

Washington Assumes Command - II

Lead: Though he had a certain magisterial demeanor, George Washington knew he was the servant of civilian rule.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: From the beginning, the American Republic vested ultimate power in the hands of people in the person of their elected representatives. Though the nation admired military leaders and has often elected them to power, republican sentiment has always

distrusted the man on horseback and insisted that in peace and in war power rests with civilians. In many ways this attitude, if not originating with George Washington, was certainly re-enforced by his respectful approach to his civilian masters and his willingness to give up power, twice in fact.

This became clearly evident from the moment in June 1775 when Washington assumed command of the 16,000 colonial militiamen facing down and eventually forcing the evacuation of the British Army occupying Boston. He was insistent that his commission originated from the Continental Congress and it was to the people of America represented

by their representatives he owed his allegiance. While forming the Continental Army he believed that it was and should continue to be subsidiary to Congress. Unlike other triumphant soldiers from Caesar to Mao, when his commission was complete he surrendered it, a tribute to his republican instincts.

When George III, Washington's great adversary asked his American painter, Benjamin West, what Washington would do after winning independence. West replied, "They say he will return to his farm." "If he does that," the incredulous monarch said, "he will be the greatest man in the world."

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Resources

**Ellis, Joseph J. "Washington Takes Charge," *Smithsonian* 35
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Biography*. New York, NY: Scribners, 1947-1958.**

**Lengel, Edward G. *General George Washington: A Military
Life*. New York, NY: Random House, 2005**

**Wall, Charles Cecil. *George Washington: Citizen Soldier*.
Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1980.**

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/curriculum-unit/what-made-george-washington-good-military-leader>

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