

LIBERTY! The Call to Washington



Mount Vernon, 1793



"Washington retreats like a general and acts like a hero. Had he lived in the days of idolatry, he would have been worshiped as a god...."

From the Pennsylvania Journal, 1777

"If you were lost for America, there is nobody who could keep an Army and Revolution for six months...."

The Marquis de LaFayette in a letter to Washington

"Fellow Citizens, I am again called upon by the voice of my Country to execute the functions of its Chief Magistrate. When the occasion proper for it shall arrive, I shall endeavor to express the high sense I entertain of this distinguished honor, and of the confidence which has been reposed in me by the people of United America."

*George Washington
2nd Inaugural Address
March 4, 1793*

"I danced twenty-four dances, setts, cotillions, reels &c sung twelve songs..."

Eleanor Parke Custis

"Not being able to procure private lodging, we have agreed to live entirely at a tavern. Our most disagreeable attendant is the noise of the American soldiers who vociferate their songs so loud that the whole house rings with War and Washington, a favorite ballad."

A British prisoner of war

"The Indispensable Man"

By the time he was inaugurated to his second term as President in 1793, George Washington was considered a remarkable man. From the time he emerged as hero in the French and Indian War until his retirement from public service, and throughout his final days living at his beloved Mount Vernon, he was revered for his bravery and loyalty. Even his physical appearance created a larger-than-life personality that inspired songs, poetry, and even dances. By 1775 when General Washington took command of the American troops, "War and Washington" became the rallying cry as people looked toward their leader. But Washington never sought recognition for himself and, in fact, often mourned the fact that he had to part with his family and farm. Indeed his story is one of sacrifice as again and again he was called into the service of his country. One of his biographers called him "the indispensable man."

In 1787, he was elected President of the Constitutional Convention. And when in 1789, the new country needed a leader, citizens once more turned to an obvious and unanimous preference for President: George Washington. He was, in fact, such a popular choice that many of his officers had wanted to make him king of America. He is known for many things. His greatest service was as a "nation builder." He was called by people of his time "father of our country." His main goal was to make the 13 states into one unified nation -- an amazing feat in the chaos of the early days of our country.

The Call to Washington

LIBERTY!

Who was there?

Eleanor (Nelly) Parke Custis – George Washington's adopted grand daughter, Nelly was one of four children of Martha Washington's son "Jackey" Custis (from her first marriage). Nellie was raised by her grandparents at Mount Vernon after her father died in 1781.

Elizabeth Bordley – Close friend of Eleanor Parke Custis. Elizabeth was a frequent guest in the Washington household.

James Armistead LaFayette – a slave who served as a spy for the Marquis de LaFayette during the Revolutionary War. To show loyalty and respect, he took the last name LaFayette. For the heroism he gave to the American cause for liberty, James Armistead LaFayette was rewarded with his freedom.

General Henry Knox – Military leader who served as Brigadier General in charge of artillery during the Revolutionary War.

Marquis de LaFayette – French military figure who joined forces with General Washington to serve in the Revolutionary War. The General Marquis de Lafayette, was called the hero of two worlds being prominent in both the American and the French Revolutions.

Jean Antoine Houdon – French artist recognized as the greatest portrait sculptor of his time, casting the likeness of many great men throughout history including George Washington. In 1788 he created the famous statue of General Washington from a life model. A copy made from the mold taken from the original sculpture sits in the Grand Foyer of the American Village's Washington Hall.



Symbolism in the George Washington Statue

The statue of George Washington occupies a place of prominence in Washington Hall. The building is patterned after our first President's home, Mount Vernon and includes a dining room much like the one found at his estate. This statue of George Washington was crafted by a French sculptor named Jean Antoine Houdon in 1788. When the statue was first commissioned, Houdon was on his way to make a statue of Catherine the Great. Upon hearing the request to sculpt Washington, he canceled his work for Catherine the Great, and came to America. The original statue was made of marble and is displayed at the state house in Richmond, Virginia. Our figure was created from the restoration of a mold taken from Houdon's original statue and used for many 19th century copies. The American Village statue is only the third replica made in the 20th century from this mold. The other two are at the Washington Monument and at Mount Vernon.

Houdon's statue includes many symbols. Washington is holding a gentleman's cane, having sheathed and laid aside his sword. After Washington won the Revolution, he voluntarily resigned his military role, resuming civilian life. Washington firmly believed that the leader of the Nation should be a civilian and not a military officer. Behind his sword is a plow share, symbolizing his first love of farming.

The pillar upon which Washington rests his left arm is comprised of thirteen rods, symbolizing the thirteen states of the new nation. They are bound together by strong yet flexible leather bands, symbolizing the union and the new Constitution. Arrows are placed between rods, signifying the strength of this united country.

Through this life-like statue, we see George Washington, the indispensable leader of his time, and father of our country, who more than any other leader of the time, laid the foundation for the United States of America.