

# WILEY



---

The Political Thought of President George Washington

Author(s): Richard Loss

Source: *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, SUMMER 1989, Vol. 19, No. 3, I: The Congress, the Court, and the Presidency at 200 Years and II: Presidential Greatness: Considerations on the FDR and Truman Presidencies (SUMMER 1989), pp. 471-490

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40574366>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Wiley and Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

# The Political Thought of President George Washington

RICHARD LOSS\*

*Post-Doctoral Research Associate*

*The University of Chicago*

## Abstract

*The scholarship on President George Washington contends either that he did not engage in political thought, or that he taught entirely modern republicanism or that he taught entirely ancient republicanism. My thesis is that Washington's political thought mixes classical and modern republicanism. The classical element is inegalitarian virtue and the molding of potential statesmen by liberal education. The modern elements of Washington's republicanism include liberty, equality, popular sovereignty and majority rule. I further contend that Washington's political thought, though not strictly political philosophy, is still worthy of attention.*

*Washington distinctly blended elements of classical and modern republicanism around the idea of a national university, and this constitutes on the statesman's level a provocative criticism of the mainstream solution to the political problem in *The Federalist*. Washington's thought on political education is better conceived than the educational thought of his more respected contemporaries, Hamilton and Jefferson. This essay calls for a reappraisal of Washington's thought while warning against understanding it as "the cause of everything" in the American regime.*

## Introduction

The scholarship on George Washington argues predominantly that he shunned political thought. Three conflicting generalizations emerge from a review of the Washington literature: (1) he did not engage in political thought; (2) although he taught political principles, they were entirely modern republicanism; (3) his principles were entirely ancient republicanism. Part II of this essay presents Washington's principles and briefly contrasts them with Hamilton's and Jefferson's principles. My thesis is that Washington's political thought mixes modern republicanism (liberty, equality of men, popular sovereignty and majority rule) and classical republicanism (in-egalitarian virtue and the formation of character by liberal education).

## I. Washington's Political Thought in the Literature

Many of the commentators on George Washington deny that his greatness rests on a theory of politics. In 1851 the French historian Guizot held that Washington was "a man of experience and action" and had "no systematic pretension in his manner of thinking . . . No principle fixed beforehand governed him."<sup>1</sup> Washington, said Guizot, "was a stranger to every theory . . . his acts . . . had not a systematic character."

Guizot concluded that Washington was “uninfluenced by any theory”: “he made no show of the principles that were to govern him.”<sup>2</sup>

During the twentieth century this opinion of Washington gained in authority. W. E. Woodward, for example, gave the sharpest American expression of Guizot’s interpretation of Washington: “One of the most significant facts about Washington’s long and distinguished career is that he never formulated any coherent theory of government. Hamilton and Jefferson both worked out distinctly articulated systems of politics. . . . But there is nothing in the body of American political thought that we can call Washingtonism.”<sup>3</sup> Woodward concluded by disparaging Washington’s intellectual capacity: his observations “lack a fundamental idea” because “a coherent political philosophy is not an impelling necessity to this type of intellect.”<sup>4</sup> According to Bernard Fay, Washington “made great efforts to keep Americans from dispersing their strength in discussing theories.”<sup>5</sup> Writing in 1961 J. A. Carroll drew the familiar dichotomy between the man of thought and the man of action: “Washington was not an architect in ideas; he was essentially a man of deeds.”<sup>6</sup>

Although debunking students of Washington, such as Woodward, stress Washington’s lack of political thought, this emphasis also occurs among writers with a higher estimate of Washington’s greatness, such as Carroll. In 1969 Morton Borden asked: “Why . . . was Washington great? In what did he excel? By common consent his intellectual talents were limited. He knew little of . . . political theory. . . . Scholars interested in . . . the clash of ideas must turn elsewhere.”<sup>7</sup> Echoing this familiar disparagement of Washington as a political thinker, in 1974 Forrest McDonald wrote that Washington “understood little and thought even less about the fine points of speculative disputation from which Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians derived justification for their conduct.”<sup>8</sup>

This rejection of Washington as a political thinker contrasts with early accounts. Thomas Paine, the celebrated political writer who regarded himself as “one of the principal founders of the American republic,” enclosed the key to the Bastille with a letter to Washington: “That the principles of America opened the Bastille is not to be doubted; and therefore the key comes to the right place.”<sup>9</sup> Entirely apart from the influence of American principles on the French Revolution, clearly Paine implies that Washington made the central contribution in articulating “the principles of America.” Fisher Ames, skillful orator of the Federalists, eulogized Washington’s thought: “Others, I hope but few . . . will deem it incredible that Washington should think with as much dignity and elevation as he acted. . . . Such a chief magistrate as Washington, appears like the polestar in a clear sky, to direct the skillful statesman.”<sup>10</sup>

John Marshall, who knew Washington personally, wrote that “in speculation, he was a real republican, devoted to the Constitution of this country, and to that system of equal political rights on which it is founded.”<sup>11</sup> Clearly Marshall implies that Washington had a political teaching and that it was modern republicanism. Early in the nineteenth century Chateaubriand said that “Washington represented the needs, the ideas, the enlightenment, the opinions of his day; instead of impeding the development of modern ideas, he promoted them.”<sup>12</sup> That is, Washington is best understood

as a child of the Enlightenment and his achievement is limited to the promotion of modern republicanism.

In 1832 Daniel Webster held that the question of principle for the United States was identical with the question that Washington had addressed: “whether free states may be stable, as well as free; whether popular power may be trusted, as well as feared; in short, whether wise, regular and virtuous self government is a vision for the contemplation of theorists, or a truth established, illustrated, and brought into practice in the country of Washington.”<sup>13</sup> Washington’s “leading principles,” said Webster, “are not left doubtful” but are found in the Constitution, in the measures recommended and approved by Washington, in his speeches to Congress and in the Farewell Address. Summarizing in 1889 the trends in the understanding of Washington, Henry Cabot Lodge concluded that

“there is no need to argue the truism that Washington was a great man, for that is universally admitted. But it is very needful that his greatness should be rightly understood, and the right understanding of it is by no means universal. His character has been exalted at the expense of his intellect, and his goodness has been so much insisted upon both by admirers and critics that we are in danger of forgetting that he had a great mind as well as high moral worth.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1945 Harold Bradley found that although “the first President seems curiously remote from the realm of abstract ideas,” “Washington . . . fancied himself as something of an amateur philosopher—at least in the field of political thought. His private correspondence is filled with allusions to the delights of the philosophically minded—a category in which obviously he included himself.”<sup>15</sup> But Bradley is unable to develop his understanding of Washington’s political teaching from Washington’s praise of contemplation over political practice because, for Bradley, Washington “would seem . . . miscast as a political philosopher. He was neither a phrase maker nor an original thinker. . . . One may search the public papers of Washington without finding a concise statement of political philosophy. . . . He prepared no treatise on government or politics.”<sup>16</sup> Yet “through all of his thinking ran the major conviction that government must be strong or it is no government worthy of the name.”<sup>17</sup>

According to Bradley, Washington’s legacy to his countrymen is a set of “pleasant platitudes reflecting . . . his day” and “convictions,” i.e., dogmas, such as a strong central government, rather than reasoned principles that explain the American regime, that is, political thought.<sup>18</sup> By political thought we mean “the reflection on, or the exposition of, political ideas; and by a political idea we may understand any politically significant ‘phantasm, notion, species, or whatever it is about which the mind can be employed in thinking’ concerning political fundamentals.”<sup>19</sup> These political fundamentals are attempts to express the nature of the American regime, what the political community venerates, what sets the tone and how this is reflected in the distribution of power and honors.

Political thought may be briefly contrasted with political philosophy. “Political thought which is not political philosophy finds its adequate expression in laws and codes, in poems and stories, in tracts and public speeches *inter alia*.”<sup>20</sup> The proper form

of political philosophy is the treatise. Political thought is “indifferent to the distinction between opinion and knowledge; but political philosophy is the conscious, coherent and relentless effort to replace opinions about the political fundamentals by knowledge regarding them.” Political thought “may not be more, and may not even intend to be more, than the expounding or the defense of a firmly held conviction or of an invigorating myth.” A non-philosophical political thinker “is primarily interested in, or attached to, a specific order or policy; the political philosopher is primarily interested in, or attached to, the truth.” Thus an American political thinker such as Washington is primarily attached to the United States. Finally, political thought is coeval with the human race, but political philosophy emerged at a knowable time in the past. It goes almost without saying that political thought may more closely approach political philosophy at one time than another. American political thought may be understood as a spectrum running from the most pedestrian statements to statements that raise, but do not answer, fundamental questions of political philosophy.

Harold Bradley argues in effect that either Washington must be a political philosopher at the level of, say, Aristotle or Washington can leave his countrymen only unreasoned and unauthoritative platitudes and dogmas. Bradley, however, overlooks the excluded middle of political thought. Few, if any, American political thinkers meet Bradley’s test of “political philosophy” and, knowing this, Bradley applied a more lenient test to Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Bradley’s test for these statesmen was not in any way political philosophy, but “enduring contributions to political practice and theory,” “unusual insight into the problems and institutions of government” and “views upon the nature and function of government and the appropriate relationship between government and the citizen.”<sup>21</sup> Bradley makes Washington’s speculation seem unimportant by comparison to the speculation of Hamilton, Adams, Madison and Jefferson because Bradley reasonably and appropriately treats the latter quartet as contributors to American political thought, not political philosophy. “These four men constituted a quartet which has not been surpassed and perhaps has not been equaled in the history of political thought in the United States.”<sup>22</sup> If Bradley had applied the test of political thought to Washington’s teaching, Bradley would necessarily have reached a higher estimate of Washington’s importance and service to this countrymen.

In 1955 Saul Padover emphasized Washington’s character and disparaged his intellect while admitting nevertheless that principles were important for Washington: “What . . . accounts for his peculiar greatness and appeal is not book learning but character.”<sup>23</sup> Contrasting Washington’s thought with the opinion and expectations of “our own ‘other directed’ society,” Padover finds that today “George Washington would hardly be a successful leader, if, indeed, he would be considered a leader at all. A society whose main and overriding concern is with imitation of one another would probably be disinclined to follow a man of severe moral conduct . . . who was convinced that moral principles are the foundations of the universe and that they never change.”<sup>24</sup> More generally, the present currents of opinion make it difficult for twentieth century scholars to develop the sympathetic understanding that is indispensable to grasping Washington’s thought. In short, contemporary opinion makes it difficult

to comprehend a statesman who, in the language of Henry Tuckerman, had “the openness to right impressions characteristic of an intellect . . . whose chief affinity is for absolute truth.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1958 Marcus Cunliffe focused on Washington’s “temperament” and character rather than his thought: “The point is that his age differed profoundly from ours; that in certain ways he is better understood within a classical framework than as a man of modern times.”<sup>26</sup> Cunliffe’s approach, suggestive as to character, takes off from an unacknowledged source, John Adams’s comparison of Washington to Marcus Aurelius.<sup>27</sup> For Cunliffe the classical framework explains Washington as “the disinterested patriot.”<sup>28</sup> But Cunliffe also uses “a classical framework” to explain Washington’s beliefs or thought. This “classical framework” “does at least help us to grasp why men such as Washington believed that they could create a huge new nation on the republican model.”<sup>29</sup> “The lessons of the classical past, when the world was young, as America felt itself to be young, suggested that such a republic was a working possibility, as well as providing a warning that things might go wrong.” Cunliffe’s helpful parallel, however, is not thought through. He does not tell us, for example, how Washington acted to prevent things from going wrong.

In 1969 James Morton Smith objected to “the tendency of the twentieth century to view Washington as a mindless man.”<sup>30</sup> That is sound enough as far as it goes. In part over the past twenty-five years, Smith argues, the “neglect of Washington springs from his failure to write any systematic or theoretical statement of his political and social philosophy until his Farewell Address, in part from the difficulty of classifying him as a liberal or conservative thinker.”<sup>31</sup> Smith’s assertion about the lack of a theoretical statement until the Farewell Address conflicts with Daniel Webster’s understanding, for whom Washington’s “leading principles” were “not left doubtful” and were found in Washington’s thought as a whole. Smith’s other point, the difficulty, nay, impossibility, of classifying Washington as a liberal or conservative thinker, is a more adequate explanation of the resistance of modern liberal and conservative scholars to Washington’s thought. Smith is on sound ground in writing that the omission of Washington or giving him brief notice, “as in most intellectual histories,” is an “easy out,” that is to say, is indefensible.<sup>32</sup>

In 1972 James Flexner’s biography closed with some, but, according to Henry Cabot Lodge’s requirement, still insufficient recognition of Washington’s mind and political thought. Washington “had found a persuasive formula for self regulation” in Stoicism, “but it did not define effective principles of government.”<sup>33</sup> “Washington had to seek in more modern sources” for “effective principles of government”: “many of the philosophical conceptions Washington acted out had originated in France.” Washington, Flexner implies, was a classical man in character and an entirely modern political thinker. More precisely, Flexner interprets Washington’s political thought as undiluted modern republicanism. Thus the scholarship discussed above poses in the main three generalizations. These are first, that Washington lacked political thought; second, that his political thought was modern republicanism; third, that his political thought was classical republicanism. Let us examine Washington’s writings with these generalizations in mind.

## II. President Washington's Political Thought

Washington's theory of political education held that the elucidation of principle is an important part of political leadership and that his elucidation would determine the fate of the Federalist party. "If *men*, not *principles*, can influence the choice, on the part of the Federalists, what but fluctuations are to be expected. . . . If principles, instead of men, are not the steady pursuit of the Federalists," he wrote in 1799, "their cause will soon be at an end."<sup>34</sup> The republican statesman, Washington held, must elucidate political principle so as to preserve "order, and good government."<sup>35</sup> Washington's concern with political principle or theory is more clearly formulated by his brilliant second, Alexander Hamilton: "but is it a recommendation to have *no theory*? Can that man be a systematic or able statesman who has none? I believe not. *No general principles* will hardly work much better than erroneous ones."<sup>36</sup> Washington agreed wholeheartedly with this conclusion of Hamilton's: the political vocation necessarily involves the statesman in political education understood as the elucidation of principle.

Washington's political teaching employs, without being limited to, principles of modern republicanism. "I love to indulge the contemplation of human nature in a progressive state of improvement and melioration," confided Washington to Lafayette.<sup>37</sup> Washington drew the consequences of the idea of progress in comparing the founding generation with posterity: "I do not think we are more inspired, have more wisdom, or possess more virtue, than those who will come after us."<sup>38</sup> He also applied the implications of the idea of progress in his comparison of governments in Europe and America. In contrast with Europe the United States, he taught, has "governments founded on genuine principles of rational liberty, and . . . mild and wholesome laws."<sup>39</sup>

Yet Washington also found evidence that told against the idea of progress and made him far from being simply a son of the Enlightenment. Washington confronted what he called his "innocent reveries, that mankind will, one day, grow happier and better" with the other evidence at his disposal.<sup>40</sup> "But alas! the millennium will not I fear appear in our days. The restless mind of man cannot be at peace; and when there is disorder within, it will appear without, and soon or late will show itself in acts. So it is with nations, whose mind is only the aggregate of those of individuals, where the government is representative, and the voice of a despot, where it is not."<sup>41</sup> Discussing the limitations of a philanthropic understanding of progress, Washington held that "while the passions of mankind are under so little restraint as they are among us, and while there are so many motives, and views, to bring them into action, we may wish for, but will *never* see the accomplishment" of such progress.<sup>42</sup> In short the restless passions that governed Americans postponed the millennium of progress to an indefinite futurity. Washington retains a qualified belief in Providence: "The great Governor of the universe has led us too long and too far on the road to happiness and glory, to forsake us in the midst of it" so long as "there is good sense and virtue enough left to recover the right path."<sup>43</sup>

Washington was strongly interested in federalism. Regarding the Articles of Confederation as almost a complete error in 1787, he argued that "the primary cause of all our disorders lies in the different state governments, and in the tenacity of that

power, which pervades the whole of their systems.”<sup>44</sup> Washington saw a direct connection between the lack of public virtue and the need for coercion from a national government: “I confess . . . that my opinion of public virtue is so far changed that I have my doubts whether any system without the means of coercion in the sovereign, will enforce obedience to the ordinances of a general government; without which, everything else fails.”<sup>45</sup> Washington wanted a “well-toned government” from the Philadelphia Convention, the purpose of which was “to determine whether we are to have a government of respectability under which life, liberty, and property will be secured to us” or are to submit to a government which may be the result of chance.<sup>46</sup>

“To complete the American character,” Washington held, “it remains for the citizens of the United States to show to the world, that the reproach heretofore cast on republican governments for their want of stability, is without foundation, when that government is the deliberate choice of an enlightened people.”<sup>47</sup> Washington saw the need to vindicate American republicanism from the British critique that “without the protection of Great Britain we should be unable to govern ourselves; and would soon be involved in anarchy and confusion.”<sup>48</sup> The connection between Washington’s emphasis on stability and the property right would appear to arise from the long standing reputation of popular governments as unjust and, hence, unstable associations in which the many poor tried to expropriate the wealthy few.<sup>49</sup> After his tour of 1,887 miles through the Southern states, President Washington proclaimed that the people “begin to feel the good effects of equal laws and equal protection; equal laws and equal rights prevail”; and to Lafayette Washington termed ours “an equal and good government.”<sup>50</sup> To a British correspondent Washington wrote that “liberty, civil and religious, secured on the liberal basis of reason and virtue, are the rich rewards of the past exertions of our citizens.”<sup>51</sup>

Washington found the basis of the Constitution to be in popular sovereignty: “The power under the Constitution will always be in the people.”<sup>52</sup> The Farewell Address similarly proclaimed that “the basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government.”<sup>53</sup> This principle led Washington to find in majority rule the practical expression of popular sovereignty. His Sixth Annual Address to Congress enumerated “the fundamental principle of our Constitution which enjoins that the will of the majority shall prevail.”<sup>54</sup> Speaking of the Whiskey Rebellion, Washington held that if minorities are allowed to prostrate laws made by the majority, “there is an end put, at one stroke, to republican government.”<sup>55</sup> The result will be anarchy and confusion because other men may dislike another law and oppose it “with equal propriety until all laws are prostrate, and every one (the strongest I presume) will carve for himself.”

“The Constitution is the guide, which I never will abandon,” Washington informed the Boston Selectmen.<sup>56</sup> “As the Constitution of the United States, and the laws made under it, must mark the line of my official conduct, I could not justify my taking a single step in any matter, which appeared to me to require their agency, without its being first obtained.”<sup>57</sup> Despite this ringing defense of the Constitution and constitutionalism, Washington understood the Constitution as necessary but not sufficient cause of good government. In this Washington departed from the notion



of modern republicanism held by the influential modern political philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Kant subscribed to the view, characteristic of modern republicanism, that emphasized the devising and implementing the right political institutions as distinct from classical republicanism, which had stressed the formation of character through liberal education. Kant taught that “the problem of organizing a state, however hard it may seem, can be solved *even for a race of devils*, if only they are intelligent.”<sup>58</sup> “A good constitution,” said Kant, “is not to be expected from morality, but, conversely, a good moral condition of a people is to be expected only under a good constitution.”<sup>59</sup>

Washington thought beyond the somewhat smug listing of institutions, such as separation of powers, used in Hamilton’s *Federalist* 9 to prove the superiority of modern over ancient political science. Washington holds in effect that no constitution can compensate for a decline of America into a nation of devils, even if they are intelligent. Speaking of what lies beyond the Constitution, namely, the character of the people and statesmen, Washington informed Lafayette: “I would not be understood my dear Marquis to speak of consequences which may be produced, in the revolution of ages, by corruption of morals, profligacy of manners, and listlessness for the preservation of the natural and unalienable rights of mankind; nor of the successful usurpations that may be established at such an unpropitious juncture, upon the ruins of liberty, however providently guarded and secured, as these are contingencies against which no human prudence can effectually provide.”<sup>60</sup> Washington expressly teaches that institutions such as the constitutional separation of powers can prevent our government from degenerating into despotic or oppressive forms only “so long as there shall remain any virtue in the body of the people.” Washington in effect reverses Kant’s notion of causality: lasting republican constitutions presuppose the absence of “corruption of morals” or the presence of good character. As Washington put it, “a good general government, without good morals and good habits, will not make us a happy people.”<sup>61</sup>

Washington’s reliance upon character and virtue is shown in this description of how the government functioned or was intended to function. “The establishment of our new government seemed to be the last great experiment for promoting human happiness by reasonable compact in civil society. It was to be, in the first instance, in a considerable degree a government of accommodation as well as a government of laws. Much was to be done by *prudence*, much by *conciliation*, much by *firmness*.”<sup>62</sup> Thus “much” beyond what the Constitution and laws could do was left to the prudence and moral virtue of the statesman. As Washington declared in his First Inaugural Address, “the foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality.”<sup>63</sup>

Two of Washington’s writings, the First Inaugural Address and the Farewell Address, underscore the crucial importance of virtue for republican government. As the First Inaugural Address succinctly put the matter, “there is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists in the economy and course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness. . . . Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards

the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained: And since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the republican model of government, are justly considered as *deeply*, perhaps as *finally* staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.”<sup>64</sup> The Farewell Address teaches that “‘tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.”<sup>65</sup> Washington writes of “virtue or morality” as the “foundation of the fabric” of popular government.<sup>66</sup> “Can it be,” he asks in the Farewell Address, “that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue?”<sup>67</sup> Washington established, contrary to Kant, that virtue was a condition of good and durable constitutional government and national happiness.

What, according to Washington, was to be the source of virtue in the American republic? Clearly Washington would have disagreed with Tocqueville’s conclusion that at best the American regime would be decent and orderly but devoid of poetry and the highest excellence.<sup>68</sup> Washington’s thought that education was a means to virtue or moral excellence was an implicit reply to Kant’s argument that virtue is irrelevant and that only the constitution matters. Washington’s thought was also a reply to a classical criticism of democracy.<sup>69</sup> Aristotle taught that democracy was the rule of the many, who are generally the poor.<sup>70</sup> The poor lack leisure for education; hence, democracy is the rule of ignorance.<sup>71</sup> As if in reply to this criticism Washington steadfastly supported the liberal arts and liberal education. He based his support for the liberal arts on the precedent of “men of real talents in arms” who “have commonly approved themselves patrons of the liberal arts and friends to the poets of their own as well as former times”: Alexander the Great, Caesar, Augustus, Louis XIV and Queen Anne of England.<sup>72</sup> “Although we are yet in our cradle, as a nation, I think the efforts of the human mind with us are sufficient to refute (by incontestable facts) the doctrines of those who have asserted that everything degenerates in America.”<sup>73</sup> “To promote literature in this rising empire, and to encourage the arts, have ever been amongst the warmest wishes of my heart.”<sup>74</sup>

Washington’s principal contribution to education for virtue was his plan to create a national university. Nor was this a routine proposal mechanically supported by Washington: “My solicitude for the establishment of a national university in this country, has been great, and unceasing.”<sup>75</sup> “That a national university in *this* country is a thing to be desired, has always been my decided opinion.”<sup>76</sup> Washington’s First Annual Address left Congress to choose between aiding established universities or creating a national university. Washington’s address introduced the idea of a national university under the heading of the “promotion of science and literature.” “Knowledge,” said Washington, “is in every country the surest basis of public happiness. In one in which the measures of government receive their impression so immediately from the sense of the community as in ours it is proportionably essential.”<sup>77</sup> Knowledge, Washington continued, contributes to the security of a free Constitution. It convinces the statesmen to seek the enlightened confidence of the people. It teaches the people to know and value their rights, to provide against invasions of their rights, to distinguish between oppression and the exercise of lawful authority and to discriminate the spirit of liberty from licentiousness.

Washington best stated his plan for a national university in his Eighth Annual Address to Congress and his last will and testament. His message to Congress of 1796 recommends both a military academy and a national university. Congress, Washington argued, is aware “how much a flourishing state of the arts and sciences, contributes to national prosperity and reputation.”<sup>78</sup> He justified the national university with the argument that “the more homogeneous our citizens can be made” in “principles, opinions . . . manners . . . [and] common education,” “the greater will be our prospect of a permanent union.”<sup>79</sup> “A primary object of such a national institution should be, the education of our youth in the science of *government*. In a republic, what species of knowledge can be equally important? and what duty, more pressing on its Legislature, than to patronize a plan for communicating it to those, who are to be the future guardians of the liberties of the country.”<sup>80</sup>

Washington’s last will and testament donated fifty shares of the Potomac Company for the endowment of a national university “under the auspices of the general government” in the District of Columbia.<sup>81</sup> Washington’s will stated that a purpose of the national university was to prevent sending American youth to foreign countries for their education “often before their minds were formed, or they had imbibed any adequate ideas of the happiness of their own; contracting, too frequently, not only habits of dissipation and extravagance, but principles unfriendly to republican government and to the true and genuine liberties of mankind; which, thereafter are rarely overcome.”<sup>82</sup> A second purpose of the national university was “to do away [with] local attachments and state prejudices, as far as the nature of things would, or indeed ought to admit, from our national councils” by “a plan devised on a liberal scale which would have a tendency to spread systematic ideas through all parts of this rising empire.”<sup>83</sup>

Washington’s last will and testament called for the establishment of a university in a central part of the United States to which “the youth of fortune and talents from all parts thereof might be sent for the completion of their education in all the branches of polite literature; in arts and sciences, in acquiring knowledge in the principles of politics and good government.” A draft of Washington’s will more closely described the political education as getting the youth “fixed in the principles of the Constitution, [to] understand the laws, and the true interests and policy of their country, as well as the professions they mean to pursue.”<sup>84</sup> Washington’s last will concluded with “a matter of infinite importance in my judgment”: the national university would enable the youth to acquire friendships and to free themselves from “local prejudices and habitual jealousies” that were “pregnant of mischievous consequences to this country.”<sup>85</sup>

In a little noticed letter to Jefferson Washington revealed that he wished to locate the national university in the District of Columbia “because many advantages, I conceive, would result from the jurisdiction which the general government will have over it, which no other spot would possess.”<sup>86</sup> Washington’s plan for a national university directly involves the national government in determining the “ablest professors” and a proper liberal education for forming the character of potential statesmen, the trustees of American liberties. The Constitution as drawn up and ratified mentioned nothing of education. Certainly Washington’s teaching is that the Constitution permits, nay,

requires, a broad exercise of national governmental power over the American mind or else republican government and freedom will ultimately perish in these United States. Washington's understanding of the power of the national government may be deduced from this encouragement of its actively forming the human mind and holding aloft the constitutional standards Americans should revere. If the national government could educate the educable potential statesmen, in Washington's reasoned judgment the national government could certainly do such lesser things as passing the Alien and Sedition Acts.<sup>87</sup> Washington, in sum, was not behind Alexander Hamilton in his understanding of the inherent, just, prudent and necessary power of the "general government" of the United States.

Washington's plan for a national university to foster virtue and to extirpate sectional and state prejudice differs in important respects from the thought of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, both of whom enjoy a greater reputation than Washington as insightful commentators on the American regime. Hamilton's principal educational plan was a semi-religious one, "The Christian Constitutional Society" whose purposes were "the support of the Christian religion" and "the support of the Constitution of the United States."<sup>88</sup> Hamilton agreed with Washington on the primacy of inegalitarian virtue, but Hamilton stopped short of solving nationally and on the level of principle how to inculcate virtue.<sup>89</sup> Washington distinguished between liberal education for potential statesmen and religious education for the people, while Hamilton supported a mixture of religious and constitutional education as an electioneering device for Federalism. In short Washington thought through far more than Hamilton the problem of providing for virtue. For Washington the problem of providing, educationally speaking, for virtue and the problem of meeting the threat to the Union from state particularism were different aspects of the same problem.

In 1813 Thomas Jefferson, anxious to exonerate Washington of the charge of having held Federalist principles, argued that "General Washington did not harbor one principle of federalism . . . he sincerely wished the people to have as much self-government as they were competent to exercise themselves. The only point on which he and I ever differed in opinion, was, that I had more confidence than he had in the *natural* integrity and discretion of the people, and in the safety and extent to which they might trust themselves with a control over their government."<sup>90</sup> This implies that Jefferson differed with Washington over the inherent and spontaneous wisdom and virtue of the people, with Jefferson tending to the conclusion that virtue was somehow instinctive in Americans and Washington holding that virtue, while "according to nature," was far from being instinctive in Americans. The educational work of Washington and Jefferson shows that they agreed on the importance of forming character through liberal education. But the national scope of Washington's university, which was to be created and closely administered by the national government and aimed by that government against state particularism, and the sectional, not to say state's rights or parochial cast of Jefferson's University of Virginia, suggest that Washington had a deeper grasp of the whole than Jefferson. Washington directly concerned himself with the formation of American *national* character and Jefferson did not because for Washington the American regime was greater than the sum of its

parts. For Jefferson, as in his state's rights manifesto in the Kentucky Resolutions, the parts of the regime, the states, were greater or more important and authoritative than the whole.<sup>91</sup> Thus Washington's thought on education was more consequential than Hamilton's on the problem of virtue and more comprehensive than Jefferson's thought on the relationship among liberal education, the molding of potential statesmen and the formation of American National character. No student of the American regime would dismiss Hamilton's and Jefferson's ideas, but the attention given to the thought of both statesmen has prevented the just consideration of Washington's political thought. The examination of his political thought suggests that Washington deserves to rank not only "first in the hearts of his countrymen," but concerning virtue and education ahead of Hamilton and Jefferson in the minds of his countrymen as well.

Now we should consider certain objections likely to be made to my interpretation of Washington's political thought. The first objection might be that I have discussed Washington's political thought somewhat independently of his policies and programs. This objection implies that a statesman's political thought is mere camouflage for his policy goals. In reply, we should avoid projecting our understanding of and cynicism about recent presidents back to Washington, who was not a strongly programmatic president in the sense that, say, Lyndon Johnson was with his Great Society. Some of Washington's political thought was programmatic; for example, I discussed his doctrine of virtue in the context of his legislative proposal for a national university. But a great part of his political thought was not tied to specific programs. Washington thought politically by in effect asking himself, "What does America stand for?" and he answered this question by saying, "This is what I believe it stands for." In his correspondence and state papers he concentrated above all on the explanation and safeguarding of the new regime under the Constitution, and those tasks were President Washington's most important "program." In other words, Washington devoted himself more to the Chief of State role than to other activities in which modern presidents typically engage.

A second objection is that Washington did not engage in political philosophy and, hence, his thought lacks scholarly interest. Washington attempted to combine ancient virtue and modern rights. This is not a theoretically satisfactory position: Washington compromised on a lower level elements from the positions of Aristotle, the arch proponent of virtue or excellence and duties, and Locke, the arch proponent of natural rights. "Logic admits of no compromise; the essence of politics is compromise." The original positions of Aristotle and Locke are as far apart as the supremacy of virtue, a moral limit on property, censorship and the closed society, on the one hand, and the supremacy of commodious self-preservation, the lack of a moral limit on property and "toleration" or the nearly open society, on the other. Washington proceeded unphilosophically as if to say: "Virtue is good and rights are good. Therefore we can have both in full measure." He emphasized the "natural and unalienable" rights of men as distinctive theoretical principle, but at best he only alludes to the teaching of philosophers such as Locke. As an active statesman Washington does not demonstrate the soundness of Locke's teaching of material self-interest nor should we expect him to do so.

If Washington's attempted synthesis was not theoretically sound, what did he contribute on a lower level to American political thought? Jefferson correctly praised Washington for his "judgment," not genius. In Washington's opinion principled judgment rather than genius was exactly what the times demanded at the founding of the American republic. As he said in the Circular Letter to the Governors of June 8, 1783: "The foundation of our empire was not laid in the gloomy age of ignorance and superstition; but at an epocha when the rights of mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any other period. The researches of the human mind after social happiness have been carried to a great extent; the treasures of knowledge acquired by the labors of philosophers, sages, and legislators, through a long succession of years, are laid open for our use, and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the establishment of our forms of government." The United States came into existence as a nation at an "auspicious period" when practical judgment rather than contemplative skill was needed. Washington had the penetration to understand that the United States had to assign to the public sector or government the care of the qualities, such as moral character, that the United States required to work well.<sup>92</sup>

Washington's emphasis on the governmental role in forming character differs sharply from the moral vacuum in which Publius-Madison leaves the American regime in *Federalist* 10 and 51. In *Federalist* 10 Publius identified two methods for curing the mischiefs of faction: to remove its causes or to control its effects. The two methods of removing the causes of faction were by destroying the liberty factions need to exist or "by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests."<sup>93</sup> Publius called the second method "impracticable" without proving that Washington's narrowly focused plan for giving homogenous opinions to potential statesmen was "impracticable." In contradistinction to Washington Publius observed that moral and religious controls were ineffective: "we well know that neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on as an adequate control."<sup>94</sup> Publius resignedly predicts that "enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm" without exerting himself to improve this situation.<sup>95</sup> Publius thus opposes classically inspired tools of government while he tacitly follows Locke in liberating property from moral control: "The protection of these faculties ["the diversity in the faculties of men from which the rights of property originate"] is the first object of Government."<sup>96</sup> Publius' solution for controlling the effects of faction is not moral and religious education, "enlightened statesmen," or homogenizing the opinions of potential leaders, but the extended republic: "In the extent and proper structure of the Union, . . . we behold a Republican remedy for the diseases most incident to Republican Government."<sup>97</sup> In *Federalist* 51 Publius describes "this policy of supplying by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives," a policy that practically ensures that better motives will always be lacking. Thus I submit that Washington's thought on virtue and the national university is a necessary corrective to and an improvement upon the institutionalism and moral skepticism of *Federalist* 10 and 51. If Washington's thought is understood on the statesman's level, his thought is a solid criticism of our mainstream republican heritage and this is no small accomplishment. We who have reaped

the results of *The Federalist's* prevention of government forming character, especially in our age when practically “everything is permitted,” can understand the relevance of Washington’s ideas to our contemporary concerns about the perpetuation of the regime. Washington’s political thought edifies and, compared to Hamilton and Jefferson on liberal education, is deeper than it has been permissible to believe. Washington’s thought advises his countrymen how to perpetuate a complicated invention, particularly on the comparative importance of the Constitution and extra-constitutional influences such as virtue. For the above reasons I deny the objection that Washington’s political thought lacks scholarly interest.

It may be objected that I paid too much attention to the criticisms of Washington in the literature, but only by stating the difficulties in the ruling interpretations of Washington’s political thought can we approach his thought with sympathetic understanding. A thorough canvass of the Washington literature is part of the price we must pay to free our minds from scorn and bias. A final objection might be that Washington’s national university proposal would not have promoted national unity and was intended as “indoctrination.”<sup>98</sup> Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis, the criticism runs, were educated at West Point, but this did not prevent them from serving Virginia and the South when the chips were down; John C. Calhoun received a New England education, but this did not prevent him from becoming a theorist of nullification against national authority. The weakness of this objection is that it overlooks the express purpose of Washington’s university, to foster unity, moderation and virtue; the critic of Washington’s plan thus fails to prove that it wouldn’t work by drawing an analogy to different types of institutions. As to the objection of indoctrination, Washington in his modest way would have preferred to speak of molding character; “‘academic freedom’ was not even an expression” nor did relativism paralyze native resolution.

The weight of evidence favors the interpretation that Washington engaged in political thought. I conclude that his thought mixes classical and modern republicanism. His thought may be understood as a reply to three points in the classical Aristotelian indictment of democracy, that democracy, is unjust, unstable and, above all, the rule of ignorance. The classical element of Washington’s republicanism is inegalitarian virtue and the formation of character by the liberal education of potential statesmen; virtue sustains republican government and liberal education is a means to virtue. The modern elements of Washington’s republicanism include liberty, the equality of men, popular sovereignty and majority rule.

Washington paradoxically relied on a classical solution for the perpetuation of modern republican institutions. To state his point in an oversimplified but not misleading form for the sake of clarity, modern republican institutions such as the constitutional separation of powers and popular suffrage at brief intervals are empty boxes unless statesmen of virtue fill the offices of government. But classical virtue and the formation of character in a national university are hierarchical and cannot be justified or accounted for within the egalitarianism and institutionalism of modern republicanism. Washington’s advice on virtue and liberal education attempts to enlarge the supply

of “enlightened statesmen” and to correct a shortcoming of modern republicanism in *The Federalist*.

It is appropriate to close this discussion of Washington’s political thought by mentioning his belief that not political historians, but the “Bards . . . hold the keys of the gate by “which patriots, sages and heroes are admitted to immortality.”<sup>99</sup> The poet Gertrude Stein appraised Washington in a novel or play that asks the question: “What is an American and what makes him different from a citizen of any other country?”<sup>100</sup> She depicts Washington’s thought and action as writing a novel beyond the capacity of Napoleon or Lincoln: “he wrote principally what he had as a future.”<sup>101</sup> Stein refers to the sinking of Washington’s reputation: “Once when they were all older George Washington was not cared for. He was not anxious about that.”<sup>102</sup> She notes as well a decline from Washington to later statesmanship: “If it is possible to know that a monkey came down from a man not a man from a monkey . . . this is the background of America from George Washington to Bryan.”<sup>103</sup> Finally, Stein reflects the debate over the presence or lack of Washington’s thought and intellect. On the one hand, “George Washington thought not.”<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, “think how George Washington can link. Link this with that.”<sup>105</sup> “What has George Washington thought. George Washington is not the cause of everything nor will they manage it just now. But if he is. But if he is.”<sup>106</sup> The reappraisal of Washington’s political thought need not necessarily lead to the pious conclusion that it is “the cause of everything” in the American regime. That would be to commit the same error as his detractors, but in the opposite direction.

\* *The Institute for Educational Affairs supported my research for a forthcoming book, Alexander Hamilton and the Modern Theory of Presidential Power, from which this article is adapted.*

### Notes

1. F. Guizot, “The Life of Washington,” in *Monk and Washington: Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 1851), p. 145.
2. F. Guizot, *Essay on the Character and Influence of Washington* (Boston: J. Monroe, 1840) in Morton Borden, ed., *George Washington* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1969), p. 119.
3. W. E. Woodward, *George Washington: The Image and the Man* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), p. 428
4. *Id.*, p. 429.
5. Bernard Faÿ, *George Washington: Republican Aristocrat* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931), p. 273.
6. J. A. Carroll, “George Washington,” in Morton Borden, ed., *America’s Ten Greatest Presidents* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1961), p. 8.
7. Morton Borden, “Introduction,” in Borden, ed., *George Washington*, p. 1.
8. Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of George Washington* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), p. 96.
9. Paine to James Monroe, Oct 20, 1794, Paine to Washington, May 1, 1790, in Phillip Foner, ed., *2 The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine 1371, 1303* (New York: Citadel Press, 1945).
10. Fisher Ames, “Eulogy on Washington,” *2 Works of Fisher Ames 72–73, 88* (Boston: Little Brown, 1854; New York: Da Capo, 1969).
11. John Marshall, *5 The Life of George Washington 777* (Philadelphia: C.P. Wayne, 1807); cf. David Ramsay, *The Life of George Washington* (2nd ed.; Boston: D. Mallory, 1811), p. 333.
12. Quoted in Faÿ, *George Washington: Republican Aristocrat*, pp. xii–xiii.



13. Daniel Webster, "The Character of Washington," *The Great Speeches and Orations of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little Brown, 1879), p. 342; cf. Abraham Lincoln, "Temperance Address," in Roy Basler, ed., 1 *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* 279 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953).
14. Henry Cabot Lodge, 2 *George Washington* 326–27 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1889).
15. Harold Bradley, "The Political Thinking of George Washington," 11 *Journal of Southern History* 471 (November, 1945).
16. *Id.*, pp. 470, 485.
17. *Id.*, p. 485.
18. *Id.*, pp. 470, 472, 485.
19. Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (New York: Free Press, 1959), p. 12.
20. *Id.*, p. 12.
21. Bradley, 11 *Journal of Southern History* 469.
22. *Id.*, p. 469.
23. Saul Padover, "George Washington—Portrait of a True Conservative," 22 *Social Research* 203 (Summer, 1955).
24. *Id.*, pp. 209–210.
25. Henry T. Tuckerman, "The Patriot, George Washington," *Essays, Biographical and Critical* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1857), p. 22.
26. Marcus Cunliffe, *George Washington Man and Monument* (Boston: Little Brown, 1958), p. 194.
27. Nathaniel Stephenson, Waldo Dunn, 2 *George Washington* 494 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940).
28. Cunliffe, *George Washington*, pp. 16–17.
29. *Id.*, p. 195.
30. James Morton Smith, "Introduction," in Smith, ed., *George Washington: A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), p. xvi.
31. *Id.*, p. xv.
32. *Id.*, pp. xv–xvi.
33. James Flexner, *George Washington Anguish and Farewell 1793–1799* (Boston: Little Brown, 1972), p. 499; in *Washington and the New Nation 1783–1793* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), p. 412 Flexner held that Washington's "own mind was unconcerned with theoretical speculation."
34. Italics in the original, To Governor Jonathan Trumbull Aug. 30, 1799, 37 *The Writings of George Washington* 349, J. Fitzpatrick, ed. (Washington: G.P.O., 1940); hereinafter, *Writings* preceded by the volume number and followed by the page number.
35. To Alexander Hamilton, July 9, 1795, 34 *Writings* 264.
36. Italics in the original, Alexander Hamilton to James A. Bayard, Jan. 16, 1801, 25 *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* 321, H. Syrett, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).
37. Jan. 10, 1788, 29 *Writings* 375.
38. To Bushrod Washington, Nov. 10, 1787, 29 *Writings* 311.
39. Seventh Annual Address to Congress, Dec. 8, 1795, 34 *Writings* 389.
40. To Comte De Rochambeau, Jan. 29, 1789, 30 *Writings* 189.
41. To Dr. James Anderson, Dec. 24, 1795, 34 *Writings* 407.
42. Emphasis supplied, to Rev. Mason Locke Weems, Aug. 29, 1799, 37 *Writings* 347.
43. To Benjamin Lincoln, June 29, 1788, 30 *Writings* 11; see also the reference to the "finger of Providence," 29 *Writings* 508.
44. To David Stuart, July 1, 1787, 29 *Writings* 238.
45. To James Madison, March 31, 1787, 29 *Writings* 190–191.
46. To Henry Knox, March 3, 1788, 29 *Writings* 435; To Lafayette, June 6, 1788, 29 *Writings* 229.
47. To the inhabitants of Alexandria, July 4, 1793, 33 *Writings* 3.
48. To Edmund Pendleton, Jan. 22, 1795, 34 *Writings* 98–99.
49. Aristotle, *Politics* 122 (Barker trans.).

50. To David Humphreys, July 20, 1791, 31 *Writings* 318; to Humphreys, March 23, 1793, 32 *Writings* 399; to Lafayette, July 28, 1791, 31 *Writings* 326.
51. To Sir Edward Newenham, Sept. 5, 1791, 31 *Writings* 357.
52. To Bushrod Washington, Nov. 10, 1787, 29 *Writings* 311.
53. The Farewell Address, 35 *Writings* 224.
54. 34 *Writings* 30.
55. To Charles Mynn Thurston, Aug. 10, 1794, 33 *Writings* 465.
56. July 28, 1795, 34 *Writings* 253.
57. To the Attorney General, Feb. 11, 1790, 31 *Writings* 9.
58. Emphasis supplied, Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, Lewis White Beck, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 30.
59. *Id.*, pp. 30–31.
60. Feb. 7, 1788, 29 *Writings* 410; cf. Thomas Paine to James Monroe, Sept. 10, 1794, in Paine, 2 *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* 1348–1349, n. 244.
61. To Annis Stockton, Aug. 31, 1788, 30 *Writings* 76.
62. Italics in the original, to Catherine Macaulay Graham, Jan. 9, 1790, 30 *Writings* 496.
63. 30 *Writings* 294.
64. Italics in the original, 30 *Writings* 294–95.
65. Sept. 19, 1796, 35 *Writings* 229.
66. *Id.*, pp. 229–230.
67. *Id.*, p. 231. Lafayette revealed the extent to which the American experiment under Washington tried to combine the classical concern for virtue with the modern dispensation of liberty and equality when he wrote of “a doctrine truly American of *virtuous* liberty and legal equality.” Virtue in America was to direct the use of liberty to good rather than evil. Italics added, Lafayette to Washington, Aug. 20, 1798, in Louis Gottschalk, Shirley A. Bill, eds. *The Letters of Lafayette to Washington 1777–1799* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1976), p. 374.
68. After praising Pascal’s success in rallying “all the powers of his mind to discover the most hidden secrets of the Creator,” Tocqueville concludes that “the future will show whether such rare, creative passions come to birth and grow as easily in democracies as in aristocratic communities. For myself, I confess that I can hardly believe it.” *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, chap. 10, J. P. Mayer, Max Lerner, eds., trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 428; Tocqueville’s impressions of the “Great Men of the First Period of the Republic,” including Washington, are in Appendix VI, p. 772: “The gods depart!” On American poetry, see *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, chap. 17, pp. 451–455: “I gladly agree that there are no American poets.” *Id.*, p. 453.
69. Washington infrequently refers to the American regime as a democracy, but he does so refer to it: “It is among the evils, and perhaps is not the smallest, of democratical governments, that the people must *feel*, therefore they will *see*. When this happens, they are roused to action; hence it is that this form of governments is so slow.” Italics in the original, to Henry Knox, March 8, 1787, 29 *Writings* 171.
70. Aristotle, *Politics* 114–115, 268 (Barker trans.).
71. On the importance of property and leisure for goodness, see Aristotle, *Politics* 301–302 (Barker trans.).
72. To Lafayette, May 28, 1788, 29 *Writings* 506–507.
73. *Id.*, p. 507.
74. To the Trustees of Washington Academy, June 17, 1798, 36 *Writings* 293.
75. To St. George Tucker, May 30, 1797, 35 *Writings* 458.
76. Italics in the original, to the Vice President, Nov. 15, 1794, 34 *Writings* 23.
77. First Annual Address to Congress, 30 *Writings* 493.
78. 35 *Writings* 316.
79. *Id.*, pp. 316–17.
80. Italics in the original, *Id.*, p. 317.
81. 37 *Writings* 280.

82. *Id.*, pp. 279–280.
83. *Id.*, p. 280.
84. 34 *Writings* 60 n. 50. The probable spirit of the national university may be deduced from certain of Washington's educational recommendations and insights. He thought that learning Greek was "no bad acquisition. . . . Philosophy, moral, natural, etc. I should think a very desirable knowledge for a gentleman." To the Rev. Jonathan Boucher, Jan. 2, 1771, 3 *Writings* 36–37. In drawing up a catalogue of books for a young charge, Washington prescribed "a very neat edition" of "all Cicero's Works." 2 *Writings* 515. This catalogue, in Washington's own handwriting, is in the Washington Papers at the University of Virginia. Washington advised a young charge that "a good moral character is the first essential in a man. . . . It is therefore highly important that you should endeavor not only to be learned but virtuous." To George Steptoe Washington, Dec. 5, 1790, 31 *Writings* 163. He informed another young charge of "the advantages of a finished education, a highly cultivated mind, and a proper sense of your duties to God and man." To George Washington Parke Custis, Dec. 19, 1796, 35 *Writings* 341. Washington distinguished among universities using the criterion of the morals of the student body. To David Stuart, Jan. 22, 1798, 36 *Writings* 136; see also *Id.*, pp. 169–170, 172. "No college has turned out better scholars, or more estimable characters, than Nassau," later Princeton University. To George Washington Parke Custis, July 23, 1797, 35 *Writings* 510. It is likely that Washington's national university would have imitated the strength in character and scholarship he discerned in "Nassau."
85. 37 *Writings* 280.
86. March 15, 1795, 34 *Writings* 147.
87. To Bushrod Washington, Dec. 31, 1798, 37 *Writings* 81; to Judge Alexander Addison, March 4, 1799, 37 *Writings* 145.
88. Alexander Hamilton to James A. Bayard, 1802, 25 *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* 606.
89. For Hamilton's understanding of virtue, see Richard Loss, "Alexander Hamilton and the Modern Presidency: Continuity or Discontinuity?," 12 *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 6–25 (Winter 1982).
90. Italics supplied, Jefferson to John Melish, Jan. 13, 1813, in 13 *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* 212, Andrew A. Lipscomb, ed. (Washington: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1905); Jefferson called it "lost time" to attend lectures on moral philosophy because "the moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of a man as his leg or arm" and "is the true foundation of morality." To Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787, 6 *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* 257. Jefferson's understanding of "the moral sense, or conscience" further suggests that for him virtue was instinctive or innate. Cf. Fisher Ames: "Federalism was . . . manifestly founded on a mistake, on the supposed existence of sufficient political virtue, and on the permanency and authority of the public morals. . . . The federal power, propped by nothing but opinion, fell . . . because its principles were more exalted and pure than the people could support." Fisher Ames, "The Dangers of American Liberty," (1805) in Ames, 2 *Works of Fisher Ames* 379.
91. Jefferson drafted the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 which declared that the Constitution was a compact and that "each party has an equal right to judge for itself, as well of infractions as of the mode and measure of redress." This resolution nullified the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 in the sense of declaring them "altogether void and of no force." H. S. Commager, ed., *Documents of American History* (9th ed.; Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973), p. 179. On March 4, 1825 with Jefferson as rector the Board of Visitors of his University of Virginia "resolved, that it is the opinion of this Board that . . . on the distinctive principles of the government of our State, and of that of the United States, the best guides are to be found in. . . . The Resolutions of the General Assembly of Virginia in 1799 on the subject of the alien and sedition laws, which appeared to accord with the predominant sense of the people of the United States." The Board required the Resolutions as the "text and documents" of the Law School course on "civil polity." 19 *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* 460–461. Although Jefferson also required as texts and documents the Declaration of Independence, *The Federalist* and Washington's Farewell Address, his emphasis may have been on the Virginia Resolutions of 1799. By a "previous prescription of

the texts to be followed in their discourses” “of government,” Jefferson aimed to “guard against . . . the diffusion of that poison” of “quondam federalism, now consolidation.” 16 *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* 104.

Jefferson, in referring to the Virginia Resolutions of 1799, may have intended Madison’s Report on the Virginia Resolutions for the 1799–1800 session of the legislature. This report upholds the compact theory of the Constitution and defends the argument of the Virginia Resolutions of 1798 that the states “have the right, and are in duty bound, to interpose for arresting the progress of the evil.” “Madison’s Report on the Virginia Resolutions,” in Jonathan Elliot, ed., 4 *Debates . . . on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* 548 (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1901). Jefferson is stated also to have “drafted” the Kentucky Resolutions of 1799. Richard B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History* 155 (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). The Kentucky Resolutions of 1799 held that “the several states who formed that instrument being sovereign and independent, have the unquestionable right to judge of the infraction; and, that a nullification of those sovereignties, of all unauthorized acts done under color of that instrument is the rightful remedy.” *Documents of American History* 184. In 1832 John C. Calhoun appealed to the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions in urging nullification. “We are certainly more united against the Tariff, than we have ever been; and, I think, better disposed to enhance the old Republican doctrines of [17]98, which [“alone” canceled and “only” interlined] can save the Constitution.” Calhoun to B. Hall, Feb. 13, 1832, 11 *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* 553 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1978); see also Calhoun to James Hamilton, Jr., Aug. 28, 1832 in *Id.*, p. 625.

Jefferson’s letter of Sept. 5, 1799 to Wilson C. Nicholas contemplates secession as a remedy to be applied by a state in certain cases: “. . . we should never think of separation *but* for repeated and enormous violations [“of our federal compact”], so these, when they occur, will be cause enough of themselves.” Italics not in the original, 7 *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* 391, Paul L. Ford, ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s, 1896). This means that Jefferson wanted the states to think of some “violations,” to be determined by the states, as “a cause of scission” [*sic*; secession] or “separation.” *Id.*, pp. 390–91. Hence Jefferson reserves the choice for the states “rightfully” to secede or separate from the Union “in the future.” *Id.*, p. 390. In 1832 Calhoun wrote that “most fortunately, at this critical moment, the recorded opinions of Mr. Jefferson, the Republican Patriarch, have come to light on the all important question of the relation between the States and the general government. There can now be no longer a shadow of doubt, that what is called the Carolina doctrines are [*sic*] also the Jeffersonian. . . . In comparing Mr. Jefferson’s views with my own, I feel that such is there [*sic*; “striking” interlined] coincidence that, I should have been exposed to the charge of plagiarism, were it supposed possible, that I could have previously known what his were.” Calhoun to B. Hall, April 3, 1832, 11 *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* 565.

Alexander Hamilton wrote of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions: “The late attempt of Virginia and Kentucky to unite the state legislatures in a direct resistance to certain laws of the Union can be considered in no other light than as an attempt to change the government.” Quoted in James A. Hamilton, *Reminiscences* (New York: Scribner, 1869), p. 38; see also p. 39.

92. See Walter Berns’ criticism of the Founders in this respect, “Privacy, Liberalism, and the Role of Government,” in Robert L. Cunningham, ed., *Liberty and the Rule of Law* (College Station: Texas A & M University, 1979), p. 210.
93. Jacob Cooke, ed., *The Federalist* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University, 1961), p. 58.
94. *Id.*, p. 61.
95. *Id.*, p. 60.
96. *Id.*, p. 58.
97. *Id.*, p. 65.
98. Albert Castel, “The Founding Fathers and the Vision of a National University,” 4 *History of Education Quarterly* 280, 298 (December, 1964).
99. To Lafayette, May 28, 1788, 29 *Writings of George Washington* 506.

100. Thornton Wilder, "Introduction," Gertrude Stein, *Four in America* (New Haven: Yale University, 1947), p. xv.
101. Stein, "George Washington," in *Four in America*, p. 176.
102. *Id.*, p. 215.
103. *Id.*, p. 206.
104. *Id.*, p. 209.
105. *Id.*, p. 212.
106. *Id.*, p. 212.