Rhodehamel, John H.  

**The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic**

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- Synopsis
- About this title

Book by Rhodehamel, John H.

"synopsis" may belong to another edition of this title.

**Review:**

A catalog for a traveling exhibition of art and artifacts from the life of George Washington, this elegant volume also provides an excellent overview history of Washington's life. The biography of Washington is, as would be expected, positive, yet the author, John Rhodehamel, a curator of American History at the Huntington Library in Los Angeles, does not ignore some often overlooked aspects of Washington's personality, specifically his temper, pride, and ambition. Indeed, the "Great Experiment" of the title applies as much to Washington's efforts to transform his own personality as to his enormous contributions to the founding of the United States. Rhodehamel documents how Washington, as he matured, subjugated the fierce ambition that had brought him to international repute during the French and Indian War and eventually made perhaps his greatest contribution to the newly independent colonies by modestly emphasizing the primacy of civilian rule. The text presents Washington's story, up through his stormy second term as president and his death soon after, in readable and often entertaining terms, and the visual component of the book deserves special mention. Besides the many photographs of Washington artifacts and contemporaneous artistic depictions of him, the fine photographic reproduction of letters and journal entries in Washington's own hand does much to humanize a person all too often regarded as a distant and incomprehensible icon. --Robert McNamara

**About the Author:**

John Rhodehamel is Norris Foundation Curator of American History at the Huntington Library. He is the editor of the award-winning book *George Washington, Writings.*

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Indeed, the “Great Experiment” of the title applies as much to Washington's efforts to transform his own personality as to his enormous contributions to the founding of the United States. Rhodehamel documents how Washington, as he matured, subdued the fierce ambition that had brought him to international repute during the French and Indian War and eventually made perhaps his greatest contribution to the newly independent colonies by modestly emphasizing the primacy of civilian rule. George Washington was not particularly well educated, and in personal conversation he often seemed reticent and inarticulate. As a military commander, his great success lay in avoiding being badly beaten, and he lacked the strategic brilliance of a Napoleon. "The establishment of our new Government seemed to be the last great experiment for promoting human happiness." George Washington, January 9, 1790. "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," remarked Henry Lee in his famous funeral oration for George Washington. Marking the two-hundredth anniversary of his death, The Great Experiment: George Washington and the American Republic allowed visitors to follow Washington's evolution from loyal British subject to revolutionary leader to the country's first president, exploring his personal