UNIT I
AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

Lesson 4
What is civic virtue?
S.S. 7.C.2.3. Experience the responsibilities of citizens at the local, state, or federal levels.

Source

Overview
Washington, as one of the founders of our nation, was admired as a leader and for his character while Commander in Chief and President. He recognized the importance of character and civic virtue as necessary to preserve a strong constitutional republic. This lesson focuses on George Washington’s character and civic virtues and examines the connection between those virtues and fostering a democratic and free society in the United States.

Objectives
• Students will analyze a Washington-related primary source document, the Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior.
• Students will examine the concept of civic virtues as written and exemplified by George Washington and how civic virtues foster democracy.
• Students will discuss how the relationship between citizens and civic virtue helps to preserve a strong democracy.
• Students will relate to civic virtues to their everyday lives.

Time
• Two 50 minute class periods

Passport Vocabulary
• Civic virtue
  o A citizen’s commitment to democratic ideals and practices and to good character in everyday life

Strategies
• Primary source reading and analysis
• Group discussion
• Share posters with class
• Journal writing

**Materials**
• Copies of “Washington’s *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior In Company & Conversation*” document; teachers may select as many virtues as they wish to use and cut virtues into individual strips, 1 per group.
• Paper
• Colored markers/pencils
• Frayer model graphic organizer (see below)

**Activities**
1. As a class, define *good character*, *manners*, and *civic virtue*. Talk to the class about how George Washington believed in the importance of character and civic virtue. Throughout his life, Washington was known for his strong character and as a “man of action.” Have students tell what they know about George Washington and list their responses on the board. After the list is complete, discuss character traits that are reflected by each item on the list (e.g., Washington was Commander-in-Chief during the Revolution, thus a strong leader, courageous, good reputation, etc).

2. Using the Frayer model graphic organizer, model defining the term civic virtue. With civic virtue in the center, place each of the following in four corners: the definition (top left), characteristics (top right), examples (bottom left), and non-examples (bottom right). As the teacher, think aloud with student input.

3. Divide students into groups (2 or 3 students each, depending on class size). Give each group one rule of civility to discuss and define using the Frayer model. On the Frayer model, students will write the rule of civility in the top left, write their interpretation of the rule in the top right, give at least 3 examples of the rule in the bottom left, and at least 3 non-examples in the bottom right.

4. Have groups share their rule of civility with the rest of the class.

5. In their Passports, have students write a short reflection, using the following questions as prompts:
   a. What is civic virtue?
   b. Why is civic virtue important in a democracy?

**Extension Idea**
For homework, ask students to bring to class tomorrow a news article and/or photo of someone demonstrating civic virtue. These can be used to create a wall collage.
The Frayer Model Map
On __________

DEFINITION:

CHARACTERISTICS:

EXAMPLES:

NON-EXAMPLES:
Washington's Copy of Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour
In Company and Conversation

Ferry Farm, c. 1744

1st Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present.
2d When in Company, put not your Hands to any Part of the Body, not usuaily Discovered.
3d Shew Nothing to your Freind that may affright him.
4th In the Presence of Others Sing not to yourself with a humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet.
5th If You Cough, Sneeze, Sigh, or Yawn, do it not Loud but Privately; and Speak not in your Yawning, but put Your handkercheif or Hand before your face and turn aside.
6th Sleep not when others Speak, Sit not when others stand, Speak not when you Should hold your Peace, walk not on when others Stop.
7th Put not off your Cloths in the presence of Others, nor go out your Chamber half Drest.
8th At Play and at Fire its Good manners to Give Place to the last Commer, and affect not to Speak Louder than Ordinary.
9th Spit not in the Fire, nor Stoop low before it neither Put your Hands into the Flames to warm them, nor Set your Feet upon the Fire especially if there be meat before it.
10th When you Sit down, Keep your Feet firm and Even, without putting one on the other or Crossing them.
11th Shift not yourself in the Sight of others nor Gnaw your nails.
12th Shake not the head, Feet, or Legs rowl not the Eys lift not one eyebrow higher than the other wry not the mouth, and bedew no mans face with your Spittle, by appr[oaching too nea]r him [when] you Speak.
13th Kill no Vermin as Fleas, lice ticks &c in the Sight of Others, if you See any filth or thick Spittle put your foot Duxteriously upon it if it be upon the Cloths of your Companions, Put it off privately, and if it be upon your own Cloths return Thanks to him who puts it off.
14th Turn not your Back to others especially in Speaking, Jog not the Table or Desk on which Another reads or writes, lean not upon any one.
15th Keep your Countenance be pleasant but in Serious Matters Somewhat grave.
16th The Gestur[es] of the Body must be Suited to the discourse you are upon.
17th Reproach none for the Infirmaties of Nature, nor Delight to Put them that have in mind thereof.
18th When you see a Crime punished, you may be inwardly Pleased; but always shew Pity to the Suffering Offender.
19th Do not laugh too loud or] too much at any Publick [Spectacle].
20th Superfluous Complements and all Affectation of Ceremonie are to be avoided, yet where due they are not to be Neglected.
21st In Pulling off your Hat to Persons of Distinction, as Noblemen, Justices, Churchmen &c make a Reverence, bowing more or less according to the Custom of the Better Bred, and Quality of the Person. Amongst your equals expect not always that they Should begin with you first, but to Pull off the Hat when there is no need is Affectation, in the Manner of Saluting and resaluting in words keep to the most usual Custom.
22th Tis ill manners to bid one more eminent than y[our]self be covered as well as not to do it to whom it's due Likewise he that makes too much haste to Put on his hat does not well, yet he ought to Put it on at the first, or at most the Second time of being ask'd; now what is herein Spoken, of Qualification in behaviour in Saluting, ought also to be observed in taking of Place, and Sitting down for ceremonies without Bounds is troublesome.
23th If any one come to Speak to you while you are are Sitting Stand up tho he be your Inferiour, and when you Present Seats let it be to every one according to his Degree.
29th When you meet with one of Greater Quality than yourself, Stop, and retire especially if it be at a Door or any Straight place to give way for him to Pass.

30th In walking the highest Place in most Countrys Seems to be on the right hand therefore Place yourself on the left of him whom you desire to Honour: but if three walk together the mid[dest] Place is the most Honourable the wall is usually given to the most worthy if two walk together.

31st If any one far Surpassess others, either in age, Estate, or Merit [yet] would give Place to a meaner than hims[elf in his own lodging or elsewhere] the one ought not to except it, S[o he on the other part should not use much earnestness nor offer] it above once or twice.

32nd To one that is your equal, or not much inferior you are to give the cheif Place in your Lodging and he to who 'tis offered ought at the first to refuse it but at the Second to accept though not without acknowledging his own unworthiness.

33d They that are in Dignity or in office have in all places Preecedency but whilst they are Young they ought to respect those that are their equals in Birth or other Qualities, though they have no Publick charge.

34th It is good Manners to prefer them to whom we Speak befo[re] ourselves especially if they be above us with whom in no Sort we ought to begin.

35th Let your Discourse with Men of Business be Short and Comprehensive.

36th Artificers & Persons of low Degree ought not to use many ceremonies to Lords, or Others of high Degree but Respect and highly Honour them, and those of high Degree ought to treat them with affibility & Courtesie, without Arrogancy.

37th In Speaking to men of Quality do not lean nor Look them full in the Face, nor approach too near them at lest Keep a full Pace from them.

38th In visiting the Sick, do not Presently play the Physicion if you be not Knowing therein.

39th In writing or Speaking, give to every Person his due Title According to his Degree & the Custom of the Place.

40th Strive not with your Superiors in argument, but always Submit your Judgment to others with Modesty.

41st Undertake not to Teach your equal in the art himself Proffesses; it Savours of arrogancy.

42nd Let thy ceremonies in Courtesie be proper to the Dignity of his place [with whom thou conversest for it is absurd to ac]t the same with a Clown and a Prince.

43d Do not express Joy before one sick or in pain for that contrary Passion will aggravate his Misery.

44th When a man does all he can though it succeeds not well blame not him that did it.

45th Being to advise or reprehend any one, consider whether it ought to be in publick or in Private; presently, or at Some other time in what terms to do it & in reproving Shew no Sign of Cholar but do it with all Sweetness and Mildness.

46th Take all Admonitions thankfully in what Time or Place Soever given but afterwards not being culpable take a Time [&] Place convenient to let him him know it that gave them.

47th Mock nor Jest at any thing of Importance break [n]o Jest that are Sharp Biting and if you Deliver any thing witty and Pleasant abstain from Laughing thereat yourself.

48th Wherein you reprove Another be unblameable yourself; for example is more prevalent than Precepts.

49th Use no Reproachfull Language against any one neither Curse nor Revile.

50th Be not hasty to beleive flying Reports to the Disparage[r]ment of any.

51st Wear not your Cloths, foul, unript or Dusty but See they be Brush'd once every day at least and take heed tha[t] you approach not to any Uncleanness.

52d In your Apparel be Modest and endeavour to accomodate Nature, rather than to procure admiration keep to the Fashio[n] of your equals Such as are Civil and orderly with respect to Times and Places.

53d Run not in the Streets, neither go t[oo s]lowly nor wit[h] Mouth open go not Shaking yr Arms [kick not the earth with yr feet, go] not upon the Toes, nor in a Dancing [fashion].

54th Play not the Peacock, looking every where about you, to See if you be well Deck't, if your Shoes fit well if your Stokings sit neatly, and Cloths handsomely.

55th Eat not in the Streets, nor in the House, out of Season.

56th Associate yourself with Men of good Quality if you Esteem your own Reputation; for 'tis better to be alone than in bad Company.

57th In walking up and Down in a House, only with One in Compan[y] if he be Greater than yourself, at the first give him the Right hand and Stop not till he does and be not the first that turns, and when you do turn let it be with your face towards him, if he be a Man of Great Quality, walk not with him Cheek by Jowl but Somewhat behind him; but yet in Such a Manner that he may easily Speak to you.
58th Let your Conversation be without Malice or Envy, for 'tis a Sign of a Tractable and Commendable Nature: And in all Causes of Passion admit Reason to Govern.
59th Never express anything unbecoming, nor Act against the Rules Moral before your inferiors.
60th Be not immodest in urging your Friends to Discover a Secret.
61st Utter not base and frivolous things amongst grave and Learned Men nor very Difficult Questions or Subjects, among the Ignorant or things hard to be believed, Stuff not your Discourse with Sentences amongst your Betters nor Equals.
62d Speak not of doleful Things in a Time of Mirth or at the Table; Speak not of Melancholy Things as Death and Wounds, and if others Mention them Change if you can the Discourse tell not your Dreams, but to your intimate Friend.
63d A Man ought not to value himself of his Achievements, or rare Qualities of Wit; much less of his riches Virtue or Kindred.
64th Break not a Jest where none take pleasure in mirth Laugh not aloud, nor at all without Occasion, deride no man's Misfortune, tho' there Seem to be Some cause.
65th Speak not injurious Words neither in Jest nor Earnest Scoff at none although they give Occasion.
66th Be not froward but friendly and Courteous; the first to Salute hear and answer & be not Pensive when it's a time to Converse.
67th Detract not from others neither be excessive in Commanding.
68th Go not thither, where you know not, whether you Shall be Welcome or not. Give not Advice without being Ask'd & when desired do it briefly.
69th If two contend together take not the part of either unconstrained; and be not obstinate in your own Opinion, in Things indifferent be of the Major Side.
70th Reprehend not the imperfections of others for that belong[s] to Parents Masters and Superiors.
71st Gaze not on the marks or blemishes of Others and ask not how they came. What you may Speak in Secret to your Friend deliver not before others.
72d Speak not in an unknown Tongue in Company but in your own Language and that as those of Quality do and not as the Vulgar; Sublime matters treat Seriously.
73d Think before you Speak pronounce not imperfectly nor bring out your Words too hastily but orderly & distinctly.
74th When Another Speaks be attentive your Self and disturb not the Audience if any hesitate in his Words help him not nor Prompt him without desired, Interrupt him not, nor Answer him till his Speech be ended.
75th In the midst of Discourse ask [not of what one treateth] but if you Perceive any Stop because of [your coming you may well intreat him gently] to Proceed: If a Person of Quality comes in while your Conversing it's handsome to Repeat what was said before.
76th While you are talking, Point not with your Finger at him of Whom you Discourse nor Approach too near him to whom you talk especially to his face.
77th Treat with men at fit Times about Business & Whisper not in the Company of Others.
78th Make no Comparisons and if any of the Company be Commended for any brave act of Vertue, commend not another for the Same.
79th Be not apt to relate News if you know not the truth thereof. In Discoursing of things you Have heard Name not your Author always A [Se]cret Discover not.
80th Be not Tedium in Discourse or in reading unless you find the Company pleased therewith.
81st Be not Curious to Know the Affairs of Others neither approach those that Speak in Private.
82d Undertake not what you cannot Perform but be Careful to keep your Promise.
83d When you deliver a matter do it without Passion & with Discretion, however[er] mean the Person be you do it too.
84th When your Superiors talk to any Body hearken not neither Speak nor Laugh.
85th In Company of these of Higher Quality than yourself Speak not till you are ask'd a Question then Stand upright put of your Hat & Answer in few words.
86th In Disputes, be not So Desirous to Overcome as not to give Liberty to each one to deliver his Opinion and Submit to the Judgment of the Major Part especially if they are Judges of the Dispute.
87th Let thy carriage be such as becomes a Man Grave Settled and attentive [to that which is spoken. Contra]dict not at every turn what others Say.
88th Be not tedious in Discourse, make not many Digressions, nor rep[eat] often the Same manner of Discourse.
89th Speak not Evil of the absent for it is unjust.
90 Being Set at meat Scratch not neither Spit Cough or blow your Nose except there's a Necessity for it.
91st Make no Shew of taking great Delight in your Victuals, Feed no[t] with Greediness; cut your Bread with a Knife, lean not on the Table neither find fault with what you Eat.
92 Take no Salt or cut Bread with your Knife Greasy.
93 Entertaining any one at table it is decent to present him wt. meat, Undertake not to help others undesired by the Master.
[9]4th If you Soak bread in the Sauce let it be no more than what you [pu]t in your Mouth at a time and blow not your broth at Table [bu]t Stay till Cools of it Self.
[95]th Put not your meat to your Mouth with your Knife in your hand neither Spit forth the Stones of any fruit Pye upon a Dish nor Cas[t an]ything under the table.
[9]6 It's unbecoming to Stoop much to ones Meat Keep your Fingers clea[n &] when foul wipe them on a Corner of your Table Napkin.
[97]th Put not another bit into your Mouth til the former be Swallowed [l]et not your Morsels be too big for the Gows.
98th Drink not nor talk with your mouth full neither Gaze about you while you are a Drinking.
99th Drink not too leisurely nor yet too hastily. Before and after Drinking wipe your Lips breath not then or Ever with too Great a Noise, for its uncivil.
100 Cleanse not your teeth with the Table Cloth Napkin Fork or Knife but if Others do it let it be done wt. a Pick Tooth.
101st Rince not your Mouth in the Presence of Others.
102d It is out of use to call upon the Company often to Eat nor need you Drink to others every Time you Drink.
103d In Company of your Betters be no[t longer in eating] than they are lay not your Arm but [nly your hand upon the table].
104th It belongs to the Chiefest in Company to unfold his Napkin and fall to Meat first, But he ought then to Begin in time & to Dispatch [w]ith Dexterity that the Slowest may have time allowed him.
[1]05th Be not Angry at Table whatever happens & if you have reason to be so, Shew it not but on a Cheerfull Countenance especially if there be Strangers for Good Humour makes one Dish of Meat a Feas[t].
[1]06th Set not yourself at the upper of the Table but if it Be your Due or that the Master of the house will have it So, Contend not, least you Should Trouble the Company.
107th If others talk at Table be attentive but talk not with Meat in your Mouth.
108th When you Speak of God or his Atributes, let it be Seriously & [wt.] Reverence. Honour & Obey your Natural Parents altho they be Poor.
109th Let your Recreations be Manfull not Sinfull.
110th Labour to keep alive in your Breast that Little Spark of Celestial fire Called Conscience.

Finis
Lesson 4
What is civic virtue?
*S.S. 7.C.2.3. Experience the responsibilities of citizens at the local, state, or federal levels.*

**Vocabulary**
- Civic virtue
  - A citizen’s commitment to democratic ideals and practices and to good character in everyday life

This document addresses the following issues:

1. Background information pertaining to George Washington’s views on civic virtue
2. George Washington’s views on civic virtue
3. “George Washington and Civic Virtue”, an essay by Steve Antley and Thomas Krannawitter, of the PBS *Rediscovering George Washington* project, provides an extensive discussion of George Washington’s views on civic virtue, and how they impacted the founding fathers (original text and source link).

1. **Background information: George Washington, the founders, and civic virtue**

   George Washington became interested in civic virtue as a teenager. He located and copied 110 “Rules of Civility” that originated in a French Jesuit college in the 17th century. These “Rules of Civility” guided Washington for the rest of his life, and served as the primary resource for his *Book of Etiquette*.

   Cincinnatus, a Roman military officer around 460 B.C., was Washington’s role model for civic virtue. Cincinnatus was asked to serve as dictator during a military crisis, and refused the position on the grounds that being a citizen of Rome was more important than personal power. The notion that citizens and their leaders should put the country above personal power was later viewed by Washington and the founders as the only way that the new republic could work. In fact, 27 delegates who attended the Constitutional Convention were members of the Society of Cincinnati, an organization formed in homage to Cincinnatus.
The notion of civic virtue is also reflected in the teachings of the ancient Greeks and Romans including Socrates, who believed that “the virtuous man of politics must seek good”, Aristotle, who taught that citizens should “develop the habit of acting rightly”, and Cicero, who advocated that those who serve in government should “be true to one’s office”.

Later political philosophers also advocated civic virtue in some form. For example, Locke’s discussion in The Second Treatise of Civil Government about the relationship between the people and government suggests that obeying the laws is critical for the stability of the political community, while Montesquieu advocated that government and governance should have a “moral balance”.

2. George Washington’s views on civic virtue

George Washington believed that both civic knowledge and civic virtue were critical for a functioning representative democracy. In order to practice civic virtue, one must place the needs of the country and its citizens above individual needs and desires. Evidence of Washington’s beliefs about civic virtue is found at key critical points in his life. For example, soon after the colonists’ victory at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781, a revolutionary army officer asked Washington if he would become king. Washington declined the offer telling him that “you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable”. In his 1796 Farewell Address, Washington wrote “Tis substantially true that virtue…is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free Government.”

3. “George Washington and Civic Virtue”, an essay by Steve Antley and Thomas Krannawitter, of the PBS “Rediscovering George Washington” project, provides an extensive discussion of George Washington’s views on civic virtue, and how they impacted the founding fathers. The original source link may be found at: http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/classroom/civic_virtue.html (Pages 2-4).

George Washington and Civic Virtue

Steve Antley and Thomas Krannawitter

At the end of The Federalist 55, James Madison observed that “republican government presupposes the existence of [civic virtue] in a higher degree than any other form.” The American Founders understood that political freedom requires a limited government—that is, government should leave people alone, for the most part, in their private associations such as family, religion, and business. But the Founders also understood that limited government is risky: When people are left alone, they might use that freedom to violate the rights of others; or they might simply live irresponsibly, depending on others with money and resources to care for them. Thus limited government requires certain kinds of civic virtue, no less than political freedom requires limited government.
George Washington in many ways was, and remains, the model of what it means to be an American citizen. He embodied the civic virtues that Madison described as indispensable for a self-governing republic. These virtues can be divided into four categories:

1. Civic Knowledge
2. Self-restraint
3. Self-assertion
4. Self-reliance

1. Civic Knowledge

The American Founders built into the Constitution of 1787 a number of mechanisms that would curb the power of the national government, making it difficult for government to violate the liberties and rights of citizens. These were things such as separation of powers, checks and balances between the three branches, staggered elections and varying terms of office, and federalism. As important as these improvements were over past governments, however, they were at best “auxiliary precautions,” according to James Madison. As Madison wrote in Federalist 51. “A dependence on the people is no doubt the primary control on the government.”

The primary responsibility for keeping American government within the confines of the Constitution, and therefore protecting the liberty of the American people, belongs to the American people themselves. Or, as Ben Franklin once quipped, the Americans have been blessed with a wise and free republican form of government, “if they can keep it!”

Citizens have a number of ways to maintain control over the government. The most obvious way is voting into office candidates who will defend the Constitution. But citizens can also influence those officials already in office by writing them letters or e-mails, or calling them on the telephone. Also, citizens can run for office themselves, and challenge in the next election those who currently hold office. And, finally, if a government persists in violating the rights of citizens, and there is no peaceful way (such as free elections) for citizens to redress their grievances, citizens might choose to exercise their natural right of revolution, overthrowing the current government and replacing it with a government more likely to protect their rights. With all these options, and so many ways of exercising each of them, how is a person supposed to know what he should do? How, for example, should he vote in an upcoming election, or what kind of letter should he write to his Representative or Senator? Questions such as these point to the first kind of civic virtue, civic knowledge.

First and foremost, citizens must understand what the Constitution says about how the government works, and what the government is supposed to do and what it is not to do. We must understand the basis of our responsibilities as citizens, no less than our rights. We must be able to recognize when the government or another citizen infringes upon our rights. This civic knowledge was to form the core of education for young people. In the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, for example—the first federal law governing the western territories—it was stated that, “religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”
In his First Annual Address to Congress, President George Washington said that the people must be taught to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority…to discriminate the spirit of liberty from that of licentiousness – cherishing the first, avoiding the last; and unifying a speedy but temperate vigilance against encroachments, with inviolable respect to the laws.

In his Farewell Address, delivered at the end of his second term of office, President Washington said, “Promote then as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.” Washington knew that republican government required the participation of enlightened citizens to survive. In his First Inaugural, he described what was, and still is, at stake: “The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps as deeply, perhaps as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.”

2. Self-restraint

Washington and the other founders knew that for citizens to live in a free society with limited government, each citizen must be able to control or restrain himself; otherwise, we would need a police state—that is, a large, unlimited government—to maintain safety and order.

When he was sixteen years old, Washington copied a list of “Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior” into his school notebook. Most of these 110 rules deal with common etiquette. The last rule reads: “Labor to keep alive in your breast the little spark of celestial fire called conscience.” By “conscience” he meant our ability to understand and reason about moral right and wrong. In his First Inaugural Address, Washington said, “the foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality….” He continued by saying, “there is no truth more thoroughly established that there exists in the economy and course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness.” In other words, to be truly happy requires one to be a virtuous or moral person. The “happiness” that comes from doing things that are wrong—such as ingesting drugs, stealing from others, or engaging in reckless or irresponsible behavior—is really not true happiness at all, but is merely temporary physical pleasure. If a person continues to engage in such behavior, he will not discover happiness, but more likely misery: He will probably end up in jail, or sick, or friendless. From the point of view of Washington’s First Inaugural Address, individual or private morality and virtue are necessary for the country to prosper: “The propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of right and order, which heaven itself has ordained….” Given all the freedom that comes with a limited government, a people that live rightly and virtuously will probably end up living happily with all the goods, material and otherwise, that make the difference between living and living well. If a people violate the “rules of right and order which heaven has ordained,” they will probably end up living unhappily, with little to ease their misery.

Washington demonstrated self-restraint in his private and public life. The most dramatic examples of his self-restraint can be seen when he commanded the Continental Army in the
American Revolutionary War. Although he had the power of the army behind him, Washington always deferred to the authority of the civilian government—the Continental Congress—that was often unresponsive to the needs of his army. When one of his officers, Lewis Nicola, suggested that the army disregard the civil authority and make Washington a king, Washington was filled with anger. But he exercised great restraint over his own temper. He wrote a letter—reasoned and even-handed—rebuking Nicola.

Later, when Washington’s unpaid troops at Newburgh, New York again contemplated overthrowing or abandoning the civilian authorities, Washington urged restraint on the part of the army. He called on the army to seek justice in a lawful, constitutional manner.

Washington’s self-restraint was again displayed at the end of the Revolutionary War. Instead of asking for a high office or political power, Washington relinquished power as Commander in Chief of the army. He wrote a circular letter to the state governments, and asked only that he be allowed to return to his private life at Mount Vernon.

3. Self-assertion

Self-assertion means that citizens must be jealous of their rights, and have the courage to stand up in public and defend their rights. Sometimes a government may usurp the very rights that it was created to protect. In such cases, Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “it is the right of the people to alter or abolish” that government. George Washington asserted himself in the American struggle against the British government. As a young man Washington had served in the British army and considered himself a loyal British subject, yet later he became convinced of the need to end British rule of the American colonies. Although at first reluctant to take up arms against the British, Washington boldly wore his military uniform to the First Continental Congress where he was selected as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. As the Second Continental Congress finished its work on the Declaration of Independence in July 1776, Washington was in the field with his army. He challenged his men to assert themselves in defense of liberty against their British enemy:

"Our cruel and unrelenting enemy leaves us no choice but a brave resistance, or the most abject submission. This is all we can expect. We have therefore to resolve to conquer or die. Our own country’s honor, all call upon us for a vigorous and manly exertion, and if we now shamefully fail, we shall become infamous to the whole world… Let us therefore animate and encourage each other, and show the world, that a freeman contending for liberty on his own ground is superior to any slavish mercenary on earth."

After the Revolutionary War, as the new nation languished under the weak Articles of Confederation, Washington stepped forward to preside at the Constitutional Convention and assured ratification of the new Constitution with his endorsement. He then left a comfortable retirement at his beloved Mt. Vernon to serve for eight years as the nation’s first president. When the Whiskey Rebellion threatened the stability of the young republic, Washington asserted his authority as president to raise an army and preserve the rule of law. Both in war and peace, George Washington repeatedly demonstrated the civic virtue of self-assertion in the service of his country.
4. Self-reliance

In addition to civic knowledge, self-restraint, and self-assertion, citizens must possess the civic virtue of self-reliance. In order to be truly free, citizens must be able to provide the basic necessities of life for themselves and their families. Citizens who cannot provide for themselves will need a large government to take care of them. And as soon as citizens become dependent on government for their basic needs, the people are no longer in a position to demand that government stay limited within the confines of the Constitution. Self-reliant citizens are free citizens in the sense that they are not dependent on others for their basic needs. They do not need a large provider- government, which has the potential to become an intrusive or oppressive government, to meet those needs.

George Washington understood the need for citizens to be self-reliant. In a letter to a recent immigrant, Washington wrote of the benefits available in America to self-reliant, virtuous citizens: “This country certainly promises greater advantages, than almost any other, to persons of moderate property, who are determined to be sober, industrious, and virtuous members of society.” Washington knew, and our national experience has shown, that only a strong self-reliant citizenry is able to fully enjoy the blessings of liberty.

References


