George Washington's Journey: The President Forges a New Nation

T.H. Breen
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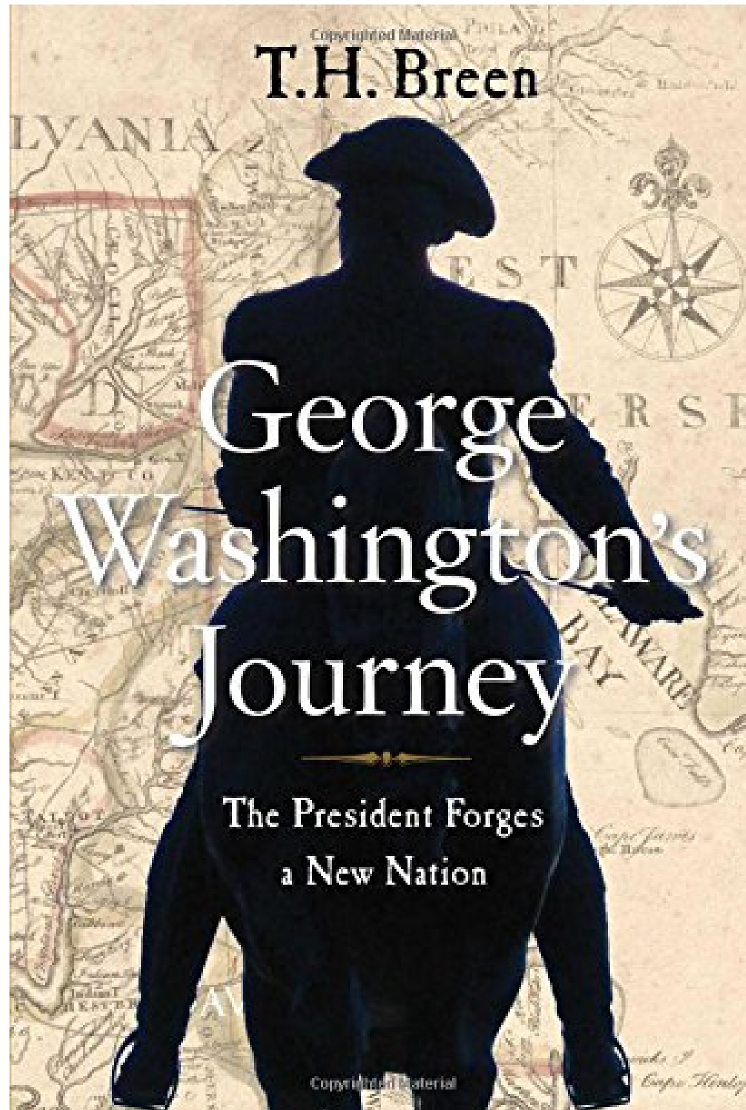

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T.H. Breen : George Washington's Journey: The President Forges a New Nation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised George Washington's Journey: The President Forges a New Nation:

5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Had one of my students written this- which they he or she would not because are better scholars and writers- a rewrite would beBy John R. BarneyThe title and introduction misrepresents what the title describes. Very little about the journey. The author meanders and lacks focus in his writing.Had one of my students written this- which they he or she would not because are better scholars and writers- a rewrite would be in

order.So sad. This volume will not have a place among my collection. My immediate thought was to drop it off at a local used book seller or a thrift store, but that would be wrong as someone else would be had.2 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Nothing worth reading in this book. Very dull.By LindaBoring! I love American history-- especially, that written by David McCullough-- but there was nothing new here to make a story about. Furthermore, the author doesn't seem to even particularly like George Washington. He seems to delight in finding hypocrisy in how Washington dealt with his slaves, and the fact that he didn't simply free them all before his death, since Washington-- and many Americans-- knew it was an immoral practice. First, most slaves came into his family through his marriage and were his wife's; second, doing so would have bankrupted him and brought his plantation to a standstill. Freeing them would have been an act of enormous good, obviously-- but how many of us are that altruistic in this life? A little empathetic realism would have been in order, rather than conveying an attitude of moral superiority. Washington did, as I understand, free his slaves (or at least most of them) at his death.I bought this book because the Wall Street Journal reviewed it, but I am surprised they gave it a good review considering what little of interest was in it. Instead of putting in it my library, I will give it to Goodwill.12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Interesting, easy read that brought that period in history alive for meBy Debbie"George Washington's Journey" described President Washington's efforts to unite the 13 states into a nation by personally visiting each state. Washington realized that winning a war for freedom doesn't guarantee the formation a stable and prosperous nation. Americans were thinking in terms of state and local interests, but they needed to think of national interests if the new government was going to succeed. Washington visited each of the original 13 states in an effort to unite the people behind a strong federal government and to hear their concerns.The author described Washington's inaugural journey (from home to the capital) and his tour of the states. Washington toured the northern states in 1789 and the southern states in 1791. The author didn't give a day-by-day description of the travels but instead grouped similar incidents and analyzed what was going on. He described various things that Washington and the people did that helped define how the president should be addressed, treated, and how he should interact with the people who elected him.There were many quotes from Washington's diary, various letters, and newspaper accounts. These quotes helped to show how people at the time viewed the events. The author also gave the context of what was happening so we could understand Washington's motives or the significance of various interactions. The author did a good job of showing events within the context of the time period rather than purely through hindsight.I found the book to be an interesting, easy read that brought that period in history alive for me. I'd recommend this book to those who enjoy learning about early American history.I received an ebook review copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley.

An absorbing portrait...Breens superb chronicle offers glimpses into Washingtons love of his country and its people, and his willingness to meet them on their own terms to secure the unity of the new republic. Publishers Weekly (starred review) This is George Washington in the surprising role of political strategist.T.H. Breen introduces us to a George Washington we rarely meet. During his first term as president, he decided that the only way to fulfill the Revolution was to take the new federal government directly to the people. He organized an extraordinary journey carrying him to all thirteen states. It transformed American political culture. For Washington, the stakes were high. If the nation fragmented, as it had almost done after the war, it could never become the strong, independent nation for which he had fought. In scores of communities, he communicated a powerful and enduring messagethat America was now a nation, not a loose collection of states. And the people responded to his invitation in ways that he could never have predicted.

An absorbing portrait of early America's struggles . . . Breen's superb chronicle offers glimpses into Washington's love of his country and its people, and his willingness to meet them on their own terms to secure the unity of the new republic. (Publishers Weekly, starred review)Worth the time of anyone interested in Washington and the birth of the United States. . . . Mr. Breen reports anecdotes that bring Washington to life. . . . both of these books, enjoyably written and learned, reveal still more of the apparently limitless greatness of Washington. (The Wall Street Journal)[An] excellent new contribution to American historiography. . . . valuable reading during an election year. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)Rather than simple good will journeys, Breen convincingly argues that Washingtons tours of New England and the South were key elements in his campaign to bind the American populace to the ideal of the union and the recently installed Constitutional government. . . . T.H. Breen is a noted authority on early American history, and his contributions have been widely acclaimed. His writing is, as always, fluid and vivid, resting on a foundation of deep research and the assurance accumulated through decades of study. With verve and grace, Breen restores the importance of these innovative goodwill trips to their rightful place in our understanding of the politics and evolving political culture of the new republic. Readers will find George Washingtons Journey as illuminating as it is enjoyable. (Journal of the American Revolution)The 2,400-mile journey over two summers, with its triumphs and its dangers, an immense undertaking in a horse-drawn carriage over rutted wilderness roads, is the basis of Breens highly readable tale. . . . Breen treats us to behind-the-scenes wrestling between Massachusetts Gov. John Hancock and Washington. . . . Washingtons journey offers a fresh insight into our first president, a man generally accepted as the

most popular American of his era, but a man not well understood by succeeding generations. (Buffalo News)Everything about this book was exciting for a history lover...If you are interested in the life and times of George Washington, or simply this period of history, this would be an excellent book to add to your collection. Recommended. (Readful Things Blog)Clear and vivid, Breens writing demonstrates Washingtons great gift for political theater. . . . In Breens deft hands, readers will encounter a very personal George Washington. . . . What makes Breens account so compelling is the depth of the research. . . . Unlike other historians of the founding era, Breen holds nothing back on his criticism of Washington as a slave owner. . . . George Washingtons Journey is an important contribution to the history of the early American republic. (Washington Indy of Books)T. H. Breen has managed the minor miracle of writing a book about George Washington that, although hagiographic, isnt toweringly maddening. His subject is an interesting one, too. . . . Breen digs into his sources and tells the story of those alleged goodwill tours in wonderfully readable detaila better and bigger account of them than I can remember reading anywhere else. . . . a natural storyteller. (Open Letters Monthly)Breens clearly written account of these sojourns give readers a fresh understanding of the presidents personality, his public and private lives, and the political and social climate of the time.This quick, accessible study will appeal to fans of Harlow Giles Ungers The Unexpected George Washington and general readers with an interest in Early American history and political science. (Library Journal)It is hard to think that anything new could be said about George Washington. But Breen has done it. Tracing Washingtons republicanized versions of royal progresses through the new nation at the beginning of his presidency was an inspired choice of subject, and Breen has developed it beautifully. In clear and accessible prose he has given us new insights into the acute political skills of our first president and the state of country in the 1790s. (Gordon S. Wood author of The Idea of America)In this vivid and insightful book, T.H. Breen takes readers on a revealing journey with the greatest of eighteenth-century Americans. More than any other founder, Washington passionately believed that only a strong and united nation could sustain liberty. By touring distant and disparate states, the first president built a connection with ordinary people that helped the new nation survive its difficult early years. Breen eloquently reminds Americans of how much we gain from remembering Washington's commitment to a more perfect union. (Alan Taylor, author of The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832)With the deft touch of one of Americas master historians, TH. Breen convincingly shows Americas greatest founderGeorge Washingtonas a genius of political stagecraft who made the office of the Presidency into the peoples office, and helped a divided and scattered people see and feel the purpose of their great Union. A surprising and compelling bookand refreshingly relevant. (Douglas Bradburn, Founding Director, National Library for the Study of George Washington, Mount Vernon)"George Washington's vision for the future of the United States was not fully formed when he became President in 1789. It took two dramatic journeys, to New England and the South, for that vision to come to fruition and become truly continental. Tim Breen's chronicle of those journeys is at once informative and inspiring, revealing a hope for unity and prosperity in the symbol of one remarkable man. (Edward G. Lengel, Director, Washington Papers, University of Virginia)About the AuthorT.H. Breen is currently the James Marsh Professor at-large at the University of Vermont. He is the author of eleven books on U.S. History, many of them prizewinners.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.George Washingtons Journey CHAPTER I The Power of Public Opinion George Washingtons departure for New England in 1789 introduces the people who accompanied him on his tours. The cast of characters included secretaries who attended to the details of travel and slaves who cared for the horses and wagons. The little cavalcade figured significantly in the creation of a new republican culture. Several months before setting out for New England, Washington had discovered firsthand the importance of public opinion, a powerful new force in the nations political life. As he traveled to his first inauguration, he witnessed crowds of noisy, self-confident, and demanding Americans, women as well as men, many of them unable to vote, who lined the country roads and city streets. It was a profoundly moving experience for Washington. He was the product of an earlier colonial society in which the ordinary people had not enjoyed a significant role in politics. The Revolution changed all that. Washington quickly accommodated to this new, challenging political environment. He learned that by pleasing the people, he could communicate to them his own expansive vision for the countrys future. I George Washingtons ambitious tour of the Eastern States, as people then called New England, began with little fanfare. The prospect of rain on the morning of October 15, 1789, would have discouraged many travelers just setting out on a long journey. Washington was not such a person. The overcast skies eventually produced showers, which began falling about ten oclock, but the weather failed to diminish the presidents high spirits. He had been eagerly contemplating his departure from New York City, then the capital of the United States, for several months, and now that he had finally commenced his trip, his major concern was maintaining a tight schedule.1 The little procession followed the Post Road northeast toward the Connecticut line. No surviving record suggests that adoring citizens endured the rain to cheer their president, the result no doubt of the lack of public announcement that Washington was taking a significant trip. No soldiers were present, no special guards. No one mentioned that the travelers carried arms. Washington had no reason to fear the American people. He sat in an open carriage, not exactly an ideal situation for a rainy autumn day, but he did not complain. More than a year later, when he organized a much more arduous trip to the southern states, Washington insisted on traveling in a stunning new coach, rumored to be one of the most elegant vehicles in the nation, but for the present, he made do with an older

carriage that he had owned since the end of the war. Four well-groomed bays pulled the vehicle. Washington took exceptional pride in the appearance of his horses. He had a well-deserved reputation as a skilled rider. Before the Revolution, he had competed with Colonel William Byrd, a wealthy Virginia planter, for the honor of having the most impressive equipage in the colony. Contemporaries described the contest as a rivalry of the grays against the bays. After he became president, Washington continued to monitor the condition of his animals, perhaps a little obsessively. In New York City, people referred to them specifically as the muslin horses. Every morning at dawn, stable boys carefully brushed the horses, and when they had finished, a supervisor ran a clean muslin cloth over each horse looking for the slightest stain. There was hell to pay if he found an imperfection. One of the stable boys went by the name of Paris. Washington had recently brought this young slave to the capital from Virginia. He is of special interest for us, because Paris and a fellow slave, Giles, assisted the president on the major trips, first to New Hampshire and later to the southern states. Washingtons favorite chargers, one of which accompanied him on the New England tour, received even more elaborate attention before public events. These were large horses of the kind that Washington had ridden during the Revolution, and many paintings from the period show the general standing next to a great white charger. According to Washingtons grandson, then a small child, in the evening the president ordered the show horses covered entirely over with a paste, of which whiting was the principal component part. The animals spent the night in this condition. It was reported that by morning the composition had become hard, was well-rubbed in, and curried and brushed, which process gave to the coats a beautiful, flossy, and satin-like appearance. Stable hands addressed the smallest details. Hooves were blackened, teeth picked and cleaned. Only then, as valued props in political theater, were the white chargers led out for service.2 The New England procession also included a baggage wagon driven by one of the six servants who traveled with Washington. The word servant was a euphemism. These men were actually slaves who had worked for the president at Mount Vernon. For this occasion, they wore special garments selected to impress the public. The coachmen and postilions, for example, sported blanket cloaks, new jockey caps, and fashionable boots. Like the horses, the slaves were part of the show. Their appearance reflected the taste and judgment of the president. Behind the wagon, a slave, probably Paris, led a large charger, which Washington intended to ride as he entered communities along the way. A tall figure mounted on a spirited horse, of course, made a more powerful impression on the spectators than did a man waving from an aging carriage. At the start of the tour, Washington wore a business suit appropriate for a person of his social standing, but at some moment along the road, he elected to exchange it for a full uniform of the Continental Army. He discovered that although he described himself simply as a citizen of the new republic, the American people still regarded him as General Washington, the hero who won independence on the battlefield. And in the political theater of the new republic, what the people wanted or expected powerfully shaped the presidents performance. Riding alongside the carriage, at least for the first few miles, were several members of Washingtons cabinet. Whether John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and Henry Knoxchief justice, secretary of the treasury, and secretary of war, respectivelywanted to be out in the rain is impossible to document. They probably chatted among themselves. No doubt, they regarded a proper send-off for the president as part of their official duties. Before setting out for New England, Washington had solicited advice from these men. He valued their opinions, and since the tour was an unprecedented undertaking, he wanted to know specifically whether they thought it wise for the president to be absent from the nations capital for several weeks. If Congress still had been in session, he would never have proposed the trip. He took a keen interest in legislative debates. Now, however, during the recess, and with official business less pressing than usual, Washington wanted assurance from the cabinet that he was doing the right thing. The response from these men was encouraging. James Madison could not be present for the departure, but the newly elected congressman from Virginia who had worked so closely with Washington during the Constitutional Convention informed Washington that he saw no impropriety in my proposed trip to the Eastward.3 Knox also gave a positive answer, as did Jay, who with astute political insight into the deep sectional differences dividing the nation warned Washington that a similar visit would be expected by those of the Southern [states].4 Hamilton gave the issue careful thought. Had conversation with Colonel Hamilton on the propriety of my making a tour through the Eastern states during the recess of Congress to acquire knowledge of the facts of the Country, Washington noted in his diary. Hamilton concluded that he thought it a very desirable plan and advised accordingly.5 An empty seat in the carriage begged explanation. John Adams, the vice president, decided not to travel with Washington on the Eastern States tour. If he had been savvier politically, he would have done so. The trip to Boston would have provided him with a much-needed opportunity to be seen publicly in the company of the most popular man in America. More important, the long hours traveling in the carriage might have sparked frank conversation between them that could have eased tensions that troubled their relationship. Even before the first election under the Constitution took place, some of Washingtons most enthusiastic supporters raised awkward questions about Adamss character. In 1788, for example, in a confidential letter to Thomas Jefferson, who was then in France, Madison explained that he regarded Adams as a potential political liability for the new administration. He hoped that the Electoral College would turn to someone with more promising credentials. J. Adams has made himself obnoxious to many particularly in the Southern States, Madison wrote. There was more. Rumors circulated that Adams had questioned Washingtons leadership during the Revolution. According to Madison, Others recollecting his [Adamss]

cabal during the war against general Washington, knowing his extravagant self-importance... conclude that he would not be a very cordial second to the General, and that an impatient ambition might even intrigue for a premature advancement.6 Although Adams did in fact win the vice presidency, he remained insensitive to political nuance. On such matters, his wife, Abigail, showed much more insight. She could hardly believe that Adams had declined the opportunity to accompany Washington. Writing from New York to a relative in Massachusetts, she observed tersely that the president would have had Mr. Adams accept a seat in his coach, but he excused himself from motives of delicacy.7 What counted for delicacy in this situation, she did not make clear. Adams may have been brooding over stories that he and Washington were on bad terms. It is true that unflattering tales were circulating in New England. One man in Boston demanded to know from John Quincy Adams, the vice presidents son, the truth of a Report which had been industriously spread here within this week past that there is so great a Coolness between the Pt V-Pt that they do not speak to each other.8 Although the two men in fact spoke regularly, Adams could never ignore a slight, real or imagined, and he probably reasoned that by traveling alone, he was acting on some high-minded principle. Adams left New York for Boston a few days ahead of the president. Still trying to help her husband, Abigail told him on October 20, I presume the President will overtake you on the Road [since] he set off on Thursday. You will remember, she added, what had happened in New York the Saturday Evening when you took leave of him. On Sunday he [Washington] expressed himself anxious... lest he had not been sufficiently urgent with you to accompany him. Abigail counseled Adams not to let personal feelings impair his judgment. She was sure that Washington will send you an invitation to accompany him [from Boston] to Portsmouth, which I hope you will find... convenient to accept.9 For his part, Washington was probably relieved that he did not have to endure long hours in a coach with Adams. Two other men who figure centrally in our story traveled to the eastward with Washington. Today we might describe Tobias Lear and William Jackson as special assistants to the president, but at the time they were generally known as secretaries. To be sure, Washington referred to these young bachelors who lived in his housein New York, they occupied a cramped dormitory room on the top flooras family or as Gentlemen of the household.10 Although Washington intended the designation Gentlemen of the household as a compliment, he may soon have had second thoughts about the political connotations of such a phrase. In a republic it smacked of monarchical culture, of a world of court lackeys and sycophantic placemen. However happy these men may have been working so closely with Washingtonit was an honor to be asked to servethe job was extremely demanding. They were on call all the time. Their duties included drafting routine letters for the president, carrying messages from him to members of Congress, and organizing routine household business. Tobias Lear, Washingtons long-serving secretary, never witnessed the face of battle during the Revolution. Nevertheless, soon after graduation from Harvard College in 1783, he became Washingtons most trusted assistant. He owed the appointment to glowing recommendations testifying to his intelligence and diligence. Lear soon moved from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where he had grown up, to Mount Vernon and quickly demonstrated an ability to organize household affairs not only for Washington, but alsoperhaps more importantfor Martha and her grandchildren. He had a good eye for numbers, and most of the personal records that have survived in his hand record the bills he paid to various merchants in Washingtons name. Indeed, it is from his detailed accounts that we know that Washington purchased a stylish new cap for Paris the slave just before the New England trip. Lear possessed the perfect temperament for a personal assistant. He had a capacity to disappear into the background as family members and political leaders made decisions. In New York, he went about his business, always competent but never intrusive, showing initiative without seeming pushy, and studiously diffident in the presence of superiors. Although one might have expected the young man to strike out on his own, he remained tied to the Washington family for the better part of his life. Lear did try his luck with business ventures during the mid-1790s, but his experiment in land speculation and in managing a canal company ended in failure. He kept returning to his patron, and in 1799 he achieved a measure of celebrity as the man who recorded Washingtons last words at the moment of his death.11 Like the other secretaries, Lear never told tales in public about what went on behind closed doors. On the morning of October 15, 1789, as the presidential party left New York City, his life still seemed full of promise. He was excited about returning to friends and family in New Hampshire. Of all the people who traveled to New England, William Jackson remains both the most intriguing and enigmatic. He accompanied Washington on every major trip during his first term as president. He was present at Boston and Charleston, Portsmouth and Savannah, Hartford and Richmond. Few other men ever experienced such sustained access to Washington. Day after day, over thousands of miles, sharing the discomforts of the road and trying to keep up polite conversation, these two men maintained a formal relationship that seems to have been defined more by mutual respect than deep affection. Despite years of service, Jackson never entered the inner circle of Washingtons most trusted associates. It was not that the president questioned Jacksons abilities or feared indiscretion. Rather, Jackson remained an employee who carried out assigned responsibilities but was always careful not to overstep the social constraints of his position. If he had been a person of different character, Jackson might have produced a sensational book revealing aspects of Washingtons life that remained hidden. But that did not happen. Long after Washington died and Jackson had become a newspaper publisher, he never offered the slightest hint that he had secret tales from the road to recount. About Jacksons early life, little is known. Born in Cumberland, England, in 1759, he lost both parents as a teenager. Their deaths may have

closed off anticipated educational opportunities. Whatever his prospects as an orphan were, he decided that they were not sufficiently promising to warrant remaining in Great Britain, and on the eve of the Revolution, he took his chances on Charleston, South Carolina. Although he lacked financial resources, he possessed considerable personal charm, which served him well in America, and as a volunteer in the Continental Army, he quickly achieved a reputation as a brave and reliable officer. Jackson caught the eye of General Benjamin Lincoln, who during the war had earned Washingtons lasting respect. Lincoln championed the young soldiers advancement. By the end of the Revolution, Jackson had risen to the rank of major, and for the rest of his life, including his years as Washingtons secretary, everyone called him Major Jackson. Not surprising for a man so eager to make his mark in America, Jackson struck some associates as perhaps a little too ambitious. He was always searching for patrons and the positions he thought they had on offer. By his early twenties, he had found ways to extend his network of powerful contacts. The list included Henry Laurens, one of South Carolinas wealthiest planters and a leading American diplomat in Europe during the Revolution. Jackson also impressed Alexander Hamilton. During the early 1780s, Hamilton had already grown impatient with the chronic inefficiencies of the Confederation Congress. The critique made a lot of sense to Jackson. His war experience had persuaded him of the need for the creation of a strong central government in the United States. His political beliefs certainly mirrored Hamiltons, and in 1783 when Lincoln appointed Jackson Assistant Secretary of War under the Confederation government, Jackson forged a lasting bond with Hamilton, who was then serving in Congress. Jackson greatly advanced his career prospects three years later by delivering an oration commemorating the anniversary of American independence. Much of the speech, later published in Philadelphia, offered little more than a standard story of great leaders accomplishing great things. Toward the end of his performance, however, Jackson raised troublesome questions about the countrys future. He doubted the ability of the Confederation to serve the financial interests of the new nation. For him, the source of the problem seemed obvious: How far our national character shall be established on the basis of virtueand our public credit be supported with honorwill depend upon ourselves, and can only be chargeable upon our own neglect if unattained. Although this was a truism, what he said next amounted to an appeal for a bold new start. The country desperately needed a strong central government. With great deference, said the major, I beg leave to offer an opinion, which suggests... the indispensable necessity of strengthening the confidence in our continental councils, and increasing the energy of our federal constitution, or to change the confederated system altogether, must soon become an unavoidable alternative.12 For Hamilton, the message demonstrated that Jackson, not yet thirty years of age, had the right political views. Washington and Madison would have agreed. Minor posts in the Confederation government apparently did not assuage Jacksons ambition. He seems to have thought that his maneuvering on the margins of real power would somehow propel him into the top group, making him if not a Madison or Hamilton, then at least a person in the new political structure to be reckoned with. But lacking special genius or, even more important, substantial inherited wealth, he never quite fulfilled his own high expectations. His frustration occasionally gave voice to complaint about not having enough money to get on in the world. In 1789 he wrote a self-serving letter to Washington that Jackson may have thought would win sympathy. Entering into the Army, at the early age of sixteen, the major explained, it was my lot to pass eight years, the most interesting of my life, in the service of my countryThe expense, necessarily induced, to support the character of an officer nearly exhausted my patrimonial pittance, and left me no other consolation, at the close of the war, than the consciousness of having faithfully done my duty. In this brief autobiographical account, a rare personal document in the life of this mysterious man, Jackson seemed willing to blame everyone around him for lack of professional advancement. He traced his initial failure to achieve the success he expected to his parents, who were too poor to provide the boy with the funds necessary to make a mark in his new home. And then he drew Washingtons attention to his selfless commitment to American independence, which in Jacksons materialistic account of patriotism had cost him a lot more money than he had bargained for. The list of disappointments expanded to include friends who had given inadequate guidance to a young man struggling to find his calling. Collecting the remnant of my property, Jackson continued, I embarked in commerce, which, being neither congenial to my temper, nor favorable to my fortune, I was forced to abandon. Someone apparently should have come forward to help him avoid this waste of time. Then came the study of law on the advice of my particular friends. Once again, after reading the law, he discovered an impediment. There was a long wait before new lawyers were allowed to practice before the supreme court of Pennsylvania, the state where he now lived, and with no inheritance, no money from commerce, and no income from the law, he turned to Washington for help.13 In ordinary circumstances, requests based on self-pity did not move Washington to generosity. He had no trouble rejecting appeals for support, even from members of his family. But perhaps because of Jacksons distinguished war record, his genial personality, or a good word from Lincoln or Hamilton, the major gained a sympathetic hearing. Jacksons appointment as secretary for the Constitutional Convention seemed a turning point. It was certainly an assignment that required extraordinary discretion. Day after day during a hot Philadelphia summer, he recorded one of the greatest debates in American political history. And when it was over, he never sharedat least in writinga single secret of what had happened at the meeting in Philadelphia. He made a good impression on Washington, who chaired the convention, and he soon invited Jackson to join Lear in New York City as one of the presidents secretaries. At that moment, Jackson still possessed

youthful charm. No one during Washingtons first term in office openly questioned his abilities or loyalty. But Washington maintained a certain distance from Jackson. He was an associate, a colleague, but not a genuine friend, as were Lear and David Humphreys, whom we will meet later in this chapter. The major once found himself the butt of Washingtons humor, not a side of Washington that many people ever witnessed, when he asked to ride one of Washingtons famed chargers. The horse was hard to control, and within minutes it threw Jackson. Washington thought the incident very funny and thereafter called the animal Jackson. There was no forgetting the embarrassment, since this particular horse accompanied Jackson and the president during a trip of several thousand miles through the southern states in 1791. Another indication of the coolness that defined the relationship was the tone of a note that Washington wrote to Jackson after he had asked late in 1791 for a letter of recommendation. To this request, Washington responded that he was willing to declare to you [Jackson] that your deportment so far as it has come under my observation, had been regulated by principles of integrity and honor. He added that Jackson had always been a welcome member of my family.14 Although polite, this was not the kind of effusive rhetoric that would open many doors. Nevertheless, even without a glowing testimonial from the president, Jackson managed to win the heart of a woman who was the daughter of a rich Philadelphia merchant. His streak of luck continued. His wifes sister had married an even richer man, William Brigham. During the mid-1790s, Jackson worked closely with Brigham in a huge, somewhat dodgy land speculation scheme in which they tried to sell heavily forested acreage in far northern Maine to Europeans who wanted good arable land for farms. Predictably, the potential buyers lost interest when they realized that Jackson was offering rocky fields and pine trees in a very cold place, and the enterprise lost a lot of money. Jackson also served as a second for Hamilton in a duel with James Monroe, an event fortunately settled at the last minute through negotiation. But in 1789, no sign of such unpleasantness had yet appeared, and as he set off for New England, Jackson still dreamed of the opportunities that awaited him. By eleven oclock on this first day, the rain had stopped. The presidential cavalcade had reached Kingsbridge, now part of the Bronx. The cabinet membersHamilton, Knox, and Jayhad already turned back to the city. According to Washingtons diary, the party now included Major Jackson, Mr. Lear and myself, with Six Servants. They dined at the house of one [Caleb] Hoyatt and then, even though the showers returned, the riders, wagon, and carriage pushed on several miles to Rye, New York. There they found a tavern known locally as the Square House, run by Mrs. Tamar Haviland. Washington described it a very neat and decent Inn.15 The Post Road to New Haven lay before them. So too did the stubbornly independent states that the president hoped to forge into a powerful union. II The idea of taking a journey to the people of the new nation had matured slowly in Washingtons mind. The seeds of the enterprise seem to have been planted some months before he set off for New England. Of course, the exact moment when Washington discovered that he confronted an entirely new political climate, one that required a man elected by the people to engage with them in an ongoing conversation about the character of the republican experiment, cannot be dated with precision. Most likely the realization that he was operating in an unprecedented environment occurred during the trip from Mount Vernon for his inauguration as the president of the United States. The elaborate and enthusiastic celebrations he encountered on the road certainly alerted him to a new force in American politics: public opinion. In a republican form of government, the ordinary people could not be taken for granted. The journey to the nations capitala trip through the middle states of Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jerseybrought home to Washington the possibility of an entirely new political theater in which he, as the lead player, would communicate to an adoring audience a powerful and compelling vision for the future of the new nation. As Washington made clear before his election as president, when he was still enjoying a much-celebrated retirement from public life, he was extremely reluctant to take on the responsibilities of high office. He certainly did not welcome administrative routine. He informed everyone who would listen that he wanted to remain in Virginia, hunting with friends, experiencing the joys of family life, and developing new, more efficient forms of agriculture. He seems to have modeled himself on the virtuous Roman soldier Cincinnatus, who defended the republic on the field of battle and then returned to the simple pleasures of the farm.16 But tranquil retirement was not on offer. Whatever his misgivings about once again assuming a major national office, the pressure on Washington to accept once more the challenge of securing the future of the United States proved too great for him to reject. Although modesty prevented him from saying what was obvious to everyone else, Washington was the only person capable of leading the country at that precise historical moment. He alone seemed to stand above the regional jealousies and personal rivalries that threatened to destroy the federal order before the American people had a chance to discover its worth. Assurances that he would in fact serve as the first president of the United States convinced many critics of the Constitution to ratify the document, and it was no surprise that the Electoral College selected him unanimously for the presidency, an accomplishment never duplicated. During his final days in Virginia as a private citizen, a flood of uncertainty overcame Washington. For all the enthusiastic expressions of support he had received, he worried privately that he might not be up to the task. He faced an entirely new challenge. He was now a political leader, an elected executive, and not a military commander who could give orders to junior officers and ordinary soldiers. The American people had minds of their own. Many had difficulty accepting authority of any kind. Because of their feisty independence, they expected their representatives to champion their interests against those of other highly independent Americans. It was a process that demanded patience and tact. However much Washington

subscribed to the idea that republican government derived its powers from the people, he was not noted for his patience, and the prospect of endless bickering over governance must have struck him as potentially quite tedious. And, of course, at age fifty-seven Washington was not the man he had been in 1775 when he took charge of the Continental Army. As he contemplated the presidency, he felt the burdens of age. He was a little frailer, more aware of his own mortality. It was in this reflective mood that Washington observed just after several key states had ratified the Constitution, Although I shall not live to see but a small portion of the happy effects, which I am confident this system will produce for my Country; yet the precious idea of its prosperity... will tend to sooth the mind in the inevitable hour of separation from terrestrial objects.17 Even if he was fortunate to maintain good health, Washington harbored no illusions about the burden he had taken on. Neither his life nor that of his immediate family would be the same after he gave up the comforts of home. As he confessed in his diary on April 16, 1789, About ten oclock I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity; and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York.18 With Henry Knox, he was even more candid. Washington described himself at that moment much like a culprit who is going to the place of his execution, so unwilling am I, in the evening of life, nearly consumed in public cares, to quit a peaceful abode for an Ocean of difficulties.19 Washington believed that the American people were engaged in a political experiment whose success was by no means guaranteed. They had endured a hard decade in which the national governmentthe government of the Confederationhad failed to fulfill the expectations of a Revolutionary generation. The states could barely bring themselves to cooperate. Congressmen often did not bother to appear for legislative sessions. Obtaining quorums was problematic. The very notion of a viable union seemed to have gone missing even before the British accepted defeat in 1783. More distressing for people such as Washington, the states not only refused to raise desperately needed revenue, but also adopted inflationary fiscal policies rewarding debtors and discouraging interstate commerce.20 III Washington departed from Virginia for New York City on April 16. In addition to the usual complement of servants, two old friends accompanied the president-elect on this journey. Charles Thomson, the secretary of the Continental Congress, had rushed to Mount Vernon with news that Washington had in fact been elected president of the United States. Although everyone knew that the Electoral College had selected Washington, he waited in Virginia for the official announcement. Now there was no turning back. His task as messenger completed, Thomson returned to the capital with Washington. David Humphreys, the other person sitting in the carriage, had served with Washington during the Revolution and enjoyed a relaxed intimacy with him that very few others ever achieved. At this time, Humphreys acted as one of Washingtons secretaries, much the same position that Lear held. Humphreys had served in the Continental Army, always a positive attribute in Washingtons judgment, and rose steadily through the military ranks until 1780 when he received an appointment as General Washingtons aide-de-camp. Humphreys also spent a lot of time writing poetry. In his home state of Connecticut, he became a member of a small group of creative writers who aspired to provide the new nation with the literature they thought it deserved. Largely forgotten today, they were then known as the Connecticut Wits. Humphreys would go on to hold a number of important elective offices in Connecticut, and during Washingtons presidency, he performed ably as an American diplomat in Europe. Although Colonel Humphreys played no part in Washingtons subsequent trips to the eastern and southern states, he is of interest from our perspective largely for what he did not do. After the Revolution, he decided to write a full-length biography of Washington. Since he and Washington had developed a deep mutual trust, Washington offered Humphreys complete access to his huge personal collection of papers at Mount Vernon. Washington had warmed up to the project slowly, but once he made his decision to cooperate, he could hardly contain his enthusiasm. I should be pleased indeed, Washington declared in 1785, to see you undertake this business. He praised Humphreyss ability as a writer, his distinguished war record, his knowledge of the facts, and his impartial judgment. All of these splendid attributes combined to fit you, when joined with the vigor of life, for this task. The burden of expectation was extraordinary, the certainty of success premature. Humphreys was no historian. A manuscript copy of several early chapters of Life of General Washington is all that has survived.21 For the most part, the results were highly disappointing; the vast amount of archival material had overwhelmed the colonel. One section of the work, however, provides valuable insight into Washingtons state of mind as he was wrestling with the question not only whether to accept the presidency but also how a president in a republican government should interact with the people. Humphreys was then living at Mount Vernon, and the two men apparently discussed these issues almost daily. A surviving fragment reconstructs the conversation; at least, that was Humphreyss claim. The text of the exchange may strike modern readers as a little stiff, even contrived. The colonel countered Washingtons fears, point by point, and in the process he developed a powerful argument that the success of the new government depended almost entirely on Washingtons acceptance of the executive office. During one exchange, Humphreys asserted, I must avow, that in searching for arguments to justify you in declining appointment; I have been rather led to confirmed in an opposite opinion. Was it not the case, he observed, that it will be found that the very existence of the government will be much endangered, if the person placed at the Head of it should not possess the entire confidence of both its friends adversaries. Popularity, of course, was not Washingtons problem. From all the treatment you have ever experienced from the people of this Continent you have a right to believe, that they entertain a good opinion of your abilities. Humphreys urged Washington to stop focusing on

negative possibilities. You ought, at sometimes, Sir, stated the colonel, to look upon the bright side of the picture; and not always to be pondering the objects you find on the Reverse. Nothing but clear common sense good intentions, in our circumstances, will be necessary for conducting the affairs of the Commonwealth. It is hard to imagine anyone else addressing Washington so candidly and forcefully. But if Humphreys is to be believed, he softened Washingtons resistance, and the fragment ends the account of the conversation with Washington grumbling, If my appointment acceptance be inevitable, I fear I must bid adieu to happiness, for I see nothing but clouds darkness before me: and I call God to witness that the day which shall carry me again into public life, will be a more distressing one than any I have ever yet known.22 The trip north to New York from Mount Vernon should have allayed Washingtons worst fears. The event was without precedent in American political experience. Spontaneous celebrations in town after town seem to have taken Washington by surprise. He may have anticipated a quiet journey. No doubt, he was a little naive to think that he could discourage the people from expressing their affection for the hero of the Revolution and the leader of the new constitutional government. The crowds numbered in the thousands, and while members of the local elite in some cities such as Baltimore and Philadelphia offered Washington official greetings, it was the ordinary men and women, many of whom could not vote, who made the deepest impression on the man who did not yet quite know what it meant to be the president of the United States. Washington learned an important lesson on the way to his first inauguration. The political nation that he encountered contained distinct, though complementary, groups. Local leaders spoke for the people of their communities. They organized dinners in his honor; they drafted welcoming speeches; they called out the militia units that escorted Washington from place to place. But the ordinary people also participated, coming forward in huge numbers, representing what in Great Britain at the time was known as politics out of doors. In the new republican government, both groups possessed real power, and the inability to votea condition that would seem to have deprived all women and many men without property of a political voicedid not in fact silence the people. The crowds, the fireworks, the special songs written for the occasion, the stunning illuminations: all these provided testimony to the fact that the people were telling Washington how he fit into their own story about the Revolution and republican government in the United States. Witnessing from his carriage the repeated enthusiastic expressions of popular support, Washington may have sensed how much the character of political life had changed since the Revolution. His success as president would depend on both groupslocal elites and ordinary peopleand although it is tempting to interpret this journey as a kind of rehearsal for the later trips to New England and the South, there was a major difference. During the initial trip to New York City, Washington remained largely passive, accepting and praising the receptions along the road. But after he had become president, his journeys acquired more the character of a conversation. He had an appeal for a strong federal union to carry to the people; they had opinions about their own aspirations for the country to share with him. Washington interpreted the enthusiastic receptions on the road as an endorsement for the new federal government, a point of considerable importance. It is easy to overlook how much ordinary peoplecrowds of noisy supportersreaffirmed Washingtons faith in the republican experiment. Their cheers were as significant at this moment, as were the formal exchanges with the wealthy and well born who held local offices. No doubt, many Americans had strongly opposed ratification of the Constitution, but those people either stayed at home or separated their feelings for the president from their criticism of the national government. In Baltimore, for example, the members of a committee drew up a welcoming address that could not have been more to Washingtons liking. The group proclaimed that it was celebrating a new political dawn for the United States. We behold a new era springing out of our independence, the committee assured Washington, and a field displayed where your talents for governing will not be obscured by the splendor of the greatest military exploits. The American people stood on the cutting edge of history. The representatives of Baltimore announced, We behold, too, an extraordinary thing in the annals of mankind; a free and enlightened people, choosing, by a free election, without one dissenting voice, the late Commander-in-Chief of their armies, to watch over and guard their civil rights and privileges.