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of the world, a huge investment in scientific research, and environmental damage that will take generations to rectify."

Diane Ravitch, a historian of education and a champion of national standards, says in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Feb. 17, 1995) that the history standards "are deeply flawed. I don't believe that one can teach civic values, as the standards claim to do, or explain our society's successes and failures, without emphasizing the Western democratic tradition. But . . . the standards should be substantially

revised, not abandoned."

Forrest McDonald, the noted University of Alabama historian, disagrees. For about two decades, he writes in *Continuity*, "left-wingers . . . have dominated the history departments of the most prestigious schools as well as the two major associations of professional historians." So long as that dominance continues, he says, any national standards drawn up by the historical establishment are unlikely to be much different. The best course, in his view, is to scrap the idea altogether.

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## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

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### *America the Resilient*

"Malaise and Resiliency in America" by Seymour Martin Lipset, in *Journal of Democracy* (July 1995), 1101 15th St. N.W., Ste. 802, Washington, D.C. 20005.

In a much-noted article earlier this year, Robert D. Putnam, director of Harvard University's Center for International Affairs, pointed out alarming signs of decay in America's "civil society" [see "The Periodical Observer," *WQ*, Spring '95, p. 137]. Lipset, a sociologist at George Mason University and a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, argues that while decay has probably taken place, America's civil society "remains relatively healthy."

There still is greater civic engagement among Americans than among most other peoples, Lipset asserts. A 1990 survey showed that 82 percent of Americans belong to voluntary organizations—compared with 53 percent of Germans, 39 percent of the French, 36 percent of Italians, and 36 percent of the Japanese. Nearly half of all Americans reported taking part in charitable or service activities, compared with only one-fifth of the French and less than one-seventh of the Germans. Americans also remain among "the most religiously committed people in Christendom," Lipset says. Although there are conflicting data, Gallup polls show that membership in churches and synagogues has stayed steady at about two-thirds, and weekly atten-

dance has hovered around 38 percent since 1950.

Moreover, Lipset says, most Americans "are not unhappy about their personal lives or prospects." A 1994 Hudson Institute study found that more than four in five Americans say they are "optimistic about my personal future," and about two in three are "optimistic about America's future." As that study and others show, Lipset says, Americans "still view the United States as a country that rewards personal integrity and hard work, as a nation that—government and politics aside—still 'works.'"

These are not the views of a people in crisis. Despite the oft-noted declines in political participation, in confidence in political institutions, and in the strength of the traditional two-party system, and despite the apparent signs of civic decay, "the American political system . . . is in no real danger," Lipset concludes.

### *The Making of George Washington*

"George Washington: Today's Indispensable Man" by Forrest McDonald, in *The Intercollegiate Review* (Spring 1995), 14 South Bryn Mawr Ave., Bryn Mawr, Pa. 19010-3275.

Embarking on the perilous course of revolution, Americans had to trust someone—and



In a 1790s portrait, the uniform, map, and globe point up Washington's identities: military hero, country squire, man of science and the world.

George Washington, tall, powerfully built, and with an aura of invincibility about him, looked like the right man. But Washington, observes McDonald, a historian at the University of Alabama, was also the man most worthy of their trust—and he had set out from an early age to become so.

"To understand how he did it," McDonald says, "we must turn to the prevailing ideas about the nature of the human animal." Virtually all Americans then believed in God and in the inherent sinfulness of man. While man could not escape his base nature, he could improve himself in a number of ways. "All of them rested on the premise that the social instinct is a primary force; the desire to have the approval of one's peers ranked with the physical appetites in motivating people. A perceptive person could turn this instinct into an engine for self-improvement"—and that is just what Washington did.

Wanting as a child to become a country gentleman, he recorded and followed "110 Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation." Taken as a teenager under the wing of the Fairfaxes, a wealthy, titled family, Washington was very conscious of his own position in the highly

stratified society of 18th-century Virginia. From observing the Fairfaxes, and from a play—Joseph Addison's *Cato*—that he saw in his late teens, McDonald says, Washington "learned to aim higher than just seeking the approval of his peers": he began to strive for "the esteem of the wise and the good." Later, when circumstances and his achievements permitted, he set his sights even higher—on winning the esteem of posterity.

Washington also sought to improve himself, McDonald says, by his choice of "character," which in polite 18th-century society and among people in public life referred to "a persona or mask that one

deliberately selected and always wore." Country gentleman, scientific farmer, military hero, commander in chief of the Continental Army—Washington "chose to play a progression of characters, each grander and nobler than the last, and he played them so successfully that he ultimately transformed himself into a man of almost extrahuman virtue." In his First Inaugural Address, Washington said it was imperative that "the foundations of our national policy be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality"—words as true and relevant today, McDonald says, as they were in 1789.

## Presidential Plums

"Political Opportunity for Federal Appointment: The Case of Departing Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1961–1992" by Harvey D. Palmer and Ronald J. Vogel, in *The Journal of Politics* (Aug. 1995), Journals Division, University of Texas Press, 2100 Comal, Austin, Texas 78722–2550.

When members of the U.S. House of Representatives leave office, their public careers do not necessarily come to an end. Some, of course, win a Senate seat or a governorship. But that