



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

is not the only way to avoid the oblivion of private life.

Political scientists Palmer, of George Mason University, and Vogel, of the University of Rochester, found that of the 925 congressmen who retired or were defeated at the polls between 1961 and 1992, a total of 153, or 16 percent, were appointed within two years of leaving office to judgeships, cabinet posts, ambassadorships, or other federal jobs. Of those who belonged to the president's party, interestingly, 28 percent received such appointments.

The implication, the authors note, is that presidents—who control some 4,000 executive and judicial positions—use their power of appointment to reward legislators who follow the chief executive's lead. The appointive jobs also serve as a "safety net" for congressmen who agree to quit the House to run for the Senate for the greater good of the party. Illinois representative Lynn Martin, for example, quit her relatively safe House seat in 1990 to

run for the Senate at the behest of GOP strategists who believed that Democratic senator Paul Simon was vulnerable. After Martin lost the election, President George Bush gave her a consolation prize: the post of secretary of labor.

Abortion Reconsidered

"The Conservative Case for Abortion" by Jerry Z. Muller, in *The New Republic* (Aug. 21 & 28, 1995), 1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; "On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position" by George McKenna, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Sept. 1995), 745 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116.

Few issues have roiled the political waters in recent decades as much as abortion. While extremists dominate the public debate, the majority of Americans occupy an ambivalent middle. Muller, author of *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours* (1992), and McKenna, a political scientist at City College of New York, try

WJC Versus JFK

Like John F. Kennedy, President Bill Clinton is young, "addicted to action," and "thrives on chaos"—but there are also some significant differences between the men and their times, writes JFK biographer Richard Reeves in the *Washington Monthly* (Sept. 1995).

In the Clinton White House the doors are all closed, not because of a sense of secrecy, but often because someone inside is on the phone with a favored and famous reporter, giving his version of something that just happened inside the Oval Office. There is in the White House staff's willingness, even eagerness, to leak to the press an adolescent stargazing: Imagine this, Mom!—here I am chatting with Bob Woodward, or talking to Cokie Roberts about what she said on "Nightline."

In spite of the president's fury with the leaking, he does not seem to have fully confronted his own role in fueling it. Clinton told me that he was greatly impressed with [President John F.] Kennedy's ability to hold decisions open for

so long without constantly being called indecisive. "How did he do that?" Clinton asked. The answer was that Kennedy's men knew what would happen to them if they ever leaked stories of his private indecision. (When Kennedy suspected Chester Bowles, one of his closest advisers, of trying to make himself look good by letting it be known that he had opposed the Bay of Pigs decision, Bowles was ejected from the inner circle. Clinton's staff lives with no such fear.) And Kennedy did not analyze and agonize over his decisions in public. That is what I should have said [to Clinton], but I did not have the courage to tell my president in person that he should consider shutting up sometimes.