

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GREAT AMERICANS AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

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LESSON 04 SESSION 01

4.1 The Value of Biography

The history of any nation, in its ideals and achievements, its motives and spirit, invariably reflects the character of its leaders. The stories of the lives and accomplishments of its great men are the windows through which is revealed the soul of the nation.

The biographies of the leaders of America should be carefully studied as the means of best understanding the controlling factors in the development of our country in any given period. In these stories are revealed the combat of minds, the clash of opinions, the cunning of politicians, the ruthlessness of self-seekers, and the saving forces of those dominant leaders who inspired the people to follow them in the establishment of the ideals out of which have been created the splendid achievements of our people.

In the lives of our great men are to be found the elements of righteousness, courage, justice, unselfish devotion to duty, self-reliance, initiative, and stubborn determination, the ingredients from which was brewed the virile, aggressive, and generous spirit of America. With each succeeding period of our progress in government, industry, agriculture, education, medical science, we have had the leadership of men and women devoted to public service with little thought of personal gain.

In this spirit our Government was established. They who had power to assume control dared to commit that control to a free people, knowing that the ideals of liberty, justice, and individual right had been indelibly stamped upon the very souls of their countrymen.

In like spirit succeeding generations have responded to the call of their leaders for the preservation of our Nation. Creative and destructive forces are in eternal conflict. The experience of the past gives us wisdom to accomplish the tasks of the present. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

4.2 Fields of Achievement

The ideals and accomplishments of our great Americans were to establish a government that was fit to be entrusted with all the powers that a free people ought to delegate to any

government as the safe and proper depository of national interests, controlled not by the passions but by the reason of the people, to develop the natural resources of the country, and to open up the way of opportunity to all.

However, great Americans have not confined their achievements to the field of government and protection of our institutions. Many of the great industries, much of medical science, communication, and transportation found first expression in the keen minds of our pioneers. In the biographies of these men are incidents as thrilling, full of daring, and productive of rich achievements as are revealed in the lives of the mighty army who conquered the wilderness and won for the United States in succession the Colonies, the Northwest Territory, Louisiana, the Oregon country, Texas, California, and the great Southwest.

4.3 George Washington

This noble first citizen of America is the outstanding character in the history of our country. From his early youth he demonstrated those qualities of leadership which, with the experience gained in his great achievements, made him the dominant personality of his time.

4.3.1 Military leadership.

At the early age of 23 years he was placed in command of the Virginia Rangers. He became the hero of General Braddock's ill-fated campaign against the French and Indians. After General Braddock's failure to accept his advice, which caused his death and the defeat of his troops, it was the superior ability of Washington which saved the British from rout and possible annihilation. As commander in chief of the Continental Army, he took command of a disorganized, undisciplined yet loyal body of raw provincials. Ragged and starved, half frozen, and poorly equipped, by the force of his character he brought them to a condition of training and discipline that gave final success to the Colonial cause.

By the charm and strength of his personality he won the admiration and enthusiastic support of the great German general, Von Steuben; the brilliant Frenchman, Count de La Fayette; and the gallant Pole, Kosciusko.

4.3.2 Political leadership.

The conclusion of the war found General Washington so exalted in the hearts of his countrymen as to make him the virtual ruler of the new nation, created largely through his military genius and indomitable will.

Foregoing all personal ambitions other than that of molding a free people into an enduring nation, he gave himself with equal faithfulness to the work of peace and orderly government.

Serving without pay in his entire public career, his life of unselfish devotion rightfully won for him the title of "Father of His Country." When charged by an unfriendly Congress with usurpation of power, he replied: "A character to lose, an estate to forfeit, the inestimable blessings of liberty at stake, and a life devoted, must be my excuse."

Inspired by the influence of his character and his qualities of statesmanship, such men as Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, Randolph, King, Marshall, Monroe, and the venerable Franklin addressed themselves with him to the task of constructing a new government, which in the following generations was destined to become an ever-growing memorial to their wisdom and patriotic devotion to the ideals and rights of humanity.

4.3.3 Farewell address.

The wisdom, sagacity, and vision of Washington gave the United Colonies a republican rather than a democratic form of government. In the almost inspired words of his "Farewell Address" — in the framing of which he undoubtedly had the assistance of Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, two of the finest minds of that period — he gave counsels concerning the pitfalls which have destroyed other popular governments of history.

As far as these counsels have been observed the Nation has enjoyed peace, prosperity, and happiness.

4.3.4 The Nation's gratitude.

George Washington, born February 22, 1732, died September 14, 1799. Within the scope of his 67 years he was surveyor, farmer, soldier, statesman, commander in chief of the Continental Army, President of the Constitutional Convention, and twice President of the United States of America.

More than to any other, we owe our everlasting debt of gratitude to George Washington for American independence and the Constitution of the United States.