from Phyllis Schlafly

February 20, 1992

George Washington’s Birthday

I won't be among those celebrating “Presidents’ Day” this month. So many of our Presidents don't deserve to be honored with a holiday.

The official switch from the observation of Washington's Birthday on February 22 to “Presidents’ Day” on the third Monday in February coincided with the period when it was popular to debunk our heroes. That is most unfortunate because our nation needs heroes and our young people need heroes.

By any standard, George Washington is a hero worthy of his own national holiday. The reputation of the man whom his contemporaries called “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen,” has stood the test of time. With George Washington, what you saw was what you got. The public man and the private man were one and the same.

When sensational journalists of his and succeeding generations scraped the countryside for revelations, they did not find even one tale of a tryst behind a haystack or a plundering escapade with the boys. Item-by-item scrutiny of his cash book and ledger, which were the disclosure records of his generation, do not reveal even one entry that hints of a financial or moral impropriety.

No investigative reporter ever discovered any misdeeds of the kinds that have tarnished the reputations of many Presidents of recent memory. George Washington did not have any secret life of womanizing, cheating, building a personal fortune through the control of government television licenses, talking in profanities, abandoning his supporters, having close friendships with traitors or men of deviant behavior, betraying his campaign promises, making secret deals with foreign countries, conspiring to get our country into war, or stuffing the ballot box to win elections by fraud.

The definitive biography of Washington is the seven-volume work by Douglas Southall Freeman. He faithfully recorded the details of Washington’s life without embellishment, censorship, or psychoanalysis.

Late in life, Washington himself told an old friend his own explanation of his remarkable success in accomplishing what seemed impossible in the American Revolution. He said he “always had walked in a straight line.” As a youth, he acquired a positive love of the right and he developed an iron will to do the right.

Washington was not a great intellect or an eloquent speaker. He had no special facility with words or his generations equivalent of the 20th century sound-bite. But among the many great men of his time, he was the acknowledged leader. His support did not come from stirring the emotions of men but from earning and retaining their enthusiasm and loyalty based on his dally adherence to sound judgment, justice, and zeal for duty

One of my treasured possessions is an original sculpture of Washington on horseback at the battle of Monmouth in 1778. It catches a moment during the American Revolution when his leadership was put to its severest test. Finding his advance forces in full retreat because of a traitorous officer, Washington galloped through his frightened regiments and saved the day by turning then around and leading them forward to attack the British.

Washington's code of living was built on the principles of conduct he regarded as the code of gentlemen. That code’s foundations were not love and compassion, faith or sacrifice, but honesty, duty, truth, and justice exact and inclusive, which demanded that he do his utmost and in return receive what he had earned. with Washington, “Justice never could walk with Compromise.”

Washington's total dedication to the duty assigned to him to win our war of independence gave him personal peace of mind. His will and self-discipline were his rod and staff, and he could better war against Britain because he was not at. war with himself.

He always believed that God exists but had not been ardent in his faith. However, by the end of the American Revolution he came to believe that a personal God had intervened to save America and that our Revolutionary cause could not have succeeded without the direct intervention of Divine Providence. Washington's years in public life after the Revolution were fil1ed with references to his deep religious faith and its necessity in our public and private lives.

In the 1990s, when there seem to be so few heroes, George Washington is a man for all seasons. What he was, he made himself by will, effort, self-discipline, ambition, and perseverance. He had the strength he needed for the long and

dangerous journeys of his incredible life because he always walked that “straight line.”

As a 26-year-o1d officer under the command of General Braddock, the colonial troops found themselves ambushed by the French and Indians who effectively fired from behind trees instead of on an open field as the British were accustomed to. Washington's tall figure was an easy mark for hidden riflemen. He had two horses shot from under him, one bullet shot through his hat, and four others slit his uniform with hot lead. But nothing wounded him. Braddock was mortally wounded, and 977 men out of 1,459 were killed or badly wounded. It fell to Washington to guide the survivors in retreat and before it was over he had been in the saddle for 24 hours.