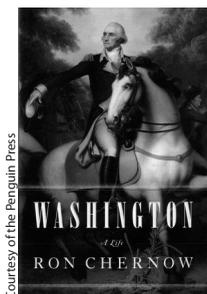


Book Reviews



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Washington: A Life

by Ron Chernow

Reviewed by John K. Walmsley, LTC USA, Assistant
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Building on his recent biography of Alexander Hamilton, Ron Chernow has written an impressive biography of George Washington. Chernow's portrayal of Washington succeeds in presenting a fresh perspective that is both informative and inspiring. Unlike some of the more recent publications on Washington, Chernow presents him in a realistic manner that does not give in to attempts to mythologize his subject. Overall, the book provides a detailed analysis of the situations that influenced Washington and culminated in his earning the title of "the father of his country."

As the title implies, Chernow's study offers a complete account of Washington's life. Dividing his analysis into six phases, the author discusses Washington's role as frontiersman, planter, general, statesman, president, and legend. The result is an in-depth character study describing his family background, personal and professional relationships, and constant quest to improve himself and his standing in the eyes of others. The early analysis depicts a young man who was deeply ambitious, but struggled with insecurities due to his "defective" education. Denied a formal education due to his father's early death, Washington toiled hard to sharpen his intellect, all the while believing himself at a disadvantage when working with better-educated contemporaries. Undoubtedly, this inspired Washington to develop "a seriousness of purpose and fierce determination to succeed, that made him stand out in any crowd." Chernow emphasizes that Washington, although often very lucky in his circumstances, benefitted most from his own resolve.

Chernow's study demonstrates how Washington matured and grew into his responsibilities. It is the depiction of his subject's growth that is the most intriguing aspect of this work. His time in the wilderness as a surveyor and later as a militia leader during the French and Indian War inured him to hardship and prepared him for the challenges he would face as a commanding officer. Although an elitist, his time as Commander of the Continental Army transformed him into a more egalitarian individual who would slowly learn to love the men he initially looked down upon during the early days of the American Revolution.

His time as Commander also reinforced a conviction of the importance of a strong centralized government. A weak Congress that was continually unable to collect sufficient funds from the states to support his forces plagued Washington throughout the war. Washington also benefitted from his political experience in Virginia's House of Burgess and the two sessions of the Continental Congress. He had learned early on the value of silence, and despite

being surrounded by “talkative egomaniacs,” he grew into a “calm figure of sound judgment” able to unify the dynamic personalities that surrounded him as commanding general and president.

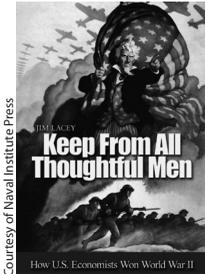
Chernow knocks Washington off his pedestal and displays the man’s faults and weaknesses. He discusses Washington’s infatuation with Sally Fairfax, the wife of his friend George Fairfax. Unfortunately, Chernow does not fully explore the implications of Washington’s disloyalty to George Fairfax. He views Washington’s “passionate attachment” to Sally as an impractical, youthful obsession that allowed for the more enduring relationship he had with his wife Martha. Martha would serve as an outlet for his innermost thoughts and doubts and provide the emotional stability and devotion lacking in other relationships.

Chernow also emphasizes Washington’s mercurial struggle with slavery. A slave owner since the age of eleven, he was both a harsh disciplinarian and a humane administrator. He provided his slaves with a certain degree of comfort and ample medical care, but was incredibly demanding of their workload and production. He was at his most baffling when, after he had secured the freedom of the colonists from Great Britain, he set about reclaiming his human property from the British. Surrounded by the abolitionist sentiment of numerous aides during the war, Washington gradually modified his views on slavery and even amended an earlier decision not to allow African-Americans to serve in the Continental Army. During his final years, he recognized the moral dilemma and threat slavery represented to the nation he had sacrificed so much for and, in an attempt to establish some precedent, was the only founding father to free his slaves upon his death.

The most significant aspect of *Washington: A Life* is its examination of Washington’s development as a leader. Leadership was not a trait that came naturally, but one that Washington meticulously created. As a leader, Washington displayed incredible courage under fire, demonstrating a desire to lead from the front, an openness to dissenting opinions, an ability to motivate and inspire loyalty, aggressiveness, and adaptability. Two of his greatest assets were his ability to learn from his mistakes and an understanding of his limitations. Commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel at the age of twenty-two, Washington made numerous mistakes throughout his military career, but rarely repeated them. Through his experiences during the French and Indian War, he learned the value of “patient moderation,” a trait he continued to use for the remainder of his life. His experiences during the American Revolution taught him to recognize, despite his desire for a “climactic battle that would end the conflict with a single stroke,” it would be necessary to follow a strategy of attrition. The loss of New York City, followed by the losses of Fort Lee and Fort Mifflin in 1776, demonstrated the futility of defending fixed positions or towns against the British. Despite the frequent criticisms levied against him by members of Congress and fellow officers, Washington knew it was the preservation of the Army that would decide the outcome of the Revolution.

Chernow offers a welcomed and insightful look into a personality of one who so many think they already know. Although the length of the book

appears daunting, the careful construction of chapters keep the reader moving. Meticulously researched, this work relies heavily upon secondary sources and *The Papers of George Washington* project sponsored by the University of Virginia. Chernow does a marvelous job of depicting George Washington as a man struggling to rise to the occasion, and succeeding.



Keep From All Thoughtful Men: How U.S. Economists Won World War II

by Jim Lacey

Reviewed by Michael J. Fratantuono, Associate Professor, Department of International Studies and Department of International Business & Management, Dickinson College

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Over the past two decades, economic forces have contributed to changing structure and rising interdependence within the global system. As a result, national leaders and security analysts now factor economics into their strategic thinking. Despite that contemporary mindset, Professor Jim Lacey—a one-time US infantry officer and now consultant, analyst, and Ph.D. historian—believes that the majority of his colleagues and nearly all of the general public neither understand nor appreciate the leading role that professional economists played during the years 1941 to 1944. He attributes that blind spot to shortcomings in previous scholarly work. His goal is to set the record straight.

Professor Lacey's central premise is that a small group of economists were able to demonstrate in authoritative terms that the strategic plans formulated during 1942 by political leaders and military officers were not economically feasible. As a result of their analysis, leaders decided to postpone a full-scale invasion of Europe from 1943 to June of 1944. If the economists had not been persuasive and the United States and her allies had moved ahead in 1943, soldiers, sailors, and airmen would not have had the material assets needed to achieve a decisive outcome. An earlier invasion of Europe would have certainly prolonged World War II which, in turn, would have necessitated much higher costs in terms of both blood and treasure; more speculatively, it may have even led to a different ultimate outcome.

Professor Lacey highlights two innovations in the field of economics that were important to the war effort. First was the revolution in the conduct of monetary policy that proved to be essential in financing the war. That is, the policymakers at the Federal Reserve, the central bank of the United States, became adept at influencing the actions of commercial bankers for the purposes of indirectly controlling the US money supply. They did so by using the tools that are now commonplace, such as altering required reserve ratios and discount rates and engaging in open-market operations. Those actions helped maintain high levels of liquidity in the banking system. That meant that private