military guy, super rich landowner, and a common guy intellectual. What he lacked in intellect, he made up in virtue and morality...

As a leader he was amazing! He was brave, extremely humble and practiced humility (stepping down from being a third term pres though the entire country wanted this). He was extremely virtuous and also loved the Romans (as did many of the founders; 'President, Congress, and Senate' are all Roman homages; so are all those pillars you see at the white house). If anything, he was a beacon of virtue in a newly founded country and everyone loved him for that... Today, politicians are corrupt slimeballs driven by greed. How we have fallen from grace!!!!.....OK, I will get off my soap box.

He loved to wear his military outfits years after not using them (he also made custom military outfits, so crafty!). He also had a bit of a temper I guess, but that's fine...

Besides that the book is boring for the most part (see good quotes below), riddled with misspellings....had some good points toward the end...Makes a reference to the stoner movie "Dazed and Confused", which was mildly entertaining....I apparently cannot make coherent sentences but vague snippets...sorry...

#### Founding Father Quotes:

"Washington's last service to his country was to stop serving. He had often been compared to Cincinnatus, the half-legendary hero of the Roman Republic who returned to his farm after saving his country in wartime". p101

"Like many sensitive people, he had a temper". p116

"For all their artistic and philosophical brilliance, the Greeks were failures at politics; Hamilton, in the Federalist, expressed 'horror and disgust' at the 'distractions with which they were agitated'. The Romans captured the American imagination because they had done what the Americans themselves hoped to do--sustain an extensive republic over a course of centuries. So the society of Revolutionary War officers called themselves the Cincinnati; "president", "congress", and "senate" were all Roman terms. But the Roman example was also cautionary, for when they lost their virtue, they slid into empire. When Franklin said, in response to a question from Eliza Powel, that the constitutional convention had produced "a republic, if you can keep it," he and she would have remembered that the Romans had failed to keep theirs." p122

"Politeness is the first form of politics." p129

"Character," as Forrest McDonald has explained was a role one played until one became it, "character" also meant how one's role was judged by others. It was both the performance and the reviews. Every man had a character to maintain; every man was a character actor." p132

"In some instances by acting reciprocally, heroes have made poets, and poets heroes." Washington proceeded to offer examples: Alexander ("said to have been enraptured with the Poems of Homer, and to have lamented that he had not a rival muse to celebrate his actions"); Caesar ("well known to have been a man of a highly cultivated understanding and taste"); Augustus ("the professed and magnificent rewarder of poetical merit, nor did he lose the return of having his achievements immortalized in song"). "Perhaps," he added, getting warmer, "we shall be found, at this moment, not inferior to the rest of the world in the performances of our poets and painters..." p135

"We think of Washington as badly educated for two reasons: he thought so, and many of the people around him thought so...Adams recalled Washington's level of education even more acidly: "he was too illiterate, unlearned, unread for his station and reputation..."p 137

"Machiavelli made a famous division of rulers into three categories- those smart enough to figure things out themselves, those smart enough to understand the explanations of others, those too stupid to do either." p138

"Washington as President repeatedly urged that newspapers be carried free of charge" (INTERNET!) p140

"Besides the literature of American political theory, Washington was influenced by two coherent systems of thought- Christianity and Freemasonry." p144

"Washington raised the ante of the last phrase immeasurably: Americans should not just be humble, but show the humility of Christ (One of the few references to Christ he ever made)." p148

"...teenage pothead in the movie Dazed and Confused. 'The founding fathers belonged to a cult, man...There's spooky stuff on the back of a dollar bill.' He was right about the dollar bill; that odd little pyramid surmounted by an unwinking eyeball is Masonic iconography, suggested by Benjamin Franklin, who published the Constitutions of Masonry in Philadelphia in 1734." (HAHA!) p 149

"Now the Patriot King's virtue was not only that he was incorruptible. but that he was non partisan. He could "govern like the common father of his people" because he was "not exposed to the temptation, of governing by a party." The "true image" of his rule was "that of a patriarchal family, where the head and all the members are united by one common interest, and animated by one common spirit...Instead of abetting the divisions of his people, he will endeavor to unite them...instead of putting himself at the head of one party in order to govern his people, he will put himself at the head of his people in order to govern, or more properly to subdue, all parties." p171

"Men must live, one way or another, and if they cannot live by ruling themselves, they will submit to the rule of others." p175

"Slavery was sanctioned by the Bible and by Aristotle." p178

"We wonder how Washington encompassed the contradictions. One way he did was the way that all men, including ourselves, encompass their contradictions: by not thinking about them." p179

"At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be intirely (sic) their own."p 189

"Rule #44: 'When a man does all he can, though it succeed not well, blame not him that did it..." p199

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