



Martha Washington: First Lady of Liberty

Helen Bryan

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A contemporary anecdote not only confirms that Martha commanded respect in her own right during her lifetime, but also suggests an awkward truth later historians have preferred to ignore—that without Martha and her fortune, George might never have risen to social, military, and political prominence. Toward the end of his life, George Washington, war hero, retired president, and object of universal fame and veneration, was negotiating to purchase a plot of land in the new capital city, to be named in his honor. The seller, an aged veteran of the Revolution, was reluctant to part with the plot, even to so distinguished a purchaser. Washington persisted until the veteran's patience snapped: 'You think people take every grist that comes from you as the pure grain. What would you have been if you hadn't married the Widow Custis!' -from the Introduction to *Martha Washington: First Lady of Liberty*

From the glittering social life of Virginia's wealthiest plantations to the rigors of winter camps during the American Revolution, Martha Washington was a central figure in some of the most important events in American history. Her story is a saga of social conflict, forbidden love affairs, ambiguous wills, mysterious death, heartbreakng loss, and personal and political triumph. Every detail is brought to vivid life in this engaging and astonishing biography of one of the best known, least understood figures in early American life.

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