

PERIODICALS

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Washington The Philosopher

"The Political Thought of President George Washington" by Richard Loss, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Summer 1989), 208 E. 75th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

"His character has been exalted at the expense of his intellect," the historian and politician Henry Cabot Lodge said of George Washington in 1889, "and his goodness has been so much insisted upon... that we are in danger of forgetting that he had a great mind as well as high moral worth."

Yet forget we have, declares Loss, a University of Chicago political scientist. The fault is partly Washington's. Unlike such contemporaries as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, he left only scattered written reflections on politics. Most scholars still do not take his ideas seriously.

Loss believes that the outlines of a philosophy can be found in Washington's writings. Borrowing from the ancient Greek philosophers, Washington adopted the idea that a virtuous citizenry is essential to good government. "Can it be," he asked in his Farewell Address of 1798, "that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue?" Thus he disagreed with republican thinkers of his own time, including Immanuel Kant, who held that the problem of government could be resolved "even for a race of devils" by the proper design of

political institutions.

But Washington parted with Aristotle and other ancients who held that democracy inevitably becomes the rule of ignorance. "Although we are yet in our cradle, as a nation, I think the efforts of the human mind with us are sufficient to refute" such doctrines, he wrote in 1798.

Among Washington's greatest goals was the establishment of a national university to promote learning and virtue among potential statesmen. "Knowledge," he declared in his first annual address to Congress in 1790, "is in every country the surest basis of public happiness." In this emphasis on moral education he differed with both the *Federalist*, where Madison wrote that "the extent and proper structure of the Union" was the "Republican remedy for the diseases most incident to Republican Government," and Jefferson, who noted in 1813 that "I had more confidence than he had in the *natural* integrity and discretion of the people."

Washington, says Loss, "paradoxically relied on a classical solution for the perpetuation of modern republican institutions." It may have been a flawed philosophy, but a philosophy it was.

Who Counts?

"Statistics and the Modern State" by Stuart Woolf, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (July 1989), Cambridge Univ. Press, 32 E. 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

We are, to paraphrase Richard Nixon, all statistics now. "We have slipped into living with statistics as we have with television or computers," writes Woolf, a historian at

the University of Essex, with consequences that are not entirely benign.

Modern statistics was pioneered during the 17th century by British insurance firms