Presidential Courage: Brave Leaders and How They Changed America 1789-1989

Editor's notes: 1) The author summarized events in only the first of four chapters
2) Presidents elected on even decades like 1990, 2000, off year elections of 1992, 2014...
3) Pictures are from Wikipedia and the Internet can often be enlarged with a click.
4) Editorial comments are in red font. 5) Part 2 for TR, FDR, HST, JFK, and RR

Events Summary

GEORGE WASHINGTON 1) A SPEEDY DEATH TO GENERAL WASHINGTON
Washington had been unanimously elected by the Electoral College in 1788 and 1792. Britain, at war with France, was seizing U.S. ships trading with France. In addition, London was reneging on its pledge made as part of the treaty ending the Revolutionary War to vacate forts in Oswego, Niagara, Detroit, and Michilimackinac. She was also arming Indians and spurring them to attack American settlers. These attacks were killing helpless women and children. Trying to avoid a war with Great Britain that might “strangle the infant nation in its cradle,” Washington secretly sent aristocratic Chief Justice John Jay to England to negotiate a peace treaty. Eventually word got out and many found some treaty demands humiliating. Article 12 of the treaty stated America could trade with the West Indies only with small ships really aggrieved Southerners as it severely hurt their exports. Another article stated the U.S. could not export products native to the islands. To make matters worse, a Provision Order issued later by Britain required U.S. ships carrying grain to France be stopped and the cargo confiscated. See Jay Treaty.

2) Kick This Treaty to Hell A Virginia Republican ignored Washington’s order to keep treaty content secret and passed a copy to the French who helped him make it public. When Hamilton defended the treaty in front of the New York City Hall he was stoned and left with a bloody face. In Boston, a British ship was set afame. The net result was our First Party System, Washington’s attempt to use Executive Privilege to keep Jay Treaty information from Congress was the first of many such Presidential attempts. Richard Nixon attempted used is perhaps the most notorious.

3) THE DAMNEDEST LIAR

To stop the treaty powerful Federalist rolled into gear and stopped issuing ship insurance until the treaty was enacted. In Philadelphia, debtors were pressured by banks to support the treaty. By 1796, Britain had scrapped the Provision Order Accepting Washington’s version of the treaty excluding Article 12 so large ships could trade in West Indies. The tide had turned in favor of the treaty.

4) HE MAY RETIRE WITH UNDIMINISHED GLORY

The Republican controlled house tried to withhold ninety thousand dollars needed to enact the Jay Treaty. John Adams feared a war with Britain might result in a “civil war” between the Anglophile Northeast who wanted to protect their manufacturing and the Southern Francophiles more interested in exporting cotton. The funding vote tie of 49 to 49 was surprisingly broken by Republican Frederick Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania who was chairman of the Committee of the Whole. He committed political suicide by voting for the funding and against the wishes of his German American constituents who hated England. After the vote, Frederick was stabbed by his German-American brother-in-law.

Edward Livingston [pictured] of New York demanded Washington hand over all documents related to treaty bargaining. Limited access was granted and Washington said the only way to get unlimited access was to impeach him. Think Executive privilege.

In a letter to John Jay Washington stated he had survived “the Storm” and would never forget the “pernicious” people “disseminating the poison” against him. As Washington predicted, America was powerful enough to get their way in a war with England. Click to enlarge both pictures. As was common for Southerners of his day Washington was plagued by seven deadly diseases during his life. Upon leaving office he suffered from a bad back, painful false teeth and rheumatism. Washington was very unhappy with the verbal political war between people with presidential aspirations, especially Hamilton and Jefferson whose dislike for each other approached paranoia. Hamilton’s was over a weak central government unable to fulfill his dreams of Manifest Destiny. He feared French invasion after their revolution because it would have southern support. Jefferson’s was that a central government that would end his Southern based rural world best described by “Gone with the Wind.” Of the nine presidents who owned slaves only Washington freed them upon the death of Martha. George Washington’s Farewell Address is very prophetic.