

Radio Remarks to Young Americans  
on George Washington's Birthday,  
Mount Vernon, Virginia

Remarks of the President at the George Washington  
Memorial Wreath-Laying Ceremony- February 22,  
1982



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National Archives and Records Association  
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Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum  
40 Presidential Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065

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February 19, 1982  
4:00 p.m.

PRESIDENTIAL RADIO REMARKS TO YOUNG AMERICANS ON  
GEORGE WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY - MOUNT VERNON, VIRGINIA

FEBRUARY 22, 1982

Thank you very much, Mrs. Guy, members of the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association, honored guests, and fellow citizens:

~~Today~~, <sup>We all</sup> We gather on hallowed grounds to share a special moment in our history. <sup>( FILLED WITH PRIDE & GRATITUDE )</sup> We come to honor George Washington, father of our country, ~~and we are filled with pride and gratitude~~, knowing that because of what he did we are free and we are Americans.

Two hundred fifty years after his birth, Washington's star shines brighter than ever. "Our cause is noble," he said, "it is the cause of Mankind!" Pursuit of liberty and justice under God is still the most inspiring, the most successful, the most revolutionary idea the world has ever known.

Words alone cannot express how much we revere this giant for freedom. Yes, he is first in our hearts, and ~~he~~ will be first for all time. But as Lincoln said: "To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Washington, is . . . impossible. Let none attempt it . . . pronounce the name, and . . . leave it shining on."

Eighty-five years later Calvin Coolidge would say, Washington's "ways were the ways of truth. He built for eternity. His influence grows . . . . In . . . action, in . . . character, he stands alone."

If one word could describe all this man was, and all he meant, it might be -- indispensable. Had he not lived perhaps some other great leader would have appeared to liberate the colonies and establish our Republic. We will never know. We know only that Washington was there, that he did fulfill this destiny, and that he did it with such skill and perfection he seemed to be carrying out a Divine plan for America.

Never a passive leader, never an armchair general, he was always in front of his troops and his Nation. He did more than live up to the standards of the time, he set them.

Washington was gifted with the vision of our future. He dreamed America could be a great, prosperous and peaceful Nation, stretching from ocean to ocean.

He hoped the deliberations at Philadelphia would end with a declaration of our independence. He even designed and presented a drawing of the new American flag to Betsy Ross -- 13 stripes and a circle of white stars on a field of blue.

When the war was going badly, his courage and leadership turned the tide of history our way. On our first Christmas as a Nation, in 1776, he led his band of ragged citizen soldiers across the Delaware River, through driving snow, to a victory that saved the cause of American independence. Their route of march was stained by bloody footprints, but their spirit did not fail. Their will could not be crushed. Washington kept them going, and, with the help of France, they finally battled their way to Yorktown and the decisive victory that ended the war.

After the revolution, he wanted to return here to Mt. Vernon -- to be with his family, to farm, to hunt, to engage in commerce. But he loved his country, and his country needed him. The 13 former colonies were impoverished, they were bickering. They needed a Constitution so they could become a union of sovereign states joined to a central government. This American political experiment was new to all human experience. The world expected us to fail. If Washington had not stepped forward again, first at the Constitutional Convention, then as our first elected President, we might well have failed.

His feats were harvested from the seeds of exceptional character. He lacked higher education but he pulled himself up with years of training and hard work.

He was a man of deep faith who believed the pillars of society were religion, morality, and bonds of brotherhood between all citizens. It has been written that the most sublime figure in American history was George Washington, on his knees in the snow at Valley Forge. He personified a people who knew it was not enough to depend on their own courage and goodness -- they must also seek help from God, their Father and Preserver.

Washington was so popular he could have been King had he wanted ~~to be~~. <sup>THAT</sup> ~~he did not~~ <sup>BUT</sup> He had no hunger for personal power. His love was liberty, and his trust was in the people. He believed they are dependable and rightminded, and he believed that a leader's responsibility is to bring out their best qualities.

Let us ask ourselves: Are we keeping faith with his trust in us? The problems we face today do not require the kind of sacrifices Washington and his men made that Christmas night on the Delaware. But they do require us to give and sustain our best efforts, to believe in each other, and to believe in the God who has blessed us and will help us rebuild our country.

George Washington and his generation of Americans met their challenge. We can, we must, and we will meet ours.

To the students across America listening in, if Washington seems much larger than life and makes you feel a little smaller, I'll let you in on a secret -- he makes us all feel that way. But you do matter -- a lot. I'm sure he would tell you the important thing is to find your goal -- and go for it. Then, if you fail -- and he himself failed many times -- pick yourselves up and try again.

Remember, our problems are also opportunities. You can take us to new frontiers in space, find medical cures for deadly disease, discover technological breakthroughs, develop better ways to grow food, provide shelter, and produce energy. The world's hope is still America's future. America's future is in your dreams. Make them come true. The only limits are your imagination, and your determination. *- Jussant -*

As Americans, let us all rededicate ourselves to the ideals George Washington set. Let us give of ourselves, so that when our time is through, history may say of us what Thomas Jefferson said of him: Their integrity was the most pure, and their justice the most inflexible we have ever known. They were, in

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every sense of the word, a wise, a good and a great people. I believe we still are. And, because I believe in you, I believe we will be tomorrow.

God bless America. Thank you very much.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 22, 1982

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL  
WREATH-LAYING CEREMONY

Mt. Vernon, Virginia

11:40 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mrs. Guy, members of the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association, honored guests and fellow citizens.

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Two hundred and fifty years after his birth, Washington's star shines brighter than ever. "Our cause is noble," he said, "it is the cause of mankind."

Pursuit of liberty and justice under God is still the most inspiring, the most successful, the most revolutionary idea the world has ever known. Words alone cannot express how much we revere this giant for freedom.

Yes, he is first in our hearts and will be first for all time. But as Abraham Lincoln said, "To add brightness to the sun or glory to the name of Washington is impossible. Let none attempt it. Pronounce the name and leave it shining on."

Eighty-five years later, Calvin Coolidge would say, "Washington's ways were the ways of truth. He built for eternity. His influence grows. In action, in character he stands alone."

If one word could describe all this man was and all he meant, it might be, "indispensable." Had he not lived, perhaps some other great leader would have appeared to liberate the Colonies and establish our Republic. We'll never know.

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Let us ask ourselves, "Are we keeping faith with his trust in us?" The problems we face today don't require the kind of sacrifices Washington and his men made that Christmas night on the Delaware. But they do require us to give and sustain our best efforts -- to believe in each other, to believe in the God who has blessed us and will help us to rebuild our country.

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The world's hope is still America's future. America's future is in your dreams. Make them come true. The only limits are your imagination and your determination. The story is told that one night at dinner here at Mount Vernon, Lafayette said to Washington, "General, you Americans even in war and desperate times have a superb spirit. You're happy and you're confident. Why is it?" And Washington answered, "There is freedom. There is space for a man to be alone and think and there are friends who owe each other nothing but affection." We still have that in America. As Americans, let us all rededicate ourselves to the ideals that George Washington set. Let us give of ourselves so that when our time is through, history may say of us what Thomas Jefferson said of them, "Their integrity was the most pure and their justice the most inflexible we have ever known. They were in every sense of the word a wise and a great people."

I believe we still are. And because I believe in you, I believe we will be tomorrow. God bless America and thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

11:52 A.M. EST