SOCIAL CHANGE AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF GEORGE WASHINGTON*

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Between 1800 and 1865, Americans remembered George Washington as a man of remoteness, gentility, and flawless virtue; after 1865 they began to remember him as an ordinary, imperfect man with whom common people could identify. Washington's post-Civil War transformation adds weight to Mead's and Halbwachs's belief that the past is mutable, made and remade for present use. Yet Americans never forgot Washington's original, aristocratic image. Setting limits on later generations' ability to democratize Washington, this enduring image reflects Durkheim's and Shils's ideas on how collective memories outlive changes in society. The very nature of these societal changes, however, determined how much of Washington's original image was revised and retained. Thus separate theories cannot explain change and continuity in collective memory; a single theory must explain both.

The memory of George Washington, a nondemocratic military and political leader, was democratized between 1865 and 1920, a period that included an industrial revolution, a reform era to correct its abuses, and a war from which America emerged as a world power. Beyond this period Washington's image continued to evolve. Throughout the 1920s, Washington came to be regarded by some as a complete businessman and captain of industry. In the late 1920s and early 1930s he became the object of both cynical debunking and spectacular bicentennial birthday rites. After World War II, biographers wrote about him in unprecedented detail. The full complexity of his image, however, was established by 1920. An analysis of this image-making process promotes fuller understanding of both the collective memory of Washington and the collective memory as a general aspect of culture.

ISSUES IN COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Two theoretical approaches have organized most twentieth-century studies in collective memory. Neither approach is narrow or dogmatic; they differ primarily in emphasis. I bring the two approaches into sharper focus by ignoring their qualifications and subtleties and focusing on their emphases alone.

The most widely accepted approach sees the past as a social construction shaped by the concerns and needs of the present. Classical statements include Mead's (1929) declaration that "Every conception of the past is construed from the standpoint of the new problems of today" (p. 353), and Halbwachs's (1941) assertion that "collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past [that] adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present" (p. 7). In recent years, this constructionist approach to collective memory has provided the theoretical context for a wide range of inquiries (e.g., Schwartz 1982; Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983; Lowenthal 1987; Schuman and Scott 1989). To this work, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) added an important dimension by bringing together accounts of the deliberate fabrication of rituals, emblems, and monuments, and by showing how these new symbolic and physical markings support new mental constructions of the past. In the process, tradition is reconceived. Commonly defined as a conception or practice sustained across generations, tradition becomes an "invention" consciously designed to deal with present problems.[1]

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[1] See also Thelen (1989, p. 1119) and Lowenthal (1989, pp. 1263-64). On the survival of reputation, see Tuchman and Fortin (1984) and Lang and Lang (1988). For a demonstration of the past's recovery and re-creation after "collective amnesia," see Schwartz, Zerubavel, and Barnett (1986).

These classic and contemporary writings pursue different research goals, but the essential thrust of their arguments is the same: They see the past as precarious, its contents hostage to the conditions of the present. They set forth an atemporal concept of collective memory that relates things remembered to the beliefs, aspirations, and fears of the here and now. While well-grounded empirically, they offer a one-sided perspective. As Schudson (1989) put it: "The present shapes our understanding of the past, yes. But this is half the truth, at best, and a particularly cynical half-truth, at that" (p. 113).

Constructionist theories of the past are rooted in a progressivist strain of social thought that defines the past as a mere burden and seeks not only to liberate the present from the past's grip (Shils 1981, pp. 1-4), but to establish "the importance of the present relative to the past" (Fitzgerald 1979, p. 172). The best way to carry out this program is to make the past a fabrication that present circumstances shape. A more conservative strain of thought, however, reveals aspects of collective memory that such "radical progressivism" (Shils 1981, p. 4) ignores. These aspects appear in de Maistre's writings on the sacred character of history and the permanence of its sacraments and precepts (Lively 1971), and in Burke's view that we "derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers" ([1790] 1940, p. 29; see also Nisbet 1978, pp. 103-5). In this reactionary light the collective memory is distorted in a different direction: It is the past that shapes our understanding of the present rather than the other way around.

Every society, whatever its ideological climate, requires a sense of continuity with the past, and its enduring memories maintain this continuity. If beliefs about the past failed to outlive changes in society, then society's unity and continuity would be undermined. Durkheim ([1912] 1965) was among the early writers who made this unity and continuity problematic. Conceptions of the past, Durkheim believed, are cultivated by periodic commemoration rites whose function is not to transform the past by bending it to serve the present, but to reproduce the past, to make it live as it once did ([1912] 1965, pp. 415, 420). Shils's (1981) concept of tradition expresses this same idea. The image of an epoch or a historical figure, he observed, is not conceived and elaborated anew by each generation but is transmitted according to a "guiding pattern" (pp. 31-32) that endows subsequent generations with a common heritage. Stable memories strengthen society's "temporal integration" by creating links between the living and the dead and promoting consensus over time (p. 327; also see Schwartz 1990; for a psychoanalytic account of the transmission process, see Freud 1939). This consensus is resilient because memories create the grounds for their own perpetuation. Memories are not credible unless they conform to an existing structure of assumptions about the past — an "available past" that people accept as given and that possesses a self-sustaining inertia (Schudson 1989). Thus, a true community is a "community of memory," one whose past is retained by retelling the same "constitutive narrative," by recalling the people who have always embodied and exemplified its moral values (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton 1985, pp. 152-55).

Two theoretical approaches to collective memory are distinguishable. The first relates the discontinuities of the past to an ongoing constructive process motivated by the changing concerns of the present. The second approach draws attention to continuities in our perceptions of the past and to the way these perceptions are maintained in the face of social change. I seek to determine (1) whether the difference between these approaches can be resolved by rejecting one in favor of the other; (2) whether conditions for the applicability of each approach can be specified; (3) whether a new theory that reconciles their conflicting claims can be formulated; or (4) whether a single, unifying property exists beneath their manifest differences.

Method

To address these questions, I compare images of George Washington before and after the Civil War. Washington's reputation in the prewar period was greater than that of any other historical figure, whereas his postwar reputation was problematic and complex. Accordingly, I focus on the development of Washington's image between 1865, the year the Civil War ended, and 1920, the end of the Progressive Era.

Any account of this image must be contestable. No one can be certain what most people who lived between 1865 and 1920 actually believed and felt about George Washington. We can only study the impressions of Washington that a small number of people wrote down for others to read, or painted or chiseled for others to see. My empirical focus, then, is on the producers,

not the consumers, of Washington's image.[2] Yet, many portrayals of Washington during this period reflected the public taste. Some writers and artists shared that taste; some exploited it, dealing mainly with the features of Washington's life that would interest a mass audience. Others believed their efforts would be of no social significance if they did not in some way affect as well as reflect the public's conception of Washington. As many biographers and orators explained, Washington's life informed the citizen about the nation's cultural heritage and for that reason the great man's story must be told accurately and his character portrayed faithfully. Painters and sculptors worked to these same ends. Thus the producers of Washington's image did their best to make it appealing, or to get it right, while those who financed their efforts, such as publishers and art patrons, were confident of the public's readiness to recognize writers' and artists' achievements. This confidence is attested to by the sheer volume of Washington writings and icons produced up to 1920, and by the greater volume produced during the next twelve years in anticipation of the 1932 Washington Bicentennial.

These interpretations of Washington may have had less influence than hoped for. They may have imperfectly reflected the public's tastes and values. However, I assume that the production of Washington images is related to the public's perception of him, and that this relationship — however strong — remained the same throughout the period under study. Given this assumption, the postwar change in portrayals of Washington by writers and artists can be taken as an index of change in the way he was generally perceived.[3]

THE DECLINE OF A HISTORICAL REPUTATION

Washington's Prewar Image

George Washington died a hero in December, 1799, and as the years passed his reputation remained secure. With the exception of the 1820s, the number of biographies written about him or reprinted remained steady at 62 to 64 per decade during the first half of the nineteenth century, then rose to 86 during the decade immediately preceding the Civil War (Baker [1889] 1967). The characteristics of Washington's image were also secure during this period. Like most common men, his admirers said, Washington worked hard at learning a trade during his boyhood, and he applied it in the new country's wilderness. As an adult, his life centered around his family and the pursuit of farming.

Washington's patriotic achievements and motives, however, set him above other men, and the grounds for elevation were linked to class. Hundreds of funeral eulogies, written mainly by Federalists, extolled traits that were admired by the population at large but cultivated mainly in America's genteel circles. Washington's greatness, the eulogists explained, rested on his "public virtue" — a republican variant of noblesse oblige. A virtuoso of sacrifice, Washington renounced personal interest for "the social good" and was content with fame rather than power. This noble amateur, according to eulogists' accounts, fought the war undramatically, with no dazzling assaults or astonishing victories. He won by moderation and persistence, by solid judgement rather than brilliance. Throughout the war, as in his life, self-restraint was his most visible asset. Passionate by nature, the great man's se-

[2] These products include essays and commentaries in popular magazines, newspaper articles, entries in the *Congressional Record*, juvenile literature, information on the production and reception of paintings and statues, and secondary data on place names. Materials were filed by decade, 1800 to present, with fullest coverage for the post-Civil War period. I rely mainly on the biographical and periodical documents. The *Readers' Guide to Periodic Literature* provided a comprehensive list of magazine articles published between 1890 and 1920. Newspaper articles were selected mainly from New York, Chicago, Savannah, and New Orleans newspapers, including newspapers serving the black community. Typically, the articles appeared in the February 22 (Washington's Birthday) or contiguous issues, which in turn were drawn from the first and fifth year of every post-Civil War decade. *Congressional Record* entries were also sampled in five-year intervals. Events of unusual political or commemorative significance were covered regardless of the year in which they occurred. Materials directly examined were those that promised to reveal most about the public perception of Washington. Any item that contradicted the patterns reported here was carefully reviewed. Only one such image — Washington the businessman — was found, and this image did not mature until the 1920s.

[3] The most influential commentators were white men. Black commentators' conceptions of George Washington were, of course, far less favorable than those of Lincoln, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the sincerity of their willingness to "forget" that Washington was a slaveholder, to acknowledge his character and accomplishments, and to participate with the black people in national celebrations of his memory.

Table 1. Average Annual Number of Entries in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*: Selected Presidents, 1890-1921

Interval	Washington	Lincoln	Grant	Jackson	Madison	Jefferson	J. Adams
1890-1899	10.0	9.0	3.7	.9	.7	3.2	.6
1900-1904	7.2	7.6	1.2	1.0	.8	4.6	.8
1905-1909	7.0	14.2	3.6	3.4	1.4	3.6	.4
1910-1914	5.4	14.0	2.0	.4	.2	3.4	.4
1915-1918	4.5	23.0	1.0	.2	.2	3.0	.2
1919-1921	6.3	20.7	1.0	.3	—	.7	.7

Note: Intervals are those used in the *Readers' Guide*.

rene and dignified air gave external expression to his incorruptible moral character. He was a gentleman-soldier (Schwartz 1986).

Celebration of "the character of Washington" appeared in all pre-Civil War biographies. Their authors (see especially Weems 1805; Bancroft [1807] 1826; Ramsay 1811; Sparks [1837] 1902; Irving 1855-1859; Tuckerman 1859; Everett 1860) were all fond of Washington. All admired his gentility and refinement and for the most part sympathized with his Federalist values. Those least inclined to share these values readily attributed them to Washington and held him in esteem nonetheless. (Paulding 1835; Headley 1856; see also Bancroft 1858, pp. 393-403).

Although these writings were produced within society's privileged sector, they reflected the universal sanctity of Washington's memory during the first 65 years of the nineteenth century. In 1812, for example, John Adams ([1812] 1966) commented upon "the idolatrous worship paid to the name of General Washington by all classes" and "the application of names and epithets to him which are ascribed in Scripture only to God and to Jesus Christ" (p. 229). Twenty years later, de Beaumont made a similar observation: "'To Washington alone are there busts, inscriptions, columns; this is because Washington, in America, *is not a man but a God*'" (italics in the original; quoted in Lipset 1979, p. 19). In 1851, journalist Walt Whitman (1932) declared that "the name of Washington is constantly on our lips .... His portrait hangs on every wall and he is almost canonized in the affections of our people" (p. 59). Four years later, when Abraham Lincoln's assassin jumped to the stage of Ford's Theatre and looked up to the presidential box to shout out justification for his act, his eyes came to rest on a festooned portrait of George Washington. In the millions of mourning portraits produced in commemoration of Lincoln's death, it is George Washington who welcomes Lincoln into Heaven.

Washington's Postwar Image

Washington's memory was drawn upon during the Civil War by both North and South to articulate and legitimate their causes. At the same time, the Civil War was a turning point in America's conception of itself and its past, and with this transformation, interest in Washington diminished. Public interest was never weak or indifferent, yet the 86 accounts of his life published in the 1850s declined in the 1860s to 47, then to 34 during the 1870s and 1880s (Baker 1967). This trend can be followed in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. Since the *Readers' Guide* is a comprehensive rather than a specialized biographical index, it covers a larger volume of writings about Washington than the *Bibliotheca Washingtoniana*, but the trend is the same. As presented in Table 1, from an annual average of 10 entries on Washington published between 1890 and 1899, the volume drops steadily to an average of 4.5 articles per year between 1915 and 1918, moving upward slightly to 6.3 articles per year between 1919 and 1921. (Unequal intervals follow the *Readers' Guide*'s method of aggregation.) At the lowest point in this trend, Washington is still written about far more often than any of the early Presidents, including Madison, Jefferson, and John Adams, and more often than the most popular nineteenth-century Presidents, Jackson and Grant. The number of Lincoln articles, on the other hand, equals the number of Washington articles by the turn of the century, and by 1920 exceeds them by a ratio of 3 to 1.

As the number of books and articles about Washington decreased, the number of hostile statements about him increased markedly. In 1880, a *New York Times* commentator reported that "He has been so grandly idealized, his virtues have been so exaggerated that we have grown rather tired of hearing of him and of them" (March 13, 1880, p. 7; also see Twain 1866; Lodge 1891,

vol. 1, pp. 10-11). Washington's perfection was unpleasant to contemplate not only because it made everyone feel small and mean in comparison, but also because this perfection was part of a character so unmatchable as to seem inhuman. For critics, Washington's dignity concealed a man who was, in their words, "grave," "staid," and "imperturbable," a man of a "cold," "harsh," "stern," "soulless," "bloodless" nature — in short, a human "iceberg." Such a man was at best "unknowable"; at worst, "dead," "stiff," "boring," and "dull."

Restraint, discipline, and limitation define a kind of archetype from which the most disparaging characterizations of Washington arose. Such images, as Douglas (1973) has suggested, are heavy with political implications. Restrained laughter, disciplined emotions, limits on expression in general, go along with rigid social structures and formalized social relations. The celebration of these traits affirms an aristocratic ideal — an ideal more suited to the gentleman than to the common man, to an eighteenth-century republic than a modern democracy. In political discussions, eighteenth-century republicans used the term "aristocratic" with derision, not praise. Yet the moral code and social manners associated with aristocracy remained vital in the class from which the new nation drew most of its leaders. Thus, Clarence King declared in his preface to the Hay-Nicolay biography of Lincoln that Lincoln was the "genuine American type," while Washington was not an American at all, except in a technical, geographical sense. He was essentially an "English country gentleman" (cited in Lodge 1896, vol. 2, p. 303).

The Contexts of Washington's Reputational Decline

George Washington the gentleman was less appealing after the Civil War than before. The diminution of his image, however, was not the sole result of the nation's becoming more democratic. The new republic's evolution toward democracy was well under way thirty years earlier, during Andrew Jackson's presidency. If the assessment of George Washington during this period were based solely on prevailing political convictions, his memory might have been treated with less reverence, but Washington was evaluated against a broader array of cultural traits.

Among the traits that sustained Washington's reputation during the antebellum years, the most important was a tendency to split American history into two stages: a "heroic age" of struggle and nation-building and a "post-heroic age" of consolidation and preservation. The period between the start of Jackson's presidency and the Civil War was the post-heroic age (Forgie 1979). For genteel culture critics, this fast-paced age of commercial activity and expansion was a "prosperous forcing-house of mediocrity" (Lowell 1861, p. 763), "a lamentable degeneration from that sublime political morality which characterized our ancestors" ("Perilous Condition" 1831, p. 283). The way to restore political morality and national cohesion during this era, according to its spokesmen, was to recreate the spirit of the Revolution, and nothing contributed more to this purpose than the commemoration of the Revolution's symbol, George Washington (see Forgie 1979, pp. 13-53).

The Civil War, however, ushered in a New Heroic Age. The massive scale of the war made the Revolutionary War and its soldiers, including Washington, seem less significant. The first evidence of this new perception appeared shortly after Lincoln's assassination. "The character of Washington has hitherto been the bright gem in our national history," wrote a correspondent to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, "but the country was small when Washington lived and the [present generation] never saw him" (Apr. 29, 1865, p. 2). Playing the major role in a minor drama, Washington no longer seemed worthy of national reverence. Fifteen years later, another writer made a similar point as he contemplated the Civil War: "The stirring events of that struggle passing under our very eyes, and in which most of us had some share, rendered the distant Revolution tame. Having made history ourselves, we naturally had less reverence for historic characters of a remote past" (*New York Times*, March 13, 1880, p. 7). Even if Washington had had greater personal appeal, if like Lincoln he had been born in a log cabin and reared in the wilderness, he would have still been regarded less highly in the decades after the Civil War. The enlargement of the nation contributed to the diminishing of his stature. Against a broader horizon of achievement and expectation, Washington seemed less impressive.

As the twentieth century approached, new criticisms appeared that called into question Washington's political attitudes. This reinterpretation was accelerated by the culture of the Progressive Era. Enacted during the first two decades of the century, Progressive reforms — including anti-trust legislation, child-labor laws, the

progressive income tax, direct election of United States Senators, women's suffrage, and the primary election — were meant not only to protect free enterprise and property, but also to extend democracy and to ensure the rights of the common man. Progressivism, then, was "a major episode in the history of American consciousness," a "spiritual growth in the hearts of the American people . . . a moral movement in democracy" (Hofstadter 1963, pp. 15, 36). Out of this new consciousness came a new interpretation of the American past and Washington's role in it.

Progressive historians were not the first to recognize the Founding Fathers' distrust of democracy and their stake in checking the influence of the masses; however, these historians articulated the discovery more persuasively than ever before. Beard ([1913] 1965) contributed much to this development. He set forth in detail George Washington's wealth, his fear of the people, and his interest in limiting popular influence through a properly "balanced" Constitution. American democracy, in Beard's view, could not be derived from philosophical ideals or high-minded political deliberation by gentlemen in Eastern statehouses — a conclusion that readily followed from Frederick Jackson Turner's tracing of democracy to the rude conditions of the Western frontier (Hofstadter 1968, pp. 47-164).

Between 1865 and 1920, Washington's new republic changed. It became smaller, less heroic, and also less democratic. The American people, however, continued to regard this era as their beginning, a time when the seeds of democracy were planted by men whose flaws were accompanied by idealism and courage. Yet the flaws were there, and they were revealed as the varnish that covered them before the Civil War wore off. The democratic George Washington emerged in the context of this new understanding.

The emergence of the new Washington is described in three stages. The first stage shows Washington's pre-Civil War image changing, becoming more compatible with America's egalitarian culture. The second stage qualifies the first, for it reveals that American society never rejected the original aristocratic conception of Washington, even as it cultivated its democratic counterpart. The third stage begins with a general claim: collective memory is dualistic when a society remembering an apparently alien past is constituted by the very past it is remembering. Evidence for this claim supports the main conclusion about Washington's changing image.

PUTTING THE PRESENT INTO THE PAST: WASHINGTON AND THE EGALITARIAN TRADITION

In the post-Civil War period, as before, Washington's admirers far outnumbered his critics. Witnessing his diminishing esteem, sympathetic intellectuals were concerned to clarify the record of his life. That a significant shift had occurred in the portrayal of Washington was evident to many by the turn of the century. "Nearly every recent biographer has announced that he was now taking down the wooden image called 'Washington' from its high pedestal and reviving it . . . . These resuscitations have been going on for a generation" (Whipple 1911, p. xiii). Although some observers regarded this shift as "a method of detraction . . . upon the theory that we gain a man while we lose a hero" (Towne 1903, p. iv), the general public, according to a *Chicago Tribune* editor, found "the newer Washington a far more attracting personage than the older one" (Feb. 22, 1910, p. 10).

The new Washington was fashioned under the same paradigm that so effectively popularized the life of Lincoln. This "realist" paradigm was a postwar development, well-suited for the candid depiction of life in a new industrial society. Realism portrayed life as it was rather than idealizing it. By taking as its subject matter "the common, the average, the everyday," realism expressed the nation's egalitarian values (Brooks, Lewis, and Warren 1973; Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman 1960). In the name of equality, realist writings not only supported contemporary reportage of business villains and their abuses, but also brought forth heroes of the past and reinterpreted their virtues. Many writers, including the socially privileged, wanted particularly to know what George Washington "was really like" in his everyday life, and their discoveries made him seem less distant and more ordinary than he had seemed before. He became, in fact, increasingly Lincolnesque.

Since the frontier had come to be regarded by many in the late nineteenth century as the ultimate source of democracy, those who wished to perpetuate Washington's memory stressed his frontier experiences. Thus, Woodrow Wilson, the son of an upper-middle class Augusta, Georgia minister, asserted that Washington's exploits in the wilderness made him as much a man of the people as Lincoln. "Living tolerably on the frontier" was a litmus test for the "true American type," and Washington passed it. He was "a man fit either for the frontier or the council-room"

(Wilson 1960-1990, vol. 11, p. 105). As the frontier diminished and disappeared, it became even more important as a symbol in the reconstitution of Washington's identity. President Taft, reared by an old and distinguished Ohio family, told his Washington's Birthday audience how much he "resents" the idea that Washington was unlike common Americans, and then cited Washington's experience as an "Indian fighter" and "pioneer" (*New York Times*, Feb. 23, 1910, p. 4).

Enlivening discussion of the common man around the turn of the century was the gap between the ideal and the reality of equality. Vast wealth amid vast poverty, powerless individuals facing powerful corporations, decent citizens exploited by corrupt bosses, in short, the separation of the masses from their leaders and institutions — these issues engaged men and women in every part of American society. When the public's attention turned to George Washington, it was natural that questions about his relation to the common people of his day would accompany questions about his military and political achievements. In this connection, Washington's democratic admirers were embarrassed by his aristocratic background and tried to ignore it. Not what Washington was, they said, but what he felt and did were the crucial points to remember. In these respects he was like the average man. "When there was active work to be done," the *Chicago Tribune* told its readers, "he did not hesitate to lay aside his coat and labor with his workmen, and there were few whose strength could vie with his" (Feb. 12, 1909, p. 11).

Appearing on Lincoln's Birthday, this last observation was intended to promote appreciation of Washington's democratic inclinations, just as the new iconography was meant to do. By painting the "Father of his Country" in simple everyday situations, J. L. G. Ferris, the son of a middle class Philadelphia portrait painter (Mitnick 1985), helped to adapt Washington's image to twentieth-century tastes, just as the aloof, epic portrayals by Charles Willson Peale and John Trumbull made Washington suitable to the courtly tastes of the late eighteenth century. Portraying Washington in the same realist style that affected the portrayal of many other subjects, Ferris's painting was a collective representation, in Durkheim's sense, rather than an idiosyncratic product of personal inspiration. In his portrait "The American Cincinnatus" (1919), for example, Ferris located the victorious Commander-in-Chief at home — not in his garden or salon, but in the blacksmith house. With coat and hat thrown on a barrel, he works at the fire with hammer, tongs, and anvil, to the entertainment of his grandchildren and the relief of his slave. A significant feature of Ferris's portrait is that Washington wears his slave's apron. To wear another person's clothing is, in a sense, to become that person, to feel and to see the world as he might.

On this score, the Ferris painting aligned itself nicely with the period's written commentary. The public never ceased reading and hearing that Washington was kind to his slaves, complained that slavery was imposed upon him by circumstance and that he wanted it abolished. In his relations with all common men, as the *Chicago Daily Tribune* commentator pointed out, "Washington was stretching out a hand to Lincoln" (Feb. 12, 1909, p. 11).

Through stories about ordinary people, servants, and slaves, America's postwar industrial society found in Washington a warmth of feeling toward lower classes that prewar agrarian generations ignored. The literal embodiment of social subordination, the child, elicited this feeling, too. The public learned that Washington "loved children, loved to see them play and to play with them. He would often peep through the crack of a door and watch them play" (Wilson 1966-1990, vol. 55, p. 482). Widely portrayed by popular writers and painters, these scenes helped convince Americans that their outwardly austere founder was inwardly tender and sympathetic like other men.

However, Americans' appreciation for Washington's ordinary side was most frequently evoked by accounts of his romantic life. No theme, in fact, appeared more often in the popular literature. The interest was natural among families increasingly formed by romantic love rather than interests of class and status. Thus, in 1876, the *Savannah Republic* published an article in its Washington's Birthday issue that dwelt exclusively on Washington's love life but said nothing about his military and political experiences. The reason for doing this was to give Washington a new and truer image. Most people were inclined to see Washington as "a staid and stiff man," a man who was "cold, grave, lofty . . . ." In fact, this man, in his youth, "gave vent to love's pleadings [and felt] its delicious tormentings." He "indulged in romantic dreams of youthful love," "sighed over faces and forms that haunted his loneliness" (Feb. 12, 1876, p. 3).

In 1896, Paul Leicester Ford, the son of an affluent literary family, published an influential biography that also de-emphasized Washington's

military and political achievement and provided the most humanized account of his life to date (Ford 1896). The book included a chapter devoted exclusively to Washington's romantic attachments wherein details of his hands-off relationship with Sally Fairfax surfaced for the first time. And if Ford assessed rumors about wartime infidelity in a way that kept Washington in the proper light, he left another tidbit unexplained. Who is this "Mrs. Neil," who was expected to provide the 21-year old Washington, according to his correspondent, with a "delight only heaven can afford . . .?" (p. 89). Ford, along with other writers and artists, also responded to the new interest in Washington's marriage to Martha Custis. By the 1890s, his wedding anniversary had become an object of public commemoration. Sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution and stirring interest throughout the country, the celebration of Washington's wedding day provided another link connecting Washington's memory to the nation's popular culture.

In a society in which the distance between the people and their leaders had lessened, the symbolic "Father of his Country" was made into a real father and a real husband who loved and was amply loved in return. Emotional display made up a code wherein the relation between fathers and children, grandfathers and grandchildren, husbands and wives, stood for the distance between the nation's leaders and its people. Emotional display entered into political perceptions by analog: Affection is to coldness what democracy is to elitism. Affection reveals equality among men by diminishing the formal distance that separates them.

Sin, no less than affection, emphasizes similarities among men. When Washington died in 1799, his eulogists described him as a man without stain, a flawless man — indeed, the most perfect mortal who ever lived (Friedman 1975, pp. 44-78). In contrast, Americans of the industrial revolution and Progressive Era wanted their political leaders to be decent and sympathetic, not perfect. As impulse and sensuality were affirmed at the expense of puritanical and aristocratic restraint, as "a greater openness to experience, an effervescence and intensification of sensibility" (Shils 1975, p. 101) became the core of a veritable cultural revolution, the nation's heroes began to personify impulse as well as conscience.

George Washington's impulses could be found in every aspect of his tastes and activities, and the print media rarely passed up the opportunity to make them public. His preferences for expensive, flashy clothes, fancy houses, good food and wine, cards, dirty jokes, horse racing, dancing, concerts, and the theater — not to mention a pretty face and a nice ankle, of which he was "too much of a man" (Ford 1896, p. 108) to resist — were generally appreciated. Included in the admiring circle was Representative and Speaker of the House Champ Clark, a Missourian of ordinary social background. Many people were grateful that Washington "sometimes sinned," according to Representative Clark, since it showed that "Washington and the common man belonged to the same breed" (*New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1915, p. 8).

There was a marked difference between these twentieth-century accounts of Washington's character and accounts heard and seen by his contemporaries. Many people in Washington's time knew about his carnal appetite, but few saw anything remarkable about it, except that he renounced it at his country's call. In Puritan New England and along the seaboard republic it was Washington's asceticism, his rejection of pleasure and comfort, that his countrymen celebrated. One hundred years later, the people would admire Washington for what he consumed as well as for what he renounced, for his exploits in *la vie légère* as well as *la vie sérieuse*.

BRINGING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT: WASHINGTON AND THE GENTEEL TRADITION

George Washington's adeptness at frontier living, his experience at common labor and attachment to the common people, his kindness to children, his strong romantic inclinations were traits that Americans had always associated with democracy. Before the Civil War, however, these traits were rarely stressed in accounts of Washington's life, even after political democracy had been secured. Between the Jacksonian "democratic revolution" and the end of the Civil War — a period of almost forty years — Washington's image bore little relation to America's egalitarian values. The democratization of Washington's image lagged behind the democratization of the society, in part due to the kind of symbolic frame in which Washington's earlier portrayals were set.

The Federalist and Whig biographers who dominated prewar portrayals of Washington were ambivalent about the new democratic revolution and wished to contain it. They cast Washington in a predemocratic neoclassical mold that emphasized his gentlemanly qualities and set him

apart from the people.[4] The neoclassical influence, to be sure, was far from absolute. New traits compatible with the culture of the common people, new symbols such as log cabins, cider, and axes, and new representative men, like Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison, entered the heroic vision of the early nineteenth century. But these developments never weakened the neoclassical paradigm and, in fact, did not achieve their fullest expression until the postwar ascendancy of Lincoln. Until then, the neoclassical paradigm alone defined Washington's image. Emphasizing his restraint and temperance, his undistinguished but perfectly balanced abilities, his steady judgement and devotion to justice and order, this model reflected the conservative values of the nation's intellectuals.

The neoclassical model appealed to others as well. In an age marked by nostalgia for the nation's founding era and founding fathers, few people had difficulty thinking of great men in neoclassical terms. Many could not conceive of greatness in any other way. Therefore, neoclassical portrayals of Washington as "a man above the people" appealed to every sector of society from his death until the end of the Civil War. Although this image lost some of its exclusiveness during the postwar years, it remained a conspicuous part of the culture of commemoration.

The changes in the portrayals of Washington did not result from changes in the commemorative language in which his memory was originally described. Post-Civil War America spoke about Washington in two languages. The new language evoked images of a democratic Washington, an ordinary man acquainted with hardship, warm in his affections, and approachable. The older language evoked images of a predemocratic Washington — a hero unconquerable and incorruptible, dignified and remote. As postwar Americans contemplated the new Washington, they never forgot his original image or rejected what it stood for.

Several aspects of his original image are evident from the *New York Times Index*. Of the 1,066 articles about Washington cited in the *Index* between 1875 and 1920,16 percent commented on the traditional military and political aspects of his life as well as the modern "humanized" and private aspects, 28 percent dealt with the erection of memorials and monuments to Washington, 14 percent dealt with statues or paintings, 18 percent reported on the discovery and trade of relics — things that Washington wore, touched, or used, and 23 percent described observances related to the anniversaries of his birth or military and political achievements.[5] Prominent among the latter was the massive 1889 celebration of Washington's presidential inauguration. Clearly, the vast majority of articles depicted Washington as anything but a common man — contrary to the efforts of many late nineteenth-century scholars and publicists.

Only tentative conclusions can be drawn about the way the old and the new conceptions of Washington developed in different sectors of society. One important conclusion relates to class and class interests. The people most inclined to notice and broadcast Washington's eighteenth-century traits were those people displaced by the late nineteenth-century industrial order, people who subscribed to "a distinct code of values, and who modeled their lives in accordance with the traditions of gentility, modified by American circumstances" (Persons 1973, p. 2). Distinguished by good breeding, wealth, and commitment to public duty, the gentry had governed the colonies, then the states, up to the early nineteenth century. By the Jackson era, however, this class had already been stripped of its hegemony. Gentlemen continued to hold dominant positions in local, state, and national government throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, but there was no distinctive agenda by which these men could restore their authority as a class. Indeed, by World War I the public's respect for the gentlemanly qualities through which they had maintained their place in the political arena had almost totally vanished. It was during the last fifty years of this decline that the genteel class became most conscious of itself as a sepa-

[4] One feature of antebellum literary culture that might have undermined the Federalist and Whig portrayals was the romantic paradigm, which was dominant between 1830 and 1865 (Thrall et al. 1960, pp. 425-27; 429-32). But romanticism contributed nothing to the public's understanding of Washington. A romantic Washington — driven by energy, enthusiasm, spontaneity, genius, and will — never existed. Something in the man himself or in the way he was originally portrayed ran counter to the romantic mode.

[5] The volume of *New York Times* articles is based on citation counts for all years between 1870 and 1920. The percentage contribution of various types of articles is estimated from a sample of ten years, beginning in 1875 and including every fifth year thereafter up to and including 1920.

rate and superior society and clung most desperately to its symbols (Persons 1973, p. 273), including the memory of George Washington.

For the genteel, post-Civil War America was no New Heroic Age, only further deterioration of a golden age when great men walked the land. The centennial of this golden age was set in the midst of a tarnished industrial revolution. James Russell Lowell (1897) reflected the irony as he gave the traditional conception of George Washington its most elegant modern expression in a poem delivered on July 3, 1875 in Cambridge in commemoration of Washington's taking command of the Continental Army: "Virginia gave us this imperial man / Cast in the massive mould / Of those high-statured ages old / Which into grander forms our mortal metal ran . . . ." Yet, how is this "imperial man" to be regarded in a society of democratic men, of men cast in the modest mold of a low statured age, whose mortal metal runs into diminished forms? For Lowell, as for other late nineteenth-century gentlemen, Washington's memory was the counterpoint of this diminished society. Thus, Reverend Andrew Peabody, addressing the Cambridge centennial, condemned the illusion that Washington was a man no different from other men and scorned its favored supports, including anecdotes about the stoic hero losing his temper and cursing his subordinates. In truth, Washington had the "bearing and good manners of a high-bred gentleman." In every respect, Reverend Peabody continued, he stands not as a symbol of contemporary society, but as a moral standard by which that society falls short:

> "Were Washington now living . . . , does anyone suppose it possible for him to be chosen to the Chief Magistracy? Would he answer the questions, make the compromises, give the pledges, without which no national convention would nominate him? Could he creep through the tortuous mole-paths, through which men now crawl into place and grovel into power? Would he mortgage, expressly or tacitly, the vast patronage of Government for the price of his election?" (*New York Times*, July 6, 1875, p. 1)

Thoughtful ladies and gentlemen everywhere saw things as Reverend Peabody did. Without ideals, without great men, the genteel believed, there can be no civilization, only venality, mediocrity, crassness. Henry Adams used Washington to make this point in a novel. Located near the capital city, Mount Vernon was a favorite place for afternoon outings in the 1880s. On one such occasion the protagonist, Mrs. Lee, remarks on the peace and dignity of the old place compared to the capital and its coarse political circles. Mrs. Lee feels herself to be a part of this new breed, but she is aware of her own ambivalence: "Why was it . . . that everything Washington touched, he purified, even down to the associations of his house? And why is it that everything we touch seems soiled? Why do I feel unclean when I look at Mount Vernon?" (Adams [1880] 1908, p. 135).

At the 1885 dedication of the Washington Monument, John Daniel, a Virginia gentleman, continued the tradition of using Washington as a symbol for the repudiation of industrial society. Daniel recognized that "aristocratic manners touch the sensitive nerve of a democratic people"; however, it is precisely the men who displayed such manners who were best suited to "cope with great forces, resolve great problems, and assert great principles." At worst, Daniel continued, these men never posed a danger to society, as do those who "in later days corrupt the suffrage in the rank growth of cities; build up palaces and pile up millions amid crowded paupers; monopolize telegraphic and railway lines by corporate machinery" (Daniel 1903, p. 266; also see Van Dyke 1906, pp. 777-78).

These men did not speak only to their own class. Many ordinary men and women were more than ready to accept criticism of America's corruption and vulgarity and to embrace the genteel Washington as a moral example. However self-serving their celebration of Washington may have been, it was the original image of him, an image of political purity and unflagging devotion to duty, that the genteel sought to preserve. They became the unwitting custodians of traditional values shared by society as a whole.

Throughout the Progressive Era, George Washington would remain a standard that America's business and political leaders betrayed. So far had these leaders descended, in fact, that it appeared that symbolically they had replaced America's original enemy. In a Washington's Birthday poem in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Feb. 22, 1910, p. 10), Washington is asked: "You, who were Freedom's chosen spear— / Her organ— / Would you have traded, had you known, / The occupant of England's throne / For Rockefeller or for Pier-Pont Morgan?" True, Washington had also been a rich man, but he was suited for public responsibility because he was a selfless aristocrat, not a self-serving bourgeois. "He was in no sense commercial, and no American hero has ever been commercial" ("Washington the Man" 1908). The aristocratic ideal was thus harnessed to the antibusiness interests of the common man.

Just as admirers of the democratic Washington repudiated his predemocratic biographers for idealizing him, so cultivators of the aristocratic Washington criticized biographers who made him seem ordinary. Thus, Towne (1903) condemned Ford's biography, which "deliberately and avowedly intended to bring Washington down from his high historic pedestal" and so prevent our "appreciation of the unparalleled man he was" (p. v). Written at a time when Washington's prominent position in America's pantheon had been challenged by Lincoln, statements about Washington as the most perfect man ever to walk the earth made sense to a minority of Americans. But what was wrong with the majority? A contributor to *The Nation*, one of the turn-of-the-century's highbrow periodicals, must have asked himself this question before he told his readers that "Washington never tolerated the notion, flaunted by some of his successors in the Presidential chair, that the voice of the people, whatever its tone or its message, was the voice of God . . . . No one realized better than he the inherent dangers of popular government" ("Washington" 1899, p. 460). This statement conveys another critique of the common man and a new wrinkle on Washington's memory as a counterpoint to the vulgarities of democracy. No one expressed this point better than that ardent admirer of aristocracy, H. L. Mencken. George Washington, he said, "had no belief in the infallible wisdom of the common people, but regarded them as inflammatory dolts, and tried to save the republic from them" (Mencken [1918] 1961, p. 68).

A CONTRAPUNTAL MEMORY

To assert that George Washington should be remembered as an aristocrat intent on staving off the threats of democracy is to misconstrue the man and his society. In experience and political outlook Washington was a republican, and he was so regarded by his own generation. As civil war converted his rural republic into a new industrial society, his image became more attractive to egalitarian tastes.

Several factors combined to prevent this shift from occurring earlier. The Jacksonian revolution could not democratize Washington because it happened at a time when the nation's past and its founders were deeply revered, because the men who wrote the history of the founding era shared the genteel values of its leaders, and because these writers succeeded in keeping the greatest leader, Washington, high in the people's regard. After 1865, however, a new portrayal emerged. The Civil War's scale diminished Washington's prestige by downgrading his achievements and creating its own heroes such as Lincoln, who dramatically personified the egalitarian ideal. Also, an industrial revolution followed the war, and as its excesses became manifest, egalitarian values became more salient. Serving as a mediating device between memory and society, realism, the new representational paradigm, affirmed these values by bringing Washington into a more intimate and warmer relation with the people.

The portrayal of Washington's common side redefined his gentility, satisfactorily resolving for the people the dissonance inherent in the coming together of a democratic present and a hierarchical, deferential past. Indeed, this resolution made Washington all the more appealing, as his aristocratic background set the common aspects of his conduct in bold relief. If the ideological spokesmen of America's old wealth used the memory of Washington to affirm the well-defined and orderly class system of his time, the ideological spokesmen of America's masses found him to be a man who transcended his own time, a man who recognized the dignity of the ordinary people and enriched the culture of a democracy.

"Ideological spokesmen" refers to those whose portrayals of Washington reflected the values of definite sectors of society. However, to draw a one-to-one relationship between the spokesmen's social background and their perceptions of Washington would be difficult. Many writers and artists who sought Washington's common side were themselves from a privileged background, while many who sought to preserve the patrician Washington were less privileged. The correspondence between the spokesmen's backgrounds and their perception of Washington was imperfect, yet this correspondence was strong enough to provide a suitable environment for the cultivation of two distinctive images of Washington.

Washington's aristocratic and democratic images have been sustained by a complex structure of claim and counterclaim. Influential persons and groups often succeed in imposing their versions of the past on others. Equally often, however, a person's or a group's effort to reconstruct the past is limited by others who are trying to do the same (Schudson 1989, p. 112). Such has been the case with the memory of George Washington. The things remembered about Washington were limited not only because different groups checked and balanced each other's conceptions of him,

but also because the checking and balancing process sustained the essential aspects of his conception. Washington the remote man and the intimate man, the man in sympathy with the genteel class and the man in sympathy with the common class — these two portrayals had coexisted from the very time of his death.[6] The Washington image handed down from one generation to the next was not a unitary one. Tradition conveyed contradictory ideas of the man, and by reiterating this duality the debates about "the real Washington" preserved it.[7]

The dualism of commonness and distinction is deeply rooted in America's political culture. It goes back to both the egalitarian values of the antebellum Democratic tradition and the hierarchical values of the Federalist-antebellum Whig tradition (Meyers 1960; Tocqueville 1946; Howe 1979; Ellis and Wildavsky 1989). Egalitarian and hierarchical values have always been unevenly personified by Washington: His antebellum image was largely hierarchical, and it was not until the Civil War ended that his egalitarian aspects commanded strong interest. Nothing inherent in postwar industrial democracy, however, could have induced the people to make so much of Washington's commonness if prewar interpreters had not preserved it in their portrayals of his gentility. Thus, the common side of Washington was not invented, but rediscovered. His youthful experience on the frontier, his strong domestic attachments, his ordinary talents, his personal modesty and occasional public awkwardness, his politeness to ordinary people — these traits were appreciated by Washington's contemporaries and recorded in accounts of his life (Schwartz 1987, pp. 151-55, 182-83). If there were no such traits in the old Washington to echo the concerns of this new society, he would not have remained so vividly in its memory, let alone remained one of its idols. Such traits remained peripheral to Washington's image, however, until this new society emerged at war's end in 1865.

CONCLUSION

Between 1800 and 1865 there was only a genteel image of George Washington and this was revered by every stratum of society. Between 1865 and 1920, two images of George Washington appeared, each admired in the context of different ideals and different interests. The common Washington reflected the dignity of the common man and affirmed democratic values.[8] The genteel Washington reflected an aristocratic standard of which common men, regardless of wealth, fell short. Affirming the "use value" of memory, these two conceptions conform to Schudson's (1987, p. 105) recognition that "the past is constantly being retold in order to legitimate present interests." Yet, Washington's prewar and postwar images possessed similar elements, which supports Schudson's complementary belief that "the past is in some respects, and under some conditions, highly resistent to efforts to make it over." Tradition, Schudson added, offers the most potent resistance. People's reconstructions of the past are "confined to the experiences of their own traditions," particularly those embedded in formal institutions (pp. 108-9). Supervising the past through their own archival or commemorative enterprises, institutions such as the state, church, and family seek to ensure that traditional conceptions of the past remain independent of the experiences of different generations. Thus, the earliest construction of an historical object limits the range of things subsequent generations can do with it.

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[6] Through Stuart's (1899) "negative method," this dualism affirmed itself. "Not one of all persons questioned was willing to say Washington was an 'Aristocrat,' and yet almost every one said he was not a 'Democrat'" (p. 1815). One word was insufficient to describe him — Washington was a "Democratic Aristocrat."

[7] By the early years of the twentieth century, this dualism became more acute and more salient than it had ever been before. That the dualism was in the culture rather than the man is suggested by its conspicuous role in the constitution of other historical figures, including Abraham Lincoln. Just as Washington's gentility was qualified by a newly appreciated commonness, so Lincoln's commonness was qualified by a newly appreciated gentility (Schwartz 1990; also see Cunliffe 1988). Washington remained primarily an epic hero; Lincoln, a folk hero, but each less exclusively than before. By 1920, there was almost as much dualism within their images as between them.

[8] Many Americans turned to Washington in their effort to preserve democratic values against the influence of foreigners and immigrants. The nativists' use of Washington was manifest in many ways, from pamphlets describing "General Washington's Vision" — a prophecy of America's struggle against European influence (reprinted from Wesley Bradshaw, *National Tribune*, vol. 4, Dec., 1880) — to inflammatory orations by clergymen and politicians (Marling 1988, pp. 128-31, 191, 235-36). Desire to limit the immigrant population's cultural influence was expressly invoked in 1924 to justify the gigantic 1932 Washington Bicentennial (United States 1932, vol. 5, p. 600).

Late nineteenth-century Americans came to know and revere the same Washington that was known and revered in the early nineteenth century. Self-sacrifice as opposed to the pursuit of self-interest; indifference to power as opposed to political ambition; moderation as opposed to excess; resoluteness as opposed to brilliance; temperance as opposed to fervent religiosity; harmony between public and private life as opposed to inconsistency — these genteel traits valued in the early nineteenth century showed up in the late nineteenth century Washington's Birthday speeches, newspaper commentaries, popular periodicals, and children's literature. The people's curiosity about "the real Washington," their determination to see his ordinary side, never seriously undermined their appreciation of his gentility or weakened their belief in his greatness. In the American memory, an egalitarian and an aristocratic legacy existed side by side. By the late nineteenth century, the original genteel dimension had ceased to dominate the collective understanding, but it curtailed the lengths to which the democratization of Washington could go.

Highlighting the continuity of memories across generations, the example of Washington undermines any theory that explains images of the past by relating them to their "sources" in the concerns and structures of the present. It was precisely this kind of theory that Mead (1932, 1938) formulated. He believed that all aspects of the past lose relevance when present conditions change. Likewise, Halbwachs asked: "How can currents of collective thought whose impetus lies in the past be re-created, when we can grasp only the present?" (Halbwachs [1950] 1980, p. 80) The radical element in these formulations is not the emphasis on present relevance as a condition for remembering, but the assumption that the past endures only because society remains unchanged and that generations that entertain different conceptions of the past must be alien to one another, "like two tree stumps," as Halbwachs put it, "that touch at their extremities but do not form one plant because they are not otherwise connected."[9] Thus, Mead and Halbwachs assume that social change that alters perception of the past is reconstructive change, and that it occurs when the past is replaced rather than built upon. Collective memory undergoes basic revision as new values and social structures replace the old. Mead and Halbwachs believed, like Lowenthal (1985), that under such conditions "the past is a foreign country."

To understand social change as a cumulative process that superimposes new social and symbolic structures on old ones, or that modifies these structures without replacing them, or that brings about structural transformation without altering fundamental values (Lipset 1979), makes it easier to go beyond Mead and Halbwachs and understand how early conceptions of the past are sustained across time. Neither the specific assumption of a "primacy effect" nor the general assumption that part of the past is autonomous, cut off from the vicissitudes of social experience, contribute much to this kind of understanding. The commemoration of George Washington, in particular, may have had a logic and force of its own, accumulating over the years a "self-perpetuating rhetorical power" (Schudson p. 109), but the momentum was certainly sustained by a hospitable social context. The primary condition for the endurance of traditional constructions is always the endurance of the social realities they symbolize. Early industrial America was vastly different from the America in which Washington lived and died. While it consisted of a different economy and class system, a different political order, a different territory, it was not a different society. It was the same society because it sustained, in the context of change and dissensus, a stable sense of identity based partly, but firmly, on the libertarian values of an eighteenth-century gentry class. For this reason, the democratic image of Washington could be superimposed upon the earlier patrician image but could never replace it.

There was, of course, a third portrayal of Washington. Organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Sons of the Revolution, and the Colonial Dames drew upon Washington's privileged background to symbolize the new wealth of the bourgeois class.[10] Their

[9] Halbwachs's argument is circular because it conceives the makeup of society in terms of the very memories that society is supposed to shape and maintain. "By definition," he explains, collective memory "does not exceed the boundaries of the group" (Halbwachs 1980, p. 80). When these boundaries are violated, when "men composing the same group in two successive periods are . . . otherwise unconnected" and "touch [only] at their extremities" (p. 80), then "historical memory," or the recalling of earlier generations whose way of life a group does not share, replaces "collective memory," which involves the contemplation of earlier generations whose way of life a group carries on (pp. 78-83). This analytic distinction allows Halbwachs to skirt the problem of how collective memory is preserved in the context of fundamental changes in society.

[10] Marling (1988) described this attempt in detail.

vision, however, never attained cultural authority.[11] The notion that Washington's greatness lay in his aptitude for business, which emerged in the 1920s, played a minor role in his commemoration, even though it expressed the mentality of society's dominant stratum ("Revealing Geo." 1921; Prussing 1921a,b; Hulbert 1925; Clark 1929). Business's commanding role in the economy and strong influence on the state was never accompanied by control over the past. In the end, industrial democracy was ennobled rather than made bourgeois by Washington's memory.

The different images of George Washington are all vehicles for dealing with the necessity of moving beyond present understandings of collective memory. The case of Washington shows that there cannot be separate theories of collective memory — one to explain changes in what is remembered; another to explain persistence in what is remembered. Nor do the facts of this case allow us to incorporate the persistence and innovation of memory into a third reconciliatory theory, for such a construction would presume the very inconsistency that it must demonstrate. The presence of inherited memories in the midst of invented memories is not an anomaly requiring reconciliation. Because the present is constituted by the past, the past's retention as well as its reconstruction must be anchored in the present. As each generation modifies the beliefs presented by previous generations, there remains an assemblage of old beliefs coexisting with the new, including old beliefs about the past itself (Shils 1981, p. 39).

Accordingly, Mead, Halbwachs, and their followers are right to anchor collective memory in the present. Their error is to underestimate the present's carrying power. They fail to see that the same present can sustain different memories and that different presents can sustain the same memory. Once this error is corrected, the Mead/Halbwachs and the Durkheim/Shils approaches to collective memory can be seen as special cases of a broader generalization that relates both change and continuity in the perception of the past to immediate human experience. The present evidence, at least, shows that the original, aristocratic image of Washington was preserved and the new democratic image created by the same society. These contrasting images coexisted because society continued to embrace aspects of its aristocratic past (gentility without privilege) while it rejected aspects of its present democratic culture (privilege without gentility). Washington's changing and enduring images thereby legitimated and sustained one another.

How we go about remembering Washington is not much different from how we remember other important figures in American history. Projecting ourselves backward and forward in that historical field, we find significant changes in the perception of most public men, including Washington's contemporaries, such as Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton (Peterson 1962), and the Marquis de Lafayette (Loveland 1971). Yet we rarely mistake such men for others, since the continuities in their images are more distinctive than the vicissitudes. Exceptions are easy to find. Many original biographies and historical accounts have been revised so extensively as to be no longer recognizable; others remain unchanged over long periods of time. Although common, these instances are not paradigmatic of collective memory. In most cases, as in the contemplation of Washington, we find the past to be neither totally precarious nor immutable, but a stable image upon which new elements are intermittently superimposed. The past, then, is a familiar rather than a foreign country; its people different, but not strangers to the present.

Marling's conclusions, however, are based largely on New York City's centennial of Washington's Inauguration and on the emergence during the 1920s of a series of articles in popular magazines that depicted Washington as a businessman. "Muffled in a cocoon of pink silk" (p. 119), Washington becomes "another robber baron with a houseful of tasteful possessions" (p. 117). These conceptions of Washington are striking precisely because they are so unrepresentative of the way most Americans thought about him and celebrated his memory.

[11] The 1889 George Washington Inauguration Centennial in New York was organized expressly for the city's "better" people. "It is true," the *New York World* explained, "that, except the 2,500 free seats in Union Square for women and children, secured through the tenacity and pluck of Mayor Grant, and the 25 cent seats in the City-Hall Park, there is little provision made by the committee for the poor, or even for well to do working people." The *Chicago Tribune* (Apr. 30, 1889) reprinted this comment, expressing no surprise that such a situation should present itself in plutocratic New York. The *Tribune* went to great pains to show how differently the centennial of Washington's inauguration would be observed in Chicago: "The whole people of the city are going to celebrate. Fashion and money take the back seats today." Sources from other cities show the Chicago plan to be the most representative; the New York plan, least so.

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