

## **A Libretto in Five Sections, portraying Washington's life in his own words**

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GW 1: Washington as a young man, approximately 1753-75

GW 2: Washington in his most active and engaged years, approximately 1775-91

GW 3: Washington in his more reflective years, approximately 1791-99

Each of the five sections has a "primary voice", but a voice from another period occasionally interjects, reflecting the ways in which one's inner life often entails conversations with oneself. Everything in the text was written or spoken by Washington. I have forged the continuity.

The indented headings will be projected, not spoken. The roles are taken by three separate narrators.

### **ORIGINS**

*As a young man, Washington's ambition and courage led him – as surveyor and military officer – into the vast and treacherous Ohio wilderness. The experience was filled with travails that tested and forged his character.*

GW 1 ... in the depth of winter, when the whole face of the earth was covered with snow and the waters covered with ice ...

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I now exist and appear in the land of the living by the miraculous care of Providence ... I had 4 Bullets through my Coat, and two Horses shot under me,

GW 2 It ought to be the pride of an officer to share the fatigue ... and yet escaped unhurt.

... as well as danger to which his men are exposed. ... I heard the Bullets whistle and believe me there was something charming in the Sound.

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The Cold increas'd very fast, & the Roads were getting much worse by a deep Snow continually Freezing ... we got to the River. ... There was no way for us to get over but upon a Raft, which we set about with but one poor Hatchet, & got finish'd just after Sunsetting, after a whole days Work: We got it launch'd ... but before we got half over, we were jammed in the Ice in such a Manner, that we expected every Moment our Raft wou'd sink, & we Perish; I put out my setting Pole, to try to stop the Raft, that the Ice might pass by, when the Rapidity of the Stream threw it with so much Violence against the Pole, that it Jirk'd me into 10 Feet Water .... Notwithstanding all our Efforts we cou'd not get the Raft to either Shoar ...

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The dead – the dying – the groans – the lamentations of the wounded were enough to pierce a heart of adamant. ... I am too little acquainted with pathetic language to attempt a description of

the people's distress, though I have a generous soul, sensible of wrongs and swelling for redress. ... I see their situation, know their danger, and participate [in] their sufferings without having it in my power to give them further relief ... The supplicating tears of the women and moving petitions from the men melt me into such deadly sorrow ...

... If it is in my power to avoid going to the Ohio again, I shall ...

What did I get by this? ... I suffered considerably in the Service ... the loss of many valuable papers, a valuable servant (who died a few days later of his Wounds) ... Books and Horses which amounted to no trifling sum ... after putting myself to considerable expense in equipping and providing Necessaries for the Campaign – I went out, was soundly beaten, lost them all – came in, and had my commission taken from me.

GW 3 Never be agitated by *more than* a decent *warmth* and offer your sentiments with modest diffidence ... opinions thus given are listened to with more attention...

## MARTHA

*Washington's marriage to the wealthy young widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, brought him into a relationship marked by deep commitment and steadfast support. Martha traveled to be with him even in war time and was his invaluable partner in the essential social life of Mount Vernon and Philadelphia. His service as Commander in Chief was only one of many obligations he undertook for his country.*

GW 2 You may believe me, my dear Patsy, when I assure you, in the most solemn manner that, so far from seeking th[e] appointment, ... I have used every endeavor in my power to avoid it... I should enjoy more real happiness in one month with you at home, than I have the most distant prospect of finding abroad, if my stay were to be seven times seven years.

... I shall rely on that Providence, which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me ...

... as it has been a kind of destiny, that has thrown me upon this service, I shall hope that my undertaking it is designed to answer some good purpose.

GW 3 I retain an unalterable affection for you, which neither time nor distance can change.

## ENGAGEMENT

*Between the first Continental Congress of 1774, and his inauguration for a second term as President in 1793, Washington's engagement in the Revolutionary process as attentive observer and dedicated participant was essential to the cause of American Liberty.*

GW 2 I am now embarked on a tempestuous Ocean from whence, perhaps, no friendly harbour is to be found . ... I can answer but for three things, ... a firm belief in the justice of our Cause — close attention to the prosecution of it — and the strictest Integrity.

GW 1 Human affairs are always checkered and vicissitudes in this life are rather to be expected ... .. I know that much is expected of me;

GW 1 ... than wondered at. I know, that without men, ... without arms, without ammunition, without anything fit ... for the accommodation of a soldier, ... little is to be done ...

GW3 ... the man, who wished to steer clear of shelves and rocks, must know where they lay ...

The arrows of malevolence, however barbed and well pointed, never can reach the most vulnerable part of me ...

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GW 2 ... I think the Parliament of Great Britain ... hath no more right to put their hands into my pocket, without my consent, ... than I have ... to put mine into yours ...

I would tell them that we had borne much, that we had long ... and ardently sought for reconciliation ... on honorable terms ... that we are determined to shake off all connexions ... with a state ... so unjust ... and so unnatural. ... This I would tell them, ... not under covert, but in words as clear as the sun in its meridian brightness.

GW 3 ... drops of water will impress (in time) ... hardest marble.

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... the Constitution of the United States ... the result of a spirit of amity and mutual concession. ... The various and opposite interests which were to be conciliated; ... the local prejudices which were to be subdued, ... the diversity of opinions ... and sentiments which were to be reconciled; ... and, in fine, ... the sacrifices which were necessary to be made on all sides combined to make it a work of so intricate and difficult a nature, ... that it is much to be wondered at.

GW 3 Much was to be done by *prudence*, much by *conciliation*, much by *firmness*.

## LAFAYETTE

*Although Washington's range of contacts was large, and his acquaintances many, his friendship with the younger French aristocrat the Marquis de Lafayette was particularly meaningful, emotionally, intellectually.*

*Washington, who had no children, treated the young man, who had no father, almost as a son.*

GW 3 ... under the shadow of my own Vine and my own Fig tree, free from the bustle of camp and the busy scenes of public life, I am solacing myself with ... tranquil enjoyments ... I am not only retired from all public employments, but I am retireing within myself; & shall be able to view the solitary walk, & tread the paths of private life with heartfelt satisfaction ...

In the moment of our separation upon the road, as I travelled, and every hour since, I felt all that love, respect and attachment for you, with which length of years, close connexion and your merits have inspired me. I often asked myself, as our carriages distended, whether that was the last sight, I should have of you? ... And tho' I wished to say no, ... my fears answered ... yes.

## REFLECTION

*Washington's engagement with service to an emerging nation was never entirely welcomed by him in spite of his ambitious nature. Letters reveal a wise and reflective nature. He saw presciently beyond his own time, in regard to the nation's governance, even its international relations.*

GW 3 I feel now as I conceive a wearied traveler must ... who, after treading many a painful step, with a heavy burden on his shoulders, is eased of the latter, having reached the goal ... and from his housetop is looking back and tracing with a grateful eye ... the meanders by which he escaped the quicksands and mires which lay in his way and into which none but the great disposer of human events could have prevented his falling.

I am just beginning to experience that ease, and freedom from public cares which takes some time to realize ... it is not 'till lately I could get the better of my usual custom of ruminating as soon as I waked in the Morning, on the business of the ensuing day, and find that I was no longer a public Man ... Envious of none, I am determined to be pleased with all ...

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The life of the husbandman, ... of all others, is the most delectable ...

GW 1 ... went through most beautiful ... To see plants ...

GW 1 ... Groves of Sugar Trees ... rise from the earth and flourish

GW 1 ... & spent the best part of the Day by the superior skill and bounty of the laborer ...

GW 1 ... in admiring the Trees ... ... fills a contemplative mind ...

GW 1 ... & richness of the Land. ... with ideas that are more easy to be conceived than expressed.

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... It should be the highest ambition of every American ... to extend his views beyond himself, and to bear in mind that his conduct will not only ... affect himself, his country, and his immediate posterity; but that its influence may stamp political happiness ...

GW 1 ... there is a destiny ... or misery ...

GW 1 ... which has the sovereign control of our actions. ... on ages yet unborn ...

I believe all things will come out right at last, ... but the people must *feel* before they will see.

GW 1 ... I see their situation, *know* their danger ... without having it in my power to give them further relief ...

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The unfortunate condition of the persons, whose labor I employed ... has been the only unavoidable subject of regret.

... to lay a foundation ... to prepare the rising generation ... for a destiny ... different from that in which they were born; ... afforded some satisfaction to my mind ...

The foundation of our Empire ... was not laid in the gloomy age ... of Ignorance and Suspicion ...

GW 2 Providence has done much for us ... but we must do something for ourselves.

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... I am *Sure* the Mass of Citizens in the United States *mean well*, ... and I *firmly believe they will always act well*, whenever they can obtain a right understanding of matters ...

Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness. ... every ... valuable end ... of government is best answered ... by the enlightened confidence of the people ...

Promote then ... Institutions ... for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion...

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GW 2 ... piety, ... Harmony,

GW 2 philanthropy, liberal ...

GW 2 honesty, Intercourse ...

GW 2 industry ... ... with all Nations,

GW 2 ...in the ordinary course of human affairs ... are ...

GW 2 ... are particularly necessary ... ... recommended by policy, humanity and interest. ... 'tis folly in one Nation to look for disinterested favours from another ...

GW 1 Wherein you reprove another be unblamable yourself; for example is more prevalent than Precepts.

GW 2... Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder.

I rejoice in a belief that intellectual light will spring up in the dark corners of the earth; that freedom of inquiry will produce liberality of conduct; that mankind will reverse the absurd position that the *many* were made for *the few* ...