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David Hackett Fischer. *Washington's Crossing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

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*Washington's Crossing* is a striking book; a complex work that explores a pivotal moment in the American Revolutionary War as Continental Army Commander-in-chief General George Washington made his desperate gamble to strike the British and Hessian forces when least expected, on Christmas evening 1776. The American cause teetered on the brink of extinction—yet after Washington's successful attack on the Hessian outpost at Trenton, New Jersey—the sputtering flame of the Revolutionary War burned bright again. David Hackett Fischer's tome traced the events that led up to the Battle of Trenton and the subsequent Battle of Princeton, which brought a tide of enlistments to the undermanned Continental Army and shifted the momentum of the war to Washington's forces. Fischer also provided a treasure trove of related information for the student and general reader, alike. Fischer's extensive resource material comprised virtually one-third of the volume, and included appendices, source material, and most notably, a lengthy section on the historiography of the American Revolutionary War.

Fischer's study included an examination of the various armies of the American rebels, as well as those of the British and the Hessians, treating each with scholarship and objectivity. Fischer explored the rebel "Army of Liberty" in its almost infinite variety: from the troops fielded by the New England colonies, to the riflemen of Virginia's backcountry, to the radical Democrats of Pennsylvania's Associators, to the "silk-stocking" regiments of Maryland, each with its own customs and traditions. He described the British "Army of Order" in detail, from the composition of its regulars and officers to British recruiting and training processes. Along the way, Fischer demolished stereotypes; although historians have commonly referred to the barbaric British custom of flogging, Fischer noted that not all British units used discipline in the same manner. The Fifth Foot preferred reward to punishment and was one of the first British units to use medals of merit rather than punishment to direct and control behavior (p. 45). Fischer portrayed the Hessian forces in detail and noted that about thirty thousand German soldiers served in the war. He described the Hessians as the "Army of Honor and Profit"; an army

bound together by a common belief in “hierarchy, order, and discipline” (p. 59). Fischer’s treatment of the Hessians included a detailed study of Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall, the commander of the Hessian troops at Trenton. Fischer portrayed Rall in a much more positive light than many historians have done in the past. He described Rall as a leader highly regarded by his men, for he treated them with dignity; he “merited the highest respect” (p. 57).

While *Washington’s Crossing* is a complex, multifaceted work, at its heart it is a study of George Washington and his growth as a leader while in the midst of almost insurmountable odds and frequent chaos. Fischer provided a telling example of Washington’s courage during an memorable incident—the rebel forces from disparate regions that came together for the first time broke out in a riot—essentially rebel Americans were fighting rebel Americans in a knock-down brawl. Washington galloped into the center of the melee, leapt from his horse, and grabbed the two closest combatants, literally lifting them off their feet while he shook some sense into them. As Fischer related the incident, the “rioters stopped fighting, turned in amazement to watch Washington in action, then fled . . . in all directions” (p. 25). Based on Fischer’s extraordinary account of the events leading up to the Battle of Trenton, it is easy to understand the memorable reflection on Washington provided by General Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee at Washington’s death; Washington truly was “first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen” for a very good reason. George Washington was the indispensable man of the American Revolutionary War.