



# Mr. President: George Washington and the Making of the Nation's Highest Office

*Harlow Giles Unger, To Be Announced (Reading)*

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## **Mr. President: George Washington and the Making of the Nation's Highest Office** Harlow Giles Unger , To Be Announced (Reading)

Although the framers gave the president little authority, Washington knew whatever he did would set precedents for generations of his successors. To ensure their ability to defend the nation, he simply ignored the Constitution when he thought it necessary and reshaped the presidency into what James Madison called a "monarchical presidency." Modern scholars call it the "imperial presidency." A revealing new look at the birth of American government, "Mr. President" describes George Washington's assumption of office in a time of continual crisis, as riots, rebellion, internecine warfare, and attacks by foreign enemies threatened to destroy the new nation. Drawing on rare documents and letters, Unger shows how Washington combined political cunning, daring, and sheer genius to seize ever-widening powers to solve each crisis. In a series of brilliant but unconstitutional maneuvers, Washington forced Congress to cede control of the four pillars of executive power: war, finance, foreign affairs, and law enforcement. Then, in the absence of Congress, he sent troops to fight Indian wars, crush tax revolts, and put down threats of secession by three states. Constantly weighing preservation of the Union against preservation of individual liberties and states' rights, Washington assumed more power with each crisis. Often only a breath away from reestablishing the tyranny he pledged to destroy in the Revolutionary War, he imposed law and order across the land while ensuring individual freedom and self-government.

## **Mr. President: George Washington and the Making of the Nation's Highest Office Details**

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## **From Reader Review Mr. President: George Washington and the Making of the Nation's Highest Office for online ebook**

### **Courtney Umlauf says**

An interesting look at how the office of the president developed under Washington. It's definitely not a biography, so if you're hoping for insights into his personality I wouldn't recommend this. It's more weighted towards informing the reader on policy and procedural decisions than on anyone's personal life. I found it easy to follow, but I'll have to give it a second closer read in order to retain more of the details it discusses.

I've read Unger's John Quincy Adams and I'm in the middle of John Marshall: The Supreme Court's Chief Justice Who Transformed the Young Republic, and man - he really seems to HATE Thomas Jefferson. It's almost entertaining to read his descriptions of Jefferson; his view comes across as very personal. It will be interesting to read a biography of Jefferson by another author so I can get a different perspective.

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### **Algernon says**

As it happened, I finished reading this book on the day the United States elected its 45th president after a long, grueling, and stunningly expensive political campaign that might have brought to mind some of the warnings Washington issued in his 1796 farewell address - especially about parties. There was much debate in the campaign about the selection of a person for the duties and the powers of the presidency - powers which Washington, as the first president, immediately set about clarifying and, yes, expanding from the letter of the Constitution.

Unger does an entertaining job of telling a coherent story through Washington's two terms demonstrating the precedents Washington established, not only for specific executive powers but also some of the protocols and expectations of one in the role of a president. He does often lapse into hagiography, ladling on the adulation of Washington and severely villainizing Jefferson. Bear through that and there is much of interest for us to consider in our present time, noting the changes that have taken place in the country and yet the arguments we are still exercising 240 years on.

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### **Benjamin says**

Seriously.... Politics never change

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### **Heather C says**

Unlike the prior books I have read on President George Washington, this book focuses primarily on the issues of the presidency, rather than on his personal life – almost to the point of ignoring his personal life entirely. While it was nice to focus on the intricacies of the developing role of the presidency, it left

something to be desired because it was much more difficult to connect with the person being presented; a little cold and distant if you will.

The development of the presidency was presented in terms of the “pillars of power” – war, finance, law enforcement, and foreign affairs – that Washington assumed for the President. These “pillars” guided the progression of the book and kept it narrative rather organized. The book was rather short – just under 7 hours of narration (equivalent of approximately 288 pages). Despite the short format, I feel like the author presented enough information about the evolution of the role of the president to make a cohesive narration. If the book was any longer, I actually think it might have felt too dense to read because of how much information was packed within those few pages.

This book is a tightly focused history where Washington the man is less of a focal point and the politics of the day are highlighted.

The audiobook narration was nothing spectacular. It didn’t make the material any less dry or any more exciting. Rather standard.

This review was previously posted @ The Maiden's Court. Was received from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Denise Morse says**

All the work to write the Constitution, get it ratified, and then what?..... This book tells the story of what comes next. How does a President with very little powers vested in him in the Constitution find a place for himself. It would have been easy for President Washington to sit back and remain a retired figurehead for the country but that wasn't enough, and with his actions, he shaped the future of the American President.

I truly enjoyed this book and learning more about the inner workings of what happens after the major event. History classes make it sound so easy and seamless following the ratification but what ensued was total chaos and confusion.

A few other thoughts:

1. I think the author is not a fan of Thomas Jefferson or the French outside of Lafayette. Jefferson is painted as a privileged, coddled little boy with a thirst for blood. Contrast that with Alexander Hamilton who comes out as a unblemished hero.
2. Politics then are not much different than they are now - majority and minority battles, crazy fringe groups mixing things up, media wars, and threats of secession. At least we don't tar and feather tax collectors anymore.

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### **Carol says**

*"This book gives our precious American history the backbone it deserves and reveals more of Washington the man than Washington the demigod as we might have believed him to be."* Well done.

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### **Melinda says**

George Washington exercised great influence regarding the shaping and defining of the executive office. The aftermath of the Revolution left our country lacking structure in both political and economic avenues. Washington thus held a prominent role in the creation of The Constitution determining the framework for federal government and its powers, once again Washington found himself in another type of battle.??

Harlow G. Unger writes a nonfictional account of George Washington in a 'to the point,' easy to read history of one of the greatest leaders of our county held in the highest esteem. Great for history fans as well as admirers of George Washington. A wonderful stepping stone to continue your history interest or a fabulous entry point for those starting to pursue history.??

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A copy of *Mr. President George Washington and the Making of the Nation's Highest Office* was ??provided by Perseus Books Group, Da Capo Press

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### **David Longo says**

I am a history teacher and have read 30 to 40 books on the era including a good 10 George Washington biographies alone. Overall I think "Mr. President" was a good book. But it wasn't Joseph Ellis quality, or Thomas Fleming. Harlow Giles Unger has moments---indeed great moments---where he captures the reader and really makes you see things in a whole new fashion. That being stated, Unger loses the reader at various times. I guess what I'm driving at is "Mr. President," in my view, is uneven. Ellis, as author and historian, keeps the passion throughout when he writes about the Founding Fathers. Moreover, when the topic is a bit mundane, he doesn't wither. If anything, Ellis turns on the gas because he knows he must keep the flow going despite a less interesting topic. The result: great storytelling. I didn't feel Unger did that. During some stretches I found myself wanting to skip ahead. But I didn't. After all, George Washington would stay the course, right? I felt I owed that much. So there you have it: Four stars but probably closer to three-and-a-half. Seeing as I'm not published, I'll give Unger the rounded up star.

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### **P.e. lolo says**

Here is a history book that is a part of our history that most people forget about or really don't know about. It is about George Washington becoming our first President. But it is really more than that. The war was over but four years later there was still problems, the treaty that was signed cannot be forced because there is no representation by us because we are not a nation. We are still just a group of colonies that can be taken advantage of. Groups of men started to get together and to discuss ways of becoming a central government. Ideas were voted some passed some failed and now you jump to the first election. 1989 George Washington is President and Adams is Vice President. Here in this book the author goes about how Washington took a job the President that had no responsibilities and turned it into the most powerful job in eight years and set the course for future Presidents. He also shows how by his leadership he was able to put the right people in

the jobs they needed to be in and to turn away friends and family for the way it look towards him and them as well. That as much as he wanted to help the integrity of the country was more important than someone's hurt feelings. The way he was able to carry these things out plus other matters was fantastic when you think about it for there was no white house. After the first year when congress was break he went on a tour of some of the smaller towns and stayed in the local tavern and someone's home this made him more like the average person he did the same thing after his second year in the south. He did have his problems and his fights with people but he had a couple of his closest friends or what was like family to him. One was Alexander Hamilton who looked to George Washington as the father he never had. This of course upset Jefferson since he did not fight in the war and he felt that Hamilton could get away with things. This lead to a big fight in the second four year term where Washington asked Jefferson to resign. And Washington was able to handle this crisis as well. There is a lot of information in this book and for me you loves history it is great and especially about a time in our country that is long forgotten or seems that way. This also shows people the strength that Washington had a person and the integrity that he already felt the job should be held to. You also find some things out about Jefferson that I did not know about and that kind of knock him down a little since once he left office and started to cause problems, he must of forgot those words of power because he made the Louisiana Purchase without the approval of congress. Sorry I digressed for a moment this a fantastic book and a great read.

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### **James Spurgeon says**

George Washington became our first President and had no real guidelines to follow. The Constitution didn't really give any details as to the President's job or to how he was supposed to execute the laws passed by Congress. Not one to be just a figurehead, he set out to create the precedents... a large number of which still exist today.

Several of the presidential powers that he assumed had been left vague in the Constitution. He set out to define them as within the power of the President. He assumed the power of making treaties with other nations and appointing ambassadors with only the approval of the Senate. He made it to where Executive Appointments, what we now know as the Cabinet, answered to the President alone and were to execute the laws and report to him. The Senate just had to approve of the nominations. The President did have the power to dismiss them without Senate approval. And there were many others ranging from the nation's finances, executive privilege, military affairs, and law enforcement.

At the end of his 8-years in office, Washington had transformed the Executive Branch into a fully equal AND separate branch of government.

That being said, I wish the book had been a little more in depth.

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### **Pat says**

Until now, books about American history have not been a significant piece of my reading diet. This book has changed all that. Immediately after finishing it, I added several books by this talented author to my queue. I'm so pumped to read more of this historian's work. End-to-end, the last book of history I was this excited about was "Founding Brothers" by Joseph Ellis.

"Mr. President" and "Founding Brothers" share some salient features:

- \* At under three hundred pages, neither is as intimidating as many history books.
- \* Both make the familiar history breathe, courtesy of the narrative gifts of the respective authors.
- \* The use of spaced repetition in both books increases the chance attentive readers might retain some of the information. For example, in "Mr. President", each time Unger introduces what he terms a new "pillar of presidential power", he re-states all the earlier pillars, using slightly different phraseology, but always reiterating the pillars in the same order. Then his appendix lists all seven pillars, the dates George Washington first erected them, and the way each pillar expanded the role of the nation's chief executive.

Can't recommend this book enough.

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### **Stan Lanier says**

An excellent telescoping of the formation of the powers of the Executive Branch, both Constitutional and extra-Constitutional, by our first chief executive. Unger delineates seven "pillars of Presidential power": foreign policy, executive appointments, government finance, military affairs, legislation by Presidential proclamation and executive order, federal law enforcement, and executive privilege. Highly readable, this work affords the basis for further profitable research and study. A great place to begin investigation of the subject.

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### **Devon Morris says**

Great look into the beginnings of the American democracy. Washington struggled with other founding fathers, but ultimately created the necessary unity to form a strong government that still exists today- under the same constitution.

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### **Anna says**

"... but the powerful presidential structure her husband (Martha Washington) built still stands, strong and stable. Many critics say too stable, too strong. While the anarchy Washington feared and despised reigns in endless countries around the globe, even in Greece, the birthplace of democracy, Americans have lived under one constitution and gone to the polls peacefully for more than 220 continuous years electing 44 different Presidents to office. Until the passage of a constitutional amendment limiting presidential terms in office, all but one observed the precedent set by Washington by voluntarily leaving the White House after no more than 8 years. Even in the face of foreign wars, a civil war, presidential assassinations and attempted assassinations, economic collapse, and terrifying natural and man-made disasters, every presidential transition in American history has proceeded seamlessly, calmly without violence or popular upheavals because of the stable presidential structure George Washington built."

Harlow Giles Unger, "Mr. President"

\*\* read by Robertson Dean

app 7 hrs

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### **Emily DuToit says**

Quick and interesting look into the office of the presidency and how George Washington interpreted the Constitution to build a powerful executive office. Kept my attention the entire book and makes me want to read more from Unger and also about the beginnings of the US.

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