Chapter 9

The War Strains the Classical Model

ONE WINTER'S DAY AT VALLEY FORGE, COLONEL JOHN BROOKS OF Massachusetts, who had fought at Concord, White Plains, and Saratoga, confided to a friend that the Army was in worrisome shape: "In my opinion nothing but virtue has kept our army together through this campaign." That sentence is comprehensible only if "virtue" is read in the eighteenth-century sense of the word, meaning public-spiritedness, or putting the common good above one's own interest.

Yet that same winter in that same camp, Washington began to sense that relying too heavily on the public-mindedness of Americans was becoming a dangerous course. "A small knowledge of human nature will convince us," Washington wrote in a report to a visiting committee of Congress, that

> *with far the greatest part of mankind, interest is the governing principle; and that, almost, every man is more or less, under its influence. Motives of public virtue may for a time, or in particular instances, actuate men to the observance of a conduct purely disinterested; but they are not of themselves sufficient to produce a persevering conformity to the refined dictates and obligations of social duty. Few men are capable of making a continual sacrifice of all views of private interest, or advantage, to the common good.*

Washington seems to be warning here that what got the rebels to this point would not be enough to carry them through to victory. They were expecting too much of people.

In a nutshell, Washington was sensing the limits of virtue as a driver of the new country. He is not often seen as a political philosopher, but in his own quiet way he was ahead of most of his peers. That spring, he unburdened himself to a Virginian member of Congress about the way forward. It is worth quoting at length, in part because Washington here begins to anticipate some of the arguments that would emerge a decade later during the Constitutional Convention's debates about the need to account for the role of self-interest in public life:

> *Men may speculate as they will—they may talk of patriotism—they may draw a few examples from ancient story of great atchievements performed by it's influence; but, whoever builds upon it, as a sufficient basis, for conducting a long and bloody War, will find themselves deceived in the end. . . . I do not mean to exclude altogether the idea of patriotism. I know it exists, and I know it has done much in the present contest. But I will venture to assert, that a great and lasting War can never be supported on this principle alone—It must be aided by a prospect of interest or some reward. For a time it may, of itself, push men to action—to bear much—to encounter difficulties; but it will not endure unassisted by interest.*

In modern terms, Washington was sensing that there was something wrong with the model. To cast Washington as an astute social and political analyst may seem a stretch, until we remember that he was a master at observing and learning from experience, at the difficult task of simply perceiving what was really going on around him. Remember also that his thoughts and senses would have been tuned intensely that winter to the question of what would hold together his army and what might weaken or even dissolve it. As the historian Glenn Phelps puts it, "The War for Independence was a great influence on the development of George

Washington's public philosophy." Washington would emerge from the war, Phelps adds, persuaded that "in republican government, virtue must always be tied to interest."

Washington also may have had some discussions with others about this emerging perception. He would have known that some members of Congress were themselves pondering the danger of relying overmuch on public virtue. Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, for example, had written in November 1776, that, "The Want of public Virtue . . . is too apparent to admit of a Doubt." Washington, Gerry, and others were sensing that the times were changing, and that this new America might require a new approach.

Washington's insight would be articulated and then refined into political theory by James Madison ten years later. The two men would work closely together for a time in the 1780s, when Jefferson was off in France. One wonders if they found common ground in realizing that the neoclassical dependence on virtue was insufficient to deal with the new realities of the United States.

Washington's doubts would deepen as the war dragged on, but he still clung to the notion that virtue somehow might revive. "Unless we can return a little more to first principles, & act a little more upon patriotic ground, I do not know when it will [end]—or—what may be the issue of the contest," he fretted in March 1779. He was dismayed by seeing "too many melancholy proofs of the decay of public virtue." In another anguished letter later that spring, he confessed that, "I have said more than enough; & shall add no more on this head—but lament, which I do most pathetically that decay of public virtue with which people were inspired at the beginning of this contest."

Washington's Forgotten Victory

ONE OF WASHINGTON'S GREATEST FABIAN VICTORIES WAS BLOODLESS, and so tends to be overlooked in most histories of the war. That

quiet triumph came at dawn on June 17, 1778, when the British began evacuating Philadelphia. They had benefited little from the eight months of occupation there, most notably in failing to force Washington to face them in a decisive confrontation.

The entry of the French into the war changed the British strategic view of it, and especially the ability of British forces to maneuver by sea. Where the British had once been able to float their troops from port to port at will, they now had to contend with the prospect of the French fleet catching them—or bottling them up in one of those ports. General Sir Henry Clinton, taking command in Philadelphia from Howe, who had resigned, was ordered by London to deliver more than a third of his 15,000 troops to the West Indies and Florida to help counter the French there, and then move the remainder to New York City, where many of the remaining British forces would consolidate.

Joseph Galloway, who was overseeing Philadelphia's Loyalist government, was appalled by the British decision to leave the city. He had helped the British find food and horses, as well as run a spy network for them. He even had conducted a census of the political affiliations of the adult male population. He and the British knew that the departure would frighten Loyalists up and down the seaboard, as well as erstwhile rebels who had come in to seek British pardons. "The rebels were inspired with fresh hopes; the friends of government were dismayed," General Howe would recall in his testimony before Parliament on the conduct of the war.

That was putting it mildly. Howe's secretary, Ambrose Serle, recorded in his diary that Philadelphia's Loyalists were "filled . . . with melancholy on the Apprehension of being speedily deserted, now a Rope was (as it were) around their necks & all their Property subject to Confiscation." Galloway, in particular, looked upon the situation "with Horror & melancholy," as he would be "exposed to the Rage of his bitter enemies, deprived of a Fortune of about £70,000, and now left to wander like Cain upon the Earth."

He was right to be distraught. Loyalists were left in a bind. The only thing worse than not being protected at all was to first be

protected and thus encouraged to shed one's neutral or ambiguous stance, and then to lose that protection and so be exposed to retaliation by the rebels. In a war for the allegiance of the people, the British could hardly have made a worse move. Loyalists were shocked: If the British were unwilling to expend resources to hold onto the rebel capital, then how much more vulnerable were Tories in other lower-profile areas? John Shy, one of the most insightful analysts of the war, concludes that after this point Loyalists could be "fairly sure of one thing: the British government no longer could or would maintain its presence, and sooner or later the rebels would return. Under these circumstances, civilian attitudes could no longer be manipulated by British policies or actions."

In sum, the British withdrawal from Philadelphia was a major defeat, if a nearly silent one. Yes, Washington had not brought about this outcome by himself. The British retreat began with the American victory the previous year at Saratoga, which encouraged the French to ally with America, which in turn forced the British to recalculate their vulnerabilities and their allocation of resources, which ultimately led to the abandonment of Philadelphia. But if Washington is to be held responsible for losses not entirely of his own making, so too should he be credited for similarly wrought victories.

Galloway, unfortunately for him, had accurately assessed his future prospects. He sailed to England, where he proceeded to pen a blistering series of neoclassical denunciations of British supporters of the American Revolution, which he titled *Letters from Cicero to Catiline the Second*. He accused Charles Fox, leader of the Whig opposition, of treachery resembling that of the infamous Roman conspirator. He predicted that "all your secret intrigues shall be exposed to the full view of your fellow-citizens, that they may guard against your seduction, and save themselves from that ruin, which like another Catiline, you have long meditated against your country." He also would criticize "the notorious indolence" of Admiral Lord Howe's naval operations in the war. He would die in exile.

Watching from outside Philadelphia that summer, Washington now knew exactly what to do and how to do it. He first ordered his militia commander in New Jersey to harass British units, slowing and fatiguing them, and to report back to him constantly. He wrote to his commander there, Philemon Dickinson (named for an old Greek myth that Ovid had written about), that "I rely on your activity to give the enemy all possible obstruction, in their march; and that you will give me instant and regular intelligence of every thing, that passes."

The enemy had developed a grim appreciation of the ability of militiamen to attack, fall back, hide, and attack again. Johann Ewald, a discerning Hessian officer, recorded that he had never "seen these maneuvers carried out better than by the American militia, especially by that of the province of Jersey. If you were forced to retreat through these people you could be certain of having them constantly around you." Ewald likened the British retreat from Philadelphia to New York during those muggy days to Xenophon's ten thousand Greeks fighting their way home after their defeat in Babylon. "Bygone heroes could not have had more hardships on their marches than we endured," he wrote.

As the British entered New Jersey, their baggage train stretched out a full twelve miles, making a long and enticing target for American militiamen. Meanwhile, Washington's regulars caught up with the departing British forces in the middle of New Jersey, in a messy encounter now remembered as the Battle of Monmouth. In a kind of combined arms operation of the eighteenth century, the regulars charged the British while the militias hung on their fringes, especially denying them safe access to watering holes. This would be Washington's last battle until Yorktown, more than three years later. Much of the subsequent fighting in the war occurred in the south, as the British searched for more sympathetic Americans on whom to base their operations. But even in the middle colonies there would be constant nipping by irregulars at British forces, who slowly pulled back into the Atlantic ports.

Meanwhile, Back in Virginia

THOMAS JEFFERSON DID NOT HAVE A GOOD REVOLUTIONARY WAR. AS governor of Virginia, from 1779 to 1781, he was a bust. All state leaders faced trouble in supporting the war, but Jefferson was particularly listless even in responding to the three British incursions into his state late in the war. In the last one, in 1781, the notorious British cavalry commander, Colonel Banastre Tarleton, nearly nabbed him at Monticello. Jefferson escaped astride his horse Caractacus—named for the British chieftain who led resistance to the Roman invasion in the first century AD—riding southwest up the steep green slope of Carter Mountain, avoiding the main roads. As Tarleton smugly phrased it, "he provided for his personal liberty by a precipitate retreat." Decades later, embittered Federalists would mock Jefferson as "the Carter-Mountain hero" who had proved somewhat ". . . skittish / When menac'd by the bullying British."

Jefferson later would feebly explain that as governor, he was "unprepared by his line of life and education for the command of armies." It was a dismaying defense to mount, and especially for someone with ambitions to lead the nation. To be charitable, Jefferson may have learned from the experience, as Washington did from his defeats in the French and Indian War. Even so, if Washington had behaved as slowly and ineffectively during the Revolution as Jefferson did, the war could have ended with a British victory by December of 1776.

The British (and William & Mary) Take a Beating

IN SEPTEMBER 1781, AFTER FOUR LONG YEARS OF FOLLOWING AN INDIrect approach, Washington finally was able to cast off the Fabian

strategy and operate in the conventional offensive posture he found more natural. When he saw the opportunity presented by the presence of French ships and troops to trap the British on the Virginia coast, he moved resolutely. "The instant he had assurance of naval superiority on the allied side, he used it to effect the swift concentration that proved decisive," observes Douglas Southall Freeman.

Washington took his forces south to execute a move with the French fleet against the British. With the French cruising offshore, he besieged the army of General Cornwallis at Yorktown, just to the east of Williamsburg. In large part because of effective French aid, both at sea and on land, this campaign culminated five weeks later with the surrender of Cornwallis' force. The British army continued to hold New York City, but the war effectively was over. It would take another twenty-two months to arrive at a signed peace treaty, and many months more for both sides to ratify it.

The nearby College of William & Mary was a casualty of this last major fight. The college buildings had been occupied by French troops, who converted them into a hospital for their ill and injured. They erected a huge three-story latrine on one side of the building, with a pit underneath it, thus enabling the patients to defecate without having to go up or down the stairs. The resulting stench was astonishing, reported James Tilton, a Delaware regiment surgeon assigned to tend to the American wounded sent there. He remembered that "this sink of nastiness perfumed the whole house very sensibly and, without doubt, vitiated all the air within the wards."

Washington Rejects Caesarism

AS THE WAR FADED AWAY, WASHINGTON REJECTED YET ANOTHER ROMAN model: He would not become a Julius Caesar, the general who takes over the nation. He probably could easily have done so, had he wanted to.

In the spring of 1783, Washington's officer corps, encamped outside Newburgh, New York, a few miles north of West Point, was on edge. They felt unsupported by the American people, some of whom had grown rich on the war while they had fought and bled. They were especially unhappy with the failure of Congress to send them the pay they had been promised.

In his scheming way, young Alexander Hamilton may have brought the matter to a head. He had left the Army and been appointed to the Continental Congress, arriving in November 1782. He quickly began looking for ways to pressure that body to become more serious about raising revenue. In mid-February, Hamilton wrote to Washington for the first time in over a year. He wanted, as he put it, "to suggest to you my ideas on some matters of delicacy and importance." Hamilton's impudent notion was that "the claims of the army" could be made "useful" to Congress. But, he added, perhaps too clever by half, "the difficulty will be to keep a *complaining* and *suffering army* within the bounds of moderation" [Hamilton's italics].

So, he suggested, perhaps Washington should not interfere if the Army's officers made public protests about their pay and pensions. And maybe Washington should even quietly encourage such protests. If so, he counseled, conspiratorially, Washington should keep his role quiet: "This however must not appear: it is of moment to the public tranquillity that Your Excellency should preserve the confidence of the army without losing that of the people."

Hamilton was treading here on dangerous ground. He was inviting Washington to conspire with him to manipulate the Army into intimidating Congress. He concluded this extraordinary letter by giving Washington a rude nudge. Washington, he warned, was seen by some officers as so heedful of respecting Congress that he had failed to adequately support the soldiers' interests. "I will not conceal from Your Excellency a truth which it is necessary you should know. An idea is propagated in the army that delicacy carried to an extreme prevents your espousing its interests with sufficient warmth." Was Hamilton insinuating that Washington

was putting his own image and feelings before the needs of his soldiers? In other words, did Washington lack the virtue to do what was required? Coming from the twenty-six-year-old Hamilton to the commanding general of the U.S. Army, this veered very close to insult.

Meanwhile, according to notes taken by James Madison, Hamilton was telling fellow members of Congress that Washington's volatile temper was intensifying even as his popularity in the Army was diminishing. Hamilton, a bit recklessly, was stirring up trouble at both ends of the situation.

Pressure on Washington was increasing. Joseph Jones, a Virginia friend of Washington's who was serving in Congress, wrote to warn the general that he was hearing rumors of insubordination in the Army. "Reports are freely circulated here that there are dangerous combinations in the Army, and within a few days past it has been said, they are about to declare, they will not disband untill their demands are complied with."

Tellingly, Washington did not respond to Hamilton for three weeks, causing the young man some unease. On March 5, Hamilton apprehensively queried the general: "I had the honor of writing to your Excellency lately on a very confidential subject and shall be anxious to know as soon as convenient whether the letter got safe to hand." This is how conspirators write: Did you get my extremely sensitive letter or was it intercepted?

In fact, Washington had finally responded to Hamilton's spidery plan just the previous day. He would not join in any schemes. Rather, he wrote, "I shall pursue the same steady line of conduct which has governed me hitherto; fully convinced that the sensible, and discerning part of the army, cannot be unacquainted (although I never took pains to inform them) of the services I have rendered it, on more occasions than one." He was saying that rather than act out a charade, he instead would stand on his record of service to respond to any internal grumbling.

But even as Washington was writing, events were getting ahead of him. On Monday, March 10, an unsigned letter circulated in the

camp stating that it was time for officers to stop asking Congress for their back pay and to start demanding it. If they did not get satisfaction, it advised, they should consider rebelling. The nation, it claimed, "tramples upon your rights, disdains your Cries—& insults your distresses." It called on the officers of the camp to "Awake—attend to your Situation & redress yourselves." We know now that the letter was written by an aide to Horatio Gates, a general who was a continual torment to Washington. A parallel letter called for a meeting of officers the next day, a Tuesday.

Washington may have had a general sense of what was brewing, but when he read the actual words, he was outraged. He immediately apprehended that he faced a profound discipline problem among his officers. This must have mortified such a proud, restrained man. His personal example—that is, his virtue—had proven insufficient. What's more, he was being manipulated by civilians in Congress.

The following day he issued a general order, carrying the weight of his command, in which he denounced the "ananominous paper" and expressed his disapproval of "such disorderly proceedings" as holding a meeting of officers in response to an anonymous letter. He ordered all senior officers, from major to general, plus one from each company (that is, captains or lieutenants), to assemble not that day, but four days later, at noon. This may have been intended to give them a few days to cool off. The officers would assemble at the camp's "Newbuilding," a structure also known by the troops as "the Temple of Virtue." What better place for Washington to speak at a crucial moment, having dedicated his life to the pursuit of eighteenth-century public virtue?

Washington wondered about the origins of the officers' conspiracy. "There is something very misterious in this business," he wrote to Hamilton. He explained that he had issued his order for the meeting "to rescue them from plunging themselves into a gulph of Civil horror from which there might be no receding"—that is, to head them off from taking "hasty and fatal steps." Just as he finished writing to Hamilton, he was informed that a second

anonymous letter was circulating. Given that he already had responded with a general order, this amounted to a clear challenge to Washington's authority.

Washington responded by donning his most Roman persona. On March 15, the general appeared at the planned meeting, at which Gates was presiding, and asked if he might address the group—which of course as the commander, he could do without asking. When he spoke, he did not question their rights to express their views or order them to desist. Rather, in what is now known as "The Newburgh Address," he invoked his personal honor. I was here first, he told them, I was with you throughout, and I have been your example. "I have never left your side one moment. . . . I have ever considered my own Military reputation as inseperably connected with that of the Army." Has my personal virtue and honor not been enough for you? Seeing it challenged in anonymous letters, he continued, "my indignation has arisen." "Indignation" is a loaded word that carried a powerful meaning for Washington. For example, he had described Benedict Arnold's treason as causing in him "astonishment and indignation."

It was about as much anger as Washington ever allowed himself to show in public, except in two moments of surprised rage in battle. Here at Newburgh, as at Kips Bay and Monmouth, he felt bitterly disappointed by some of his officers. The difference was that those outbursts were spontaneous, while here he had been stewing for days. By some accounts, he finished by putting on his glasses to read aloud a letter, apologizing in an aside that he had gone nearly blind in the service of his country. With that quiet explanation, he quelled the officers' insurrection.

"The Storm . . . is dispersed," he reported to Joseph Jones, his friend in Congress, on March 18. "The Virtue, & patient forbearance of the Army, on this, as upon every other trying occasion which has happened to call them into action, has again triumphed." He had put down "a most insiduous attempt to disturb the repose of the Army, & sow the seeds of discord between the Civil & military powers of the continent." Washington's quashing of military dissent would resonate down through the decades, un-

derscoring that the American armed forces are subordinate to civilian authority, most especially when the officer corps disagrees with Congress.

"A dangerous instrument"

HAMILTON THEN HALF APOLOGIZED TO WASHINGTON FOR HIS ROLE. "I often feel a mortification, which it would be impolitic to express, that sets my passions at variance with my reason." Still, he confessed, he was not really very sorry:

> *But supposing the Country ungrateful what can the army do? It must submit to its hard fate. To seek redress by its arms would end in its ruin. . . . I confess could force avail I should almost wish to see it employed. I have an indifferent opinion of the honesty of this country, and ill-forebodings as to its future system.*

This provoked Washington to respond in personal terms. "I read your private letter of the 25th. with pain," Washington replied. When Washington used that word "pain," invoking deep personal feeling, he was showing that he was deadly serious. He admonished the young man to knock off such talk about the Army's using threats of violence against Americans to get its way: "The idea of redress by force is too chimerical to have had a place in the imagination of any serious mind in this Army."

Washington then reproached Hamilton for trying to pull the Army into domestic politics. "I will now, in strict confidence, mention a matter which may be useful for you to be informed of," he began. Some "leading" members of the Army, he wrote, suspect that some members of Congress have tried to use the Army as "mere Puppits to establish Continental funds." He chided Hamilton for toying with the national defense simply to raise revenue. "The Army (considering the irritable state it is in, its sufferings & composition) is a dangerous instrument to play with," he warned.

Surprisingly, despite this incident, Hamilton retained Washington's confidence. Many years after the war, the general would defend Hamilton to John Adams, stating that the young man had served as his "principal & most confidential aid" and that he had found him "enterprising, quick in his perceptions, and his judgment intuitively great: qualities essential to a great military character."

A few months after the Newburgh showdown, as he prepared to step down from his command, Washington issued a warning to his countrymen. We have won the war, he told them in a message issued from his headquarters, but now you must secure the peace:

> *it is in their choice and depends upon their conduct, whether they will be respectable and prosperous or contemptible and Miserable as a Nation. . . . it is yet to be decided whether the Revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse: a blessing or a curse, not to the present Age alone, for with our fate will the destiny of unborn Millions be involved.*

In this same letter to the states, he also gave a surprisingly long and explicit bow to the Enlightenment, seeing it as a kind of philosophical nest for the fledgling republic:

> *the foundation of our Empire was not laid in the gloomy Age of ignorance and superstition, but at an Epocha when the rights of Mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period—The researches of the human Mind after social happiness have been carried to a great extent, the treasures of knowledge acquired by the labours of Philosophers, Sages and Legislators, through a long succession of years, are laid open for our use and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the establishment of our forms of Government.*

Finally, he came to a conclusion about the militias that was very different from the view with which he had begun the war. "The Militia of this Country must be considerd as the Palladium of our

security and the first effectual resort," he told the states. He was at war's end a very different man from the one he had been in 1775.

Washington's Last Roman Role

WASHINGTON'S LAST ROMAN ROLE WOULD BECOME HIS FINEST. HE HAD rejected becoming a Caesar. Instead, he would become another Cincinnatus—that is, the Roman soldier who, according to legend, saved his country in 458 BC. Roman tradition states that he was plowing his fields when he was called to lead the rescue of a Roman army that was besieged southeast of the city by an army of Aequians. He was given the temporary title of dictator. He triumphed in just sixteen days, then resigned his office and returned to his waiting plow.

The story of Cincinnatus was a reassuring one, because the Revolutionary generation had an abiding fear of the power of generals. There were few historical examples of military leaders willingly giving up power. And to the contrary, they were conscious of the relatively recent example of Oliver Cromwell, who a century earlier had led the way in establishing an English republic, only to become a dictator who passed power to his inept son. Washington owned a biography of Cromwell; Madison put in his copybook some damning lines about the man by Alexander Pope; and Adams referred to him frequently, writing once that "there never was a greater self deceiver than Oliver Cromwell."

On December 22, 1783, the Confederation Congress, then meeting at the statehouse in Annapolis, Maryland, threw a formal dinner and ball for Washington, with the guests numbering in the hundreds. The next day at noon he appeared before Congress and formally resigned his position as commander of the Army. When he rose to speak, the members of Congress remained seated, denoting the subservient role of the military to civilian leadership. "Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of Action," he stated. He bowed to Congress, then walked

to his carriage with his wife and headed home to Mount Vernon, arriving in time to celebrate Christmas there.

It is possible that too much is made of Washington's decision to step down—but probably not. It was a magnificent deed of renunciation and was recognized as such at the time. He, like the rest of his class, approached it from the perspective of classical republicanism. For him, it was always about virtue—seeking it and being esteemed by those who had it. "To merit the approbation of good & virtuous Men is the height of my ambition," Washington had told Jefferson as peace approached.

One early instance of someone labeling Washington a modern Cincinnatus appears in a letter from François-Jean de Beauvoir, Marquis de Chastellux, who as a French liaison officer to Washington had become friendly with the American general. It is worth pausing a moment to consider Chastellux, because he was a wonderful exemplar of his time. He was not just a soldier, but also a proud exponent of the French Enlightenment who before the war had composed a lengthy work titled *De la félicité publique*—that is, an essay "On Public Happiness." Typical of the time, this book was about a bit of everything, running the gamut from ancient Greek and Roman history to the nature of government debt in the eighteenth century. To top off his credentials, in 1775 Chastellux had been elected to Seat 2 in the Académie Française, the chair held twenty years earlier by none other than Montesquieu. As the war ended, Chastellux wrote to Washington to express a wish that he could "proceed to Virginy, where I am told, your excellency is retired like an other Cincinnatus."

Washington responded that in fact he was dreaming of exploring the American frontier. "I shall not rest contented 'till I have explored the Western Country," he wrote. In a letter written the same day to a Frenchman with whom he was even closer, he invited the Marquis de Lafayette to accompany him on just such a grand ramble around the new nation:

> *I have it in contemplation . . . to make a tour thro' all the Eastern States—thence into Canada—thence up the St Lawrence, & thro'*

the Lakes to Detroit—thence to lake Michigan by Land or water—thence thro' the western Country, by the river Illinois, to the river Mississippi, & down the same to New Orleans—thence thro' the two Carolina's home—A great tour this, you will say—probably it may take place no where but in imagination, tho' it is my wish to begin it in the latter end of April of next year; if it should be realized, there would be nothing wanting to make it perfectly agreeable, but your Company.

In other words, when the war ended, his thoughts turned back to the place where he had been educated in war and diplomacy—the American frontier. But instead of fighting the French there, as he had a quarter of a century earlier, he wanted a Frenchman to accompany him.

John Adams, often both accurate and ungenerous, thought that Washington was, as usual, putting on a big act:

If he was not the greatest President he was the best Actor of Presidency We have ever had. His Address to The States when he left the Army; His solemn Leave taken of Congress when he resigned his Commission; his Farewell Address to the People when he resigned his Presidency.

But the fault here lay not in Washington but in Adams. It would be to Adams' detriment as president that he would not be able to lead so well in public as his predecessor did. Washington understood, as Adams did not, that especially in a new republic, these large gestures would resonate with the people. In this nation, the people were not the governed, they were sovereign, which meant their needs must be addressed. Adams never liked that fact or even really understood it, and that failure would haunt his presidency.

It was at about this point, just as the war was ending, that Benjamin Franklin grew exasperated with Adams, who was with him in France for peace talks with the British. In a letter to Robert Livingston, secretary of foreign affairs under the Articles of Confederation, Franklin summarized Adams memorably: "He means

well for his Country, is always an honest Man, often a Wise One, but sometimes and in some things, absolutely out of his Senses." This pithy sentence may be the single most illuminating thing ever written about John Adams.

In November 1783, with the treaty concluded, the British military finally withdrew from New York City. In a kind of echo of his forgotten victory of retaking Philadelphia, Washington entered Manhattan on their heels.