Historian John Ferling has been called a "national resource," and his latest book again demonstrates his unsurpassed insight into the Founding Fathers, giving us George Washington as we have never seen him before. Our first president has long been viewed as a hero who rose above politics. The Ascent of George Washington peers behind that image—one carefully burnished by Washington himself—to reveal a leader who was not only not above politics, but a master manipulator adept in the arts of persuasion, leverage, and deniability. Washington deftly screened burning ambition behind an image of republican virtue—but that image made him just the leader that an overmatched army and a shaky young nation desperately needed.
Reviews of the **The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon** by John Ferling

**Watchman**
John Ferling has produced a capable, if unremarkable biography of George Washington. My belief is that any Founding Fathers/Revolutionary history buff will find that the book offers nothing new: no new material, little new insight. Ferling claims to offer some new insight in the form of his thesis that Washington was secretly and intensely ambitious, a point he drums over and over again. The thing is that no one who is generally familiar with Washington, and certainly no one who has read another decent biography of the man, could possibly be unaware of that. So, like I stated: nothing new.

I think the book is at its best in the one area which is the one area where Ferling's offers some novel insight, the often glossed over or romanticized relationship with Alexander Hamilton. Ferling presents it as more transactional and practical in nature than most other historians, especially biographers of Hamilton, who often depict it as having a father and son character. Ferling presents a more complex, and I think accurate, picture of their relationship.

But that is still a sidenote in a capable, but ultimately average biography.

**Goldfury**
George Washington has been the subject of countless books, from multi-volume biographies to books that focus in on a single aspect of his life. John Ferling's 2009 The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon falls into the later camp, looking at the father of our country through the lens of his political career. Overall, it's an interesting book with a fresh - if often cynical - perspective, though I wouldn't recommend it as anyone's first venture into reading about Washington.

From Washington's early days trying to rise the ranks in Virginia, to his French and Indian War service, his colonial Virginia political career, to leading the Continental Army, to his time as the first President, Ferling depicts Washington as constantly looking for advantage and political advancement, while putting a noble, self-sacrificing face on his actions.

For a fan of Washington like myself it can be a bit trying to hear Ferling keep attempting to tear him down, but Ferling does a solid job of establishing his interpretation, and it is interesting to see episodes other biographers gloss over or don't mention at all, or commonly discussed events from another angle. While Ferling didn't dim my admiration for Washington, I do have a more well-rounded view, and I wouldn't say that Ferling ventures into "hacket job" territory at any point.

The main area where I'd suggest Ferling is overly hard on Washington is slavery. Ferling is pretty negative about Washington on that front, but having read Henry Wiencek's excellent *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* I'd suggest that Ferling doesn't give Washington enough credit for his growth on this issue over his life or for the environment he was in.

I would not recommend this book for the Washington novice. It helps to have read at least one general biography of the man to have a baseline for Ferling's alternate view, and since Ferling sometimes skims over less political aspects of Washington's life one might be a bit lost without other background. Reading something along the lines of *Washington: The Indispensable Man* by James Thomas Flexner, *His Excellency: George Washington* by Joseph J. Ellis, or *Washington: A Life* by Ron Chernow would be wise before tackling The Ascent of George Washington. Reading Ferling first
might also sour you on Washington unnecessarily.

I listened to Tantor Audio's 2009 production of the book, narrated by Norman Dietz. The production was very well done, and Dietz delivers a solid, no-frills reading fitting the non-fiction topic. The unabridged production runs approximately 17.5 hours.

The Ascent of George Washington is an interesting book for the veteran Washington reader, and I recommend it to anyone who fits that category and is looking for a different take on the first president's life. This was my second Ferling book, following Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800 which didn't impress me. The Ascent of George Washington, however, was good enough that I was glad to have given Ferling another chance and expect to read more from him in the future.

Levion

In "The Ascent of George Washington" John Ferling traces the story of Washington's political maneuverings. The book is interesting and engaging but readers may or may not agree with Ferling's thesis.

After reading many, many books about George Washington and the American Revolution, I have come to the conclusion that some of the tritest old-fashioned sayings make a lot of sense. In particular those old saws, "The truth lies somewhere in the middle," and "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are," can be applied to this book.

The third section of this book contains the freshest and newest ideas. In Part Three, Ferling discusses the beginnings of American political parties. Echoing the passion of the anti-British revolts of the 1760s and early 1770's, Democratic-Republican Societies wildly rattled the cage of the new republic. It is truly no wonder George Washington was content to serve for only two terms.

While laying the groundwork for the turmoil of modern politics, the Democratic-Republicans correctly sensed another war was on the horizon. The groundwork that led to Mr. Madison's War, the War of 1812, is nicely explained here.

"Ascent" should not be the first book you read about George Washington. It is thought-provoking but it is also a political diatribe that reflects another old saying: "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

Historiographers and those who believe that history repeats itself will have a great time with this book.

Kim Burdick
Stanton, Delaware
Vonalij
JoeDanDonigi

I got a different impression of George Washington and Benedict than expected. I always looked at George Washington as honest "I cannot tell a lie", But I realize that's just an urban myth. But Washington wasn't that sort at all. He was wealthy, had slaves, it's true he freed them when he died, but not before. And married Martha for money, land and status. And he ripped off his fellow Americans of their bounty lands-that's lands that were given to soldiers intended to pay for their service to the country but Washington purposefully bought it up at discount rates. And he also was jealous and petty of generals who outshone him. And Benedict Arnold got passed over for Major
General several times and was surprised to find the powerful enemies he had. I've read half that book on Benedict Arnold so I don't know where the final break takes place but thus far he seems justified in what he's doing. So Benedict Arnold initially at least was a true American hero. I'm really interested to find out what changed him.

Related PDF to The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon by John Ferling

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