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Review: George Washington and the Virginia Backcountry

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one). She explores the paradox of the slave's duality as person and property, evidentiary issues, and the role of common-law protections. The added value of this volume is that, although it relies upon only one jurisdiction—and a rather unique one at that, Schafer's longitudinal research strategy allows for a more sophisticated understanding of the development of slave law against a background of changing legal, economic, social, and intellectual currents. Thus Schafer explores, for instance, Louisiana's unique heritage of civil law and the extent to which it evolved over time. She also traces the legal manifestations of issues central to the reality of the slave existence: white cruelty; slaves as criminal defendants; the slave trade; fugitive slaves; warranties in slave sales; the emancipation of slaves; and slaves' own suits for freedom. Schafer's analysis reveals not only legal trends but also the impact of political infighting between court and legislature. It is also a window into the harsh daily existence of slaves in Louisiana.

These two volumes, taken together, present the reader with new and important insights into the legal history of slavery and the antebellum society of which it was a part. Students and scholars alike will benefit from a close reading of each.

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George Washington and the Virginia Backcountry. Edited by Warren R. Hofstra. (Madison, Wisc.: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1998. Pp. xiv, 265. $34.95, ISBN 0-945612-50-8.)

Warren R. Hofstra of Shenandoah University has compiled a group of essays on the influence of the Virginia backcountry on the career of George Washington. The real question answered is how did the backcountry experiences of Washington as surveyor, land speculator, and military leader influence him as a leader of the Continental forces and ultimately president.

However, the essays are not just on Washington, but just as much on the settlement, social interaction, and economy of the Virginia frontier. Collectively, these essays make a major contribution to Washington scholarship and are important in that they present a summary view of many current Washington scholars.

In Part One, Dorothy Twohig, editor-in-chief of the *Papers of George Washington,* places Washington's family background in historical context, followed by Bruce A. Ragsdale's essay, mostly from secondary sources, which presents an excellent description of Tidewater planter society from which Washington came. Part Two shifts attention to the backcountry, beginning with an essay by geographer Robert D. Mitchell of the University of Maryland. His contribution describes the geography of the Shenandoah as it relates to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. Hofstra's essay builds upon this by emphasizing the importance of neighborhoods in the peopling of the valley by Germans and Scotch-Irish. Washington's relationship with these people was not too amiable since he referred to them as "an uncooth set of People." As colonel of the Virginia Regiment, Washington misunderstood, Hofstra believes, the desire of these people to put family and community first rather than join a military unit to fight Indians elsewhere.

Ethnohistorian J. Frederick Fausz's essay on Washington's relations with the frontier Indians describes his failures at Fort Necessity and with General Edward Braddock's expedition. In spite of these failures, Fausz concludes that Washington learned new lessons in warfare and diplomacy that were to benefit him later as a military leader in the Revolution and as president. He did not take time to understand Indian and African culture and made many pejorative remarks about them.

In Part Three, reviewing Washington as a surveyor and landholder, Philander D. Chase, senior associate editor of the *Papers of George Washington*, believes that Washington learned exactness, order, accuracy, and developed a conservative land policy on the frontier. These attributes he helped incorporate into the political and economic life of the country. That was his major accomplishment as president, the only Founding Father who had experience in the West. Likewise, Washington biographer John E. Ferling assesses the brashness of Washington's military career on the frontier but believes that the lessons he learned from these mistakes proved profitable in the Continental forces.

One essay that plows new ground is Don Higginbotham's "George Washington and Revolutionary Asceticism." Higginbotham rejects the themes of Bruce Mazlish in *The Revolutionary Ascetic* (New York, 1976) as applied to Washington. As proposed by Mazlish with regard to revolutionaries, Washington, according to Higginbotham, did not reject British culture but admired English gentlemen and British military tactics, nor did he have a zeal for self-denial or narcissistic tendencies. Rather, Washington's greatness comes from the fact that he was a localist and a nationalist. What was important in Washington's career was "the Virginia of deference and patriarchy, of well-born, well-connected friends and family, of Mount Vernon, and not the Virginia of the West, with its social fluidity and native cultures. . . . Paradoxical as it may seem, Washington was both a localist and a nationalist. His love of Virginia had led him to revolt and that same love kept his nationalism . . . within appropriate bounds" (pp. 244–45).

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Reason and Republicanism: Thomas Jefferson's Legacy of Liberty. Edited by Gary L. McDowell and Sharon L. Noble. (Lanham, Md., and other cities: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., c. 1997. Pp. x, 325. $65.00, ISBN 0-8476-8520-9.)

Unaccountably, the introduction to this collection makes no mention of either the editors' overall objective or the basis for their selections. Consequently, the reader is unaided in divining the thematic threads of fifteen disparate essays. Moreover, there follows no epilogue or conclusion to illumine Thomas Jefferson's path to Mount Rushmore. Instead, the editors offer:

> Jefferson was an idealistic democrat, Madison was a cautious republican. Where Jefferson saw danger in the powers of government, Madison feared the licentiousness of the people. When Jefferson argued for a frequent appeal to the people to resolve constitutional conflicts, Madison feared any such plan would only inflame public passion at the expense of public peace (p. 4).