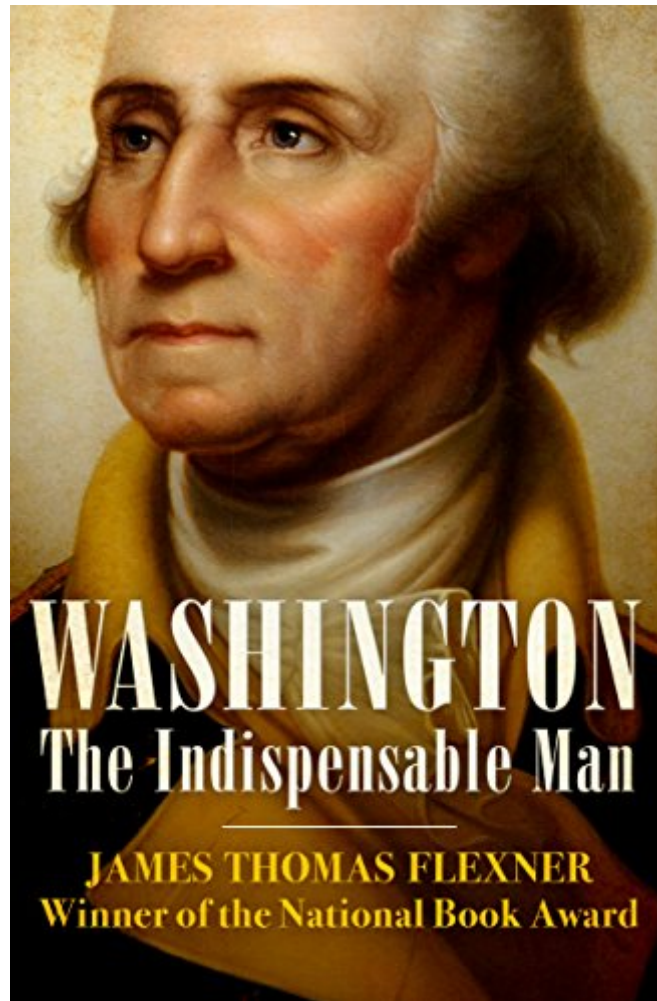




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Washington: The Indispensable Man



Synopsis

This “perceptive” and “satisfying” biography of George Washington by an award-winning historian “deserves a place on every American’s bookshelf” (The New York Times Book Review). James Thomas Flexner’s masterful four-volume biography of America’s first president, which received a special Pulitzer Prize citation and a National Book Award for its concluding installment, is the definitive chronicle of Washington’s life and a classic work of American history. In this single-volume edition, Flexner brilliantly distills his sweeping study to offer readers “the most convincing evocation of the man and his deeds written within the compass of one book” (Los Angeles Times). In graceful and dramatic prose, Flexner peels back the myths surrounding Washington to reveal the true complexity of his character. The only founding father from Virginia to free all his slaves, Washington was a faithful husband who harbored deep romantic feelings for his best friend’s wife. An amateur soldier, he prepared for his role as commander in chief of the Continental army by sending out to Philadelphia bookshops for treatises on military strategy. As president, he set many democratic precedents—including the two-term limit and the appointment of an advisory cabinet—yet routinely excluded his vice president, John Adams, from important decisions. The George Washington that emerges in these pages is a shrewd statesman, a wise commander, a brave patriot, and above all, “an ordinary man pushed to greatness by the extraordinary times in which he lived” (The Christian Science Monitor). In tracing Washington’s evolution from privileged son of the landed gentry to “the indispensable man” without whom the United States as we know it would not exist, Flexner presents a hero worthy of admiration not only for his remarkable strengths, but also for his all-too-human weaknesses.

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Customer Reviews

This book is very well written. It is consistently interesting and moves along easily. Washington, in this telling, is shown as a most admirable man, without vanity or greed, a truly urbane and great-hearted individual. Except in one respect: "In 1768, Washington went to church on fifteen days, mostly when away from home, and hunted foxes on forty-nine." The poor, panting foxes, pursued by dogs, cowering in holes when they could find shelter, torn apart when they could not. And foxes were not even consumed by humans, so there was no excuse for killing the helpless creatures. In his earlier years Washington also enjoyed cockfights. Still, all in all, he was an admirable public figure and indispensable to the creation of the United States. But not everyone deserved his trust. When the continental army was formed in Philadelphia, Washington asked for four officers to be assigned. The four were Horacio Gates, Light Horse Harry Lee, Joseph Reed, and Thomas Mifflin. "When Washington, having found his own way, ceased to depend upon his four original advisers, all four became his extremely dangerous enemies." To my surprise, this is the second history of the Revolution that pointed out Samuel Adams' jealousy. As Washington rode off to war, "Fortunately, he did not know that the most influential member of Congress burned, as he watched, with jealousy. "Such," John Adams wrote, "is the pride and pomp of war. I, poor creature, worn out with scribbling for my bread and my liberty, low in spirits and weak in health, must leave others to wear the laurels which I have sown." This quotation gives an idea of how vivid the writing is and how much of the authentic flavor of that era is provided by this excellent history.

Magnificent book. I can't imagine the qualities described for George Washington in any of the people I have known all my life. It seems he truly was one of a kind, the person who comes along just when needed and who does what must be done. Very informative, well-written, and inspiring.

I am in the middle of this book and am totally engaged. Not being originally from this country I am trying to immerse myself more in its past. This book is written in a very interesting way stating most of the pertinent facts but not going in to detail to much as to get lost in them. Using a mixture of language of the time as well as modern it gives it the air of authenticity and factual correctness. One thing though: if you want to understand the original spirit of America and the United States you owe it to yourself to learn about a man that lost battles, was undermined by the very congress that put him in power, suffered insubordination by his own officers looking for their own advancement, being stood up by the french (surprise surprise) several times, deemed unfit for the post he was given (general of the continental army), and suffered through tremendous hardships but despite that never gave up. If that is your goal read this book .

I grew up in a time when it was The Thing to snicker at the foibles of our cultural heroes. Washington, for some reason, was a particularly popular target: the cherry tree story (ironically) isn't true, he wore wooden teeth, etc. But in Flexner's very accessible work, I came to see that Ol' George was the real deal: an authentically Great Man. What Flexner helps us to see is that Washington *became* a great man through a combination of character, luck, and hard work. But the result was real and, personally, Washington has become a genuine hero for me.

I haven't read Flexner's 3 volume biography on George Washington, so I can't compare the two, but I CAN tell you that with limited amount of reading time available I didn't want to start out with 3 volumes. I also wanted a reasonably comprehensive look at the man with so many things named after him. Of all the founding Fathers President/General Washington seemed one of the most ethereal, least concrete figures of all. The earthy and witty Benjamin Franklin and the enigmatic Thomas Jefferson seem relatively easy to "know" in comparison. Flexner produces a man who stood shoulders above the other Giants at the founding of the United States. Not nearly as well-educated as Jefferson, Franklin or John Adams, and with a military tactician's ability that seemed rudimentary, he nonetheless had an aura of a man who seemed incapable of doing anything other than the "right thing". When the Continental Congress was choosing a General to lead the Army, no one other than Washington was seriously considered. When the Continental Convention was called, initially only to revise the weak Articles of Confederation, there was no other choice to preside over the convention. Initially he hadn't seriously considered GOING to the Constitutional Convention, but Benjamin Franklin - older and wiser - recognized that Washington MUST go to the convention or it would not

be recognized as having authority. After the Constitution was written and ratified Washington had the easiest Presidential campaign ever - all he had to do was not decline the office. We get a view of Washington the man as well: the woman he truly loved who he didn't get to marry, his wrong decisions in early military campaigns, his distaste for developing "party politics". It would be difficult to imagine a single volume biography on this Great American superior to this one.

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