

## OUTLINE FOR TV SHOW ON "HIS EXCELLENCY"

1. Explain why the book is entitled, and the derivation of the phrase, "His Excellency." Also explain why it fit Washington so well.
2. In your preface you say that among historians it has become passé to study Washington. He is regarded as racist, elitist, patriarchal, and imperial. You, however, seem to me to have a far more balanced view of him -- to tell both the good sides and those which might be regarded otherwise. And overall I, at least, have the impression that you are very favorable to him and that you explain the reasons for, or even explain away, what some regard as the bad sides (although he also seems to have been, in your words, a man of monumental ego with a massive personal agenda).

Yet, though you seem very favorable to him, even from your work one could get the impression that in lots of ways he had characteristics that might be called distasteful, at least until the Revolution changed him rather considerably, but to have had them to some extent afterwards too. He was fantastically ambitious, married for money, did not always tell the truth, revised the historical record to suit his own purposes, was elitist, was sometimes sycophantish or grasping, was somewhat authoritarian and even inhumane, and cared for his own economic positions to an extent that sometimes excluded other important considerations. But, on the other hand, he did risk all his economic gains on behalf of the Revolution (and he told Lund Washington that he wished he had not placated the British captain).

Now, you may disagree with me extensively about all this. But in any event, please give us your comments on it.

3. You say he was the most ambitious and potent of the founding fathers. Explain why this was so, and how he compares in this regard with, say, Jefferson, Adams and Hamilton.
4. Explain how he used his physical size and the gift of silence to his own advantage.
5. You talk a lot about his iron self control, and how this was necessary because he was a man of such deep and intense passions. Also, I get the impression that you link this personal trait of self control to the way he acted when pursuing the nation's interests. Please explain your views on all this.
6. In the same vein, you often seem to link others of his personal psychological

characteristics to his conduct as a public figure, e.g., with regard to his personal resentment toward the British for not recognizing or rewarding his talents, and his personal aggressiveness and consequent reluctance to back off and fight in the Fabian way. Please explain all this (including the meaning of Fabian.)

- A. How was it possible for him to want to fight the British in the approved European style (like a “real man” one supposes) after seeing what had happened to Braddock’s force (and learning what had happened to the British on their return from Lexington and Concord)?
  - B. Explain what his three possible methods of fighting were in the Revolution, i.e., a stand up and fight in the open field type of war, a war of posts, and a guerrilla war. Explain the physical, political and psychological pros and cons of each, which generals favored which style (especially Charles Lee and Gates), and why Washington ultimately did what he did.
  - C. Discuss the small hard core that was in the army for the duration of the Revolution, and the fact that these people were on the bottom of society and included lots of ex-slaves -- this was America's only integrated army until the Korean War.
    - i. Why is it, in your opinion, that Americans have been kept quite ignorant of the role blacks played in the Continental Army? And also in the building of the Capitol?
6. Explain the reasons Washington ultimately came to feel that God had put him on earth, and spared him in battle, for a purpose. He ultimately saw himself as the instrument of history.
7. Explain how Washington was present at, and played a role in, the seminal events of the beginning of U.S. history -- the Revolution, the Constitutional Convention, and the early years of the Republic (1788-1800). Include discussions of:
- A. How, when and why he came to the conclusion that war with Great Britain was a possibility.
    - i. This was to some extent a personal-economics driven thing, wasn't it? Discuss the mercantile system, Cary and Company, the profligate spending of the planters, etc.
  - B. The way in which and reasons for which he came to be appointed head of the Continental Army.

- C. How and why he became head of the Constitutional Convention, and the role he played there.
  - D. How he became the first President.
  - E. Views he furthered as to the nature and requirements of the country when he was President.
8. Explain the vast differences between the spirit of 1776 and the spirit of 1787, which represent the two sides of the American Revolution, independence *and* nationhood, freedom and lack of coercion, on the one hand, but an effective government that has tax and financial powers and can raise armies and navies on the other.
- A. This two sidedness has been present throughout American history, hasn't it, and is still with us today?
  - B. Explain some of the episodes that made it necessary for Washington to run counter to the spirit of '76, e.g., the whiskey rebellion when he was president, the inability of the Continental Congress to finance the war or raise troops, the need for the new "consolidated" government to have powers needed for success.
9. Explain why Washington came to the conclusion that America's future lay in the west, not in being involved in Europe's affairs.
- A. Describe why this world view was consonant with his personal economic interests.
  - B. He proved correct, of course.
- 10(a). During the Revolution itself, Washington was not always, perhaps not even usually, a great general. But he did finally learn the ultimate lesson that it was crucial for his army to survive. The British could have the towns, etc., but as long as his army existed, the British would not have won.
- (b). Yet he kept looking for the one great battle, which he thought would be at New York. Explain what Rochambeau did -- especially in ordering DeGrasse, without telling Washington (perhaps because he realized he was dealing with a stubborn man), to go no further north than the Chesapeake. This set up the victory at Yorktown.

- A. Explain that, because of siege engineering, Yorktown was fundamentally a French affair.
- (c). Explain why Washington was lucky in his choice of adversaries: Lord Howe didn't pursue and destroy his army after the New York fiasco. Nor did the Brits competently act upon the fact that they had to do one of two things strategically: they either had to destroy Washington's army, or cut the colonies in two by controlling the Hudson Valley. (This all was quite a bit like Lincoln's strategy in the Civil War of splitting the Confederacy by controlling the Mississippi and also destroying Lee's army, wasn't it?)
- A. After Saratoga they no longer tried to split the colonies -- a major mistake.
- B. Explain why Washington was mad at Gates after the latter's world altering victory at Saratoga, and what he did to neuter Gates (lest he get too big for his britches), e.g., he took away Gates' army.
- i. Washington always took care to insure his own supremacy, didn't he?
- (a) He was very big on deference to, and obedience to, higher authority, wasn't he? In this vein, he would hang or shoot soldiers at the drop of a hat if they deserted, ran, fell asleep on sentry duty, etc. He was, by our lights, pretty cruel about this, wasn't he?
10. Isn't it kind of odd that, for a guy who sometimes (often?) seemed to think in reasonably simple, black and white terms (e.g., about honor), Washington's battle plans were often way, way too intricate, too dependent upon impossible levels of coordination? (Or maybe it is incorrect to think he *ever* thought in simple, black and white terms? Rather, perhaps he was usually cognizant of complexities, as with slavery?)
- 11(a). Explain Washington's view that it was essential during the early years of the country to avoid another war with Great Britain (which was our major trading partner, and thus essential to our economy), and the steps he took to accomplish this. Describe what the Jay Treaty did in this regard, and the tumult it created.
- (b). Explain Washington's views of the French Revolution. Do you think he was right, partly right, wrong?
- (c). Describe his policies as President with regard to the government's financial

undertakings (which he left to Hamilton), a navy, and the opening of the west.

- (d). Describe what he did with regard to the building of Washington, D.C., and how this all came about.
  - (e). Explain his views on the need for a national university (like the famous French university that trains government officials?) to perform a unifying function, and a military academy. (Didn't West Point ultimately accomplish a "unifying function" to some extent, although it didn't stop officers from going south in 1861?)
12. Explain how Washington's survival of disasters, and his being on the scene, led to success time and again. (This is like Woody Allen's line that "90% of life is just showing up," isn't it?)
- 13(a). You describe Washington as the master of exits. These include Newburgh, Fraunce's Tavern, Annapolis, his farewell address, and his will. Describe all of these.
- (b). You say that Washington was deeply concerned with what history would think (as were other framers, as you have pointed out elsewhere), and that he understood that he would be remembered favorably by history if he walked away from power. How did he come to believe this?
    - A. Contrast him in this regard with Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon, Lenin, Mao, Castro.
    - B. Tell George III's comment about Washington being the greatest man in the world if he walked away.
  - (c). Explain how his concern over what history would think was a factor contributing to his attending the Constitutional Convention (if I remember correctly) and to accepting the Presidency. He knew that, for history to remember him favorably, the national experiment had to succeed, and therefore he was willing to do what he had to in order to contribute to that.
14. Explain how he used his military family (his "penmen") during the war, and how he used his cabinet afterwards. Explain the Fabian nature of some of his presidency: with regard to the judicial system (and what it meant to both sides), and economic policy. (He hid behind Hamilton on the latter, didn't he?)
- A. Explain how Jefferson and others could "hide the ball" so to speak, by attacking Hamilton instead of Washington, but that ultimately Washington

himself began to be attacked.

- B. Explain how ruination came upon generals, politicians and others who assailed Washington.
15. Describe what led to, the nature of, the true purposes of, and how Washington got fooled into cooperating with the new model army.
  16. Washington accepted civilian control of the military, although he was capable of playing politics. Explain the latter, including the Forbes route business and the efforts to get monies, supplies and troops for the Continental Army.
  17. Explain his evolving attitude toward slaves and slavery, and what he did in his will and why. The slavery business was one of those things in which his desire for economic advancement and security long trumped moral considerations, wasn't it?
    - A. But morality played a role in regard to his not wanting to break up families, and his concern for elderly and sick slaves.
    - B. Slavery was the point of fundamental inconsistency in the American Revolution, wasn't it?
  18. To some extent, Washington was often ahead of his time, wasn't he? E.g., he realized early on that the mercantile system was a disaster for Virginia's planters, at least because they engaged in enormous consumption (as did he and Jefferson). He also realized the one crop (tobacco) plantation economy was disastrous, and so had lots of farms, with lots of crops. He had his own ships. He was one of the earliest planters to recognize that there would be war. He required inoculation for his army. He was ahead of lots of others on slavery, even though he wasn't up there with the Wilberforces, so to speak.
  19. Explain that Washington had a good understanding of fundamental forces, so knew where he needed to go, so to speak, and then relied on others to fill him in on the necessary book learning or to do the book learning jobs, e.g., Mason, Madison, Hamilton.
  20. Explain the paradox that America was born of a ferment against monarchy, yet a monarchical type of figure was needed to hold together, first, the army, and subsequently, during its first years, the country.
  21. Explain why the British government refused to make peace (until its public finally got sick of the war) -- the fear that Canada, Ireland, etc., would in turn be lost. This was

the 18<sup>th</sup> century version of the domino theory, wasn't it? Yet Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (like America after Viet Nam) became stronger than ever, right?

22. Explain why time was on Britain's side during the Revolution -- the question of financing capability and resources. Courage, Washington found, was not sufficient. (In the Civil War and World War I, courage was found to hardly even matter in the face of technology. This is just a "refinement" or extension of what Washington found, I would suppose.)
23. Explain that Washington wanted the British to acknowledge that he had won and they had lost; that he was their equal or better.
- 24(a). Washington never overtly campaigned for office. Explain that to have openly *sought* high office in those days, or to campaign, was bad form. It was thought to show ungovernable passion that made one unfit for the office being sought. (My view of today is that the ability and willingness to do what is needed to win office now is nearly conclusive proof of unfitness to hold or perform well in the office. In my view nothing has changed. What is your view?) Yet Washington would work behind the scenes, as it were. E.g., he took his uniform to the convention in Philadelphia and appeared in it (which isn't very behind the scenes, really), he had his inaugural address being written while he was overtly being reticent regarding the Presidency, etc.)
  - (b). He had good, and very realistic, judgment usually. He was a hardheaded type about how nations act and why.
25. Explain what you see as his great moments of self control and self denial, moments which, however, led on to great achievements and to wealth. These include the Sally Fairfax matter, his Fabian strategy on war, walking away in Annapolis, walking away from a third term, and his will.
26. There are a large number of matters that have not been explicitly mentioned above, but which usually relate to foregoing matters and which, if not mentioned in regard to one of them, could subsequently be discussed on their own. They include:
  - A. Washington's views on the Indian nations, the warfare he engaged in with them at his side or against them (personally or by sending troops), his thwarted desire to make peace and enter treaties with them, and his desire to set aside land for them that would be closed to whites (although this was contrary to his attitude when the British earlier attempted the same).
  - B. For all his deference to and belief in authority, he simply ignored it when he

disagreed with it, as in the matter of the British effort to close off lands to whites.

- C. His land grants holdings that made him rich were from the French and Indian War.
- D. His general passion for land.
- E. Did he act fairly when he took the choicest western lands for himself instead of giving them to the rank and file?
- F. The Sally Fairfax matter.
- G. The Braddock expedition.
- H. The creation, varied abilities of, and reasons for the varied abilities of the Virginia Regiment.
- I. His thin skinned nature regarding criticism, and the view that he had to protect his reputation for merit because merit was his credential because of his lack of an aristocratic background.
- J. The view that the colonists must become independent of Britain or be slaves. (This oft bruited Virginia view is pretty odd, coming from what one Britisher called "drivers of slaves," isn't it?)
- K. The myth of a short war -- the *ever* prevalent myth, up to and including today.
- L. What happened with Charles Lee at the battle of Monmouth Courthouse.
- M. The British advantages and disadvantages in the war. Advantages included naval supremacy (so they could go wherever they wanted) plus extensive resources, a great financial system, and the world's best army. Disadvantages included a long supply line and the geographical size of the colonies.
- N. The disastrous New York campaign, followed by Princeton and Trenton.
- O. The brutal winters at Valley Forge and Morristown, and the fact that things looked at their worst in 1780-81 (and the reasons for this), which turned out to be the darkness before the dawn.

- P. The Newburgh conspiracy and what Washington did to quash it.
- Q. The Society of the Cincinnati.
- R. Nathaniel Greene's brilliant southern campaign.
- S. Washington's actions towards "squatters" on his land.
- T. The inflated opinions of their own importance held by the Virginia planters. (This never stopped, did it? The South Carolinians were equally arrogant later on, weren't they?)
- U. The huge crowds that turned out when he was traveling north to assume the presidency.
- V. The split with Jefferson.
- W. The writing of the Farewell Address.
- X. His efforts to get back Hercules and Ona Judge.
- Y. The splitting up of his estate in his will.

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