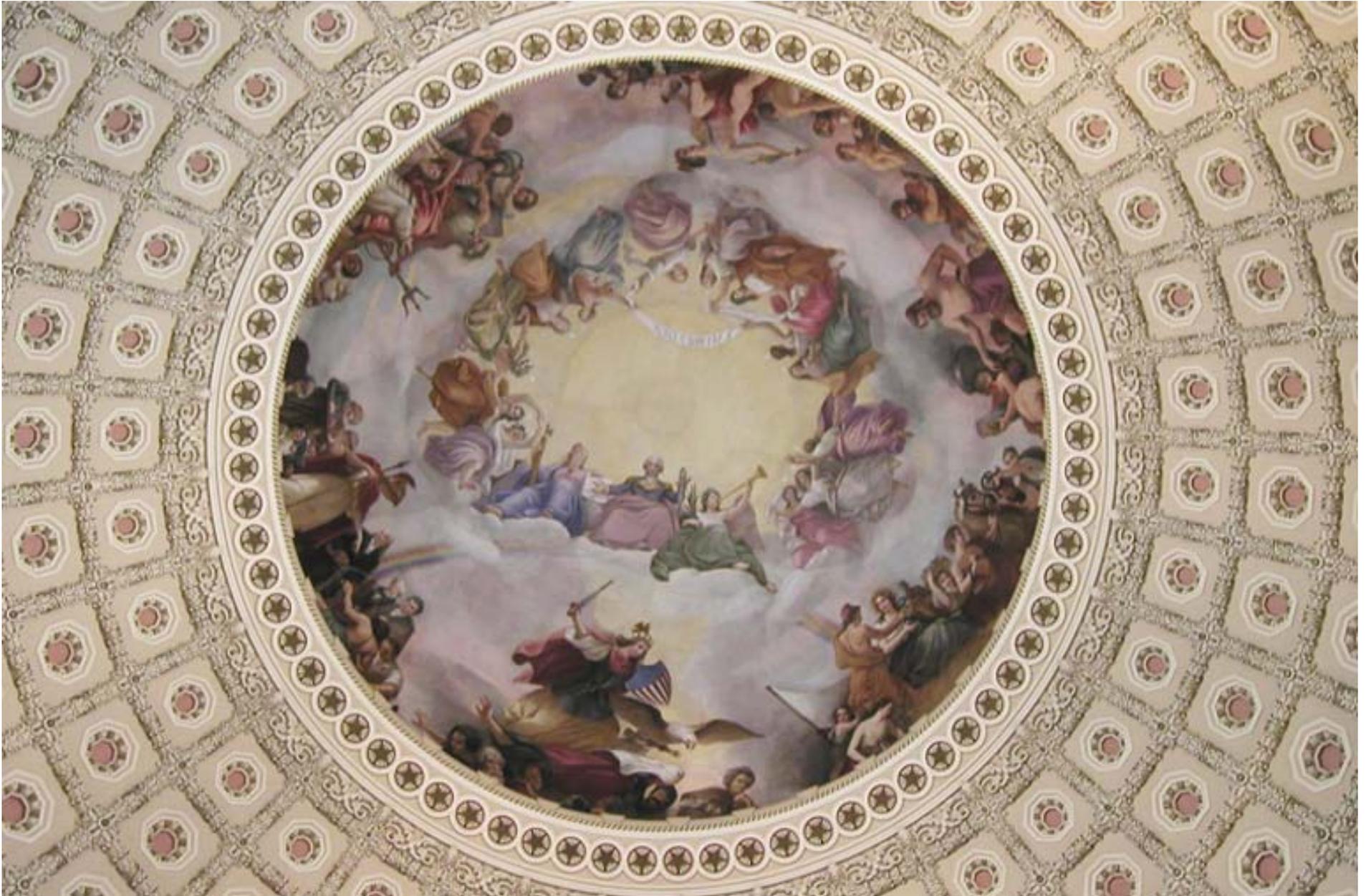


Apotheosis of George Washington (Washington becoming a god) Constantino Brumidi, Fresco, 1865, Rotunda



Suspended 180 feet above the Rotunda floor, the fresco covers an area of 4,664 square feet. The figures, up to 15 feet tall, were painted to be intelligible from close up as well as from 180 feet below.



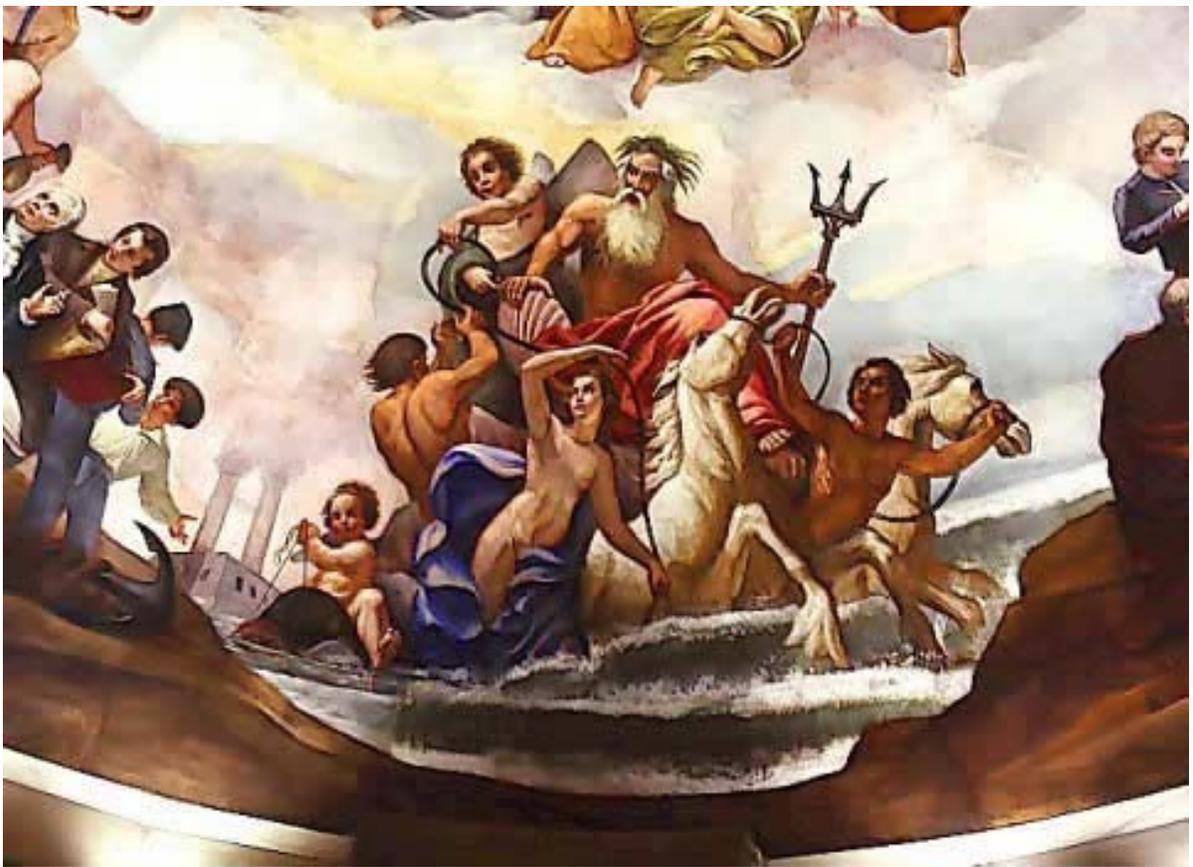
Brumidi depicted George Washington rising to the heavens in glory, flanked by female figures representing Liberty and Victory/Fame. A rainbow arches at his feet, and thirteen maidens symbolizing the original states flank the three central figures. (The word "apotheosis" in the title means literally the raising of a person to the rank of a god, or the glorification of a person as an ideal; George Washington was honored as a national icon in the nineteenth century.)



WAR- Armored Freedom, sword raised and cape flying, with a helmet and shield reminiscent of those on the Statue of Freedom, tramples Tyranny and Kingly Power; she is assisted by a fierce eagle carrying arrows and a thunderbolt.



SCIENCE- Minerva, goddess of wisdom and the arts of civilization, with helmet and spear, points to an electric generator creating power stored in batteries, next to a printing press, while inventors Benjamin Franklin, Samuel F. B. Morse, and Robert Fulton watch. At the left, a teacher demonstrates the use of dividers.



MARINE- Neptune, god of the sea, holding his trident and crowned with seaweed, rides in a shell chariot drawn by sea horses. Venus, goddess of love born from the sea, helps lay the transatlantic cable. In the background is a form of iron-clad ship with smokestacks.



COMMERCE- Mercury, god of commerce, with his winged cap and sandals and caduceus, hands a bag of gold to Robert Morris, financier of the Revolutionary War. On the left, men move a box on a dolly; on the right, the anchor and sailors lead into the next scene, "Marine."



MECHANICS- Vulcan, god of the forge, stands at his anvil with his foot on a cannon, near a pile of cannon balls and with a steam engine in the background. The man at the forge is thought to represent Charles Thomas, who was in charge of the ironwork of the Capitol dome.



AGRICULTURE- Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, is shown with a wreath of wheat and a cornucopia, seated on a McCormick reaper. Young America in a liberty cap holds the reins of the horses, while Flora gathers flowers in the foreground.

The Apotheosis of Washington

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



 The Apotheosis of Washington, as seen looking up from the capitol rotunda

The Apotheosis of Washington is the immense [fresco](#) painted by [Greek-Italian artist Constantino Brumidi](#) in 1865 and visible through the [oculus](#) of the dome in the [rotunda](#) of the [United States Capitol Building](#). The fresco is suspended 180 feet (55 m) above the rotunda floor and covers an area of 4,664 square feet (433.3 m²). The figures painted are up to 15 feet (4.6 m) tall and are visible from the floor below. The dome was completed in 1863, and Brumidi painted it over the course of 11 months at the end of the Civil War. He was paid \$40,000 (\$711,135 adjusted for inflation, as of 30 December 2009) for the fresco.

Brumidi had worked for three years in the [Vatican](#) under [Pope Gregory XVI](#), and served several [aristocrats](#) as an artist for [palaces](#) and [villas](#), including the prince [Torlonia](#). He [immigrated to the United States](#) in 1852, and spent much of the last 25 years of his life working in the Capitol. In addition to *The Apotheosis of Washington* he designed the [Brumidi Corridors](#).

This fresco is mentioned in [Dan Brown's](#) book *[The Lost Symbol](#)*.

Symbolism

The Apotheosis of Washington depicts [George Washington](#) becoming a god ([apotheosis](#)). Washington, the first [U.S. president](#) and [commander-in-chief](#) of the [Continental Army](#) during the [American Revolutionary War](#), is [allegorically](#) represented, surrounded by figures from [classical mythology](#). Washington is draped in [purple](#), a royal color, with a [rainbow](#) arch at his feet, flanked by the goddess [Victory](#) (draped in green, using a horn) to his left and the goddess [Liberty](#) to his right. Liberty wears a red [Phrygian cap](#), symbolizing emancipation, from a Roman tradition where sons leaving the home and/or slaves being emancipated would be given a red cap. She holds a [fasces](#) in her right hand and an open book in the other.

Forming a circle between Liberty and Victory are 13 maidens, each with a star above their heads, representing the original [13 colonies](#). Several of the maidens have their backs turned to Washington, said to represent the colonies that had seceded from the Union at the time of painting. Upside down above Washington is the banner [E Pluribus Unum](#) meaning "out of many, one".

Surrounding Washington, the two goddesses, and the 13 maidens are six scenes lining the perimeter, each representing a national concept allegorically: from directly below Washington in the center and moving clockwise, "War," "Science," "Marine," "Commerce," "Mechanics," and "Agriculture". The perimeter scenes are not fully visible from the floor of the Capitol.

Scene

Description



War

[Freedom](#), also known as [Columbia](#), is directly below Washington in the personification of War. The scene depicts a woman fighting for liberty with a raised sword, a cape, and a [helmet](#) and [shield](#) (in the colors of the [American flag](#)) trampling figures representing [Tyranny](#) and [Kingly Power](#). To Freedom's left assisting her is a fierce [bald eagle](#) (the [bald eagle](#) is the [national bird](#) of the United States) carrying [arrows](#) and a [thunderbolt](#) (reminiscent of the arrows carried by the eagle in the [Great Seal of the United States](#)).



Science

[Minerva](#), the Roman goddess of crafts and wisdom, is portrayed with helmet and [spear](#) pointing to an [electrical generator](#) creating power stored in [batteries](#) next to a [printing press](#), representing great American inventions. American scientists and inventors [Benjamin Franklin](#), [Samuel F. B. Morse](#), and [Robert Fulton](#) watch. In the left part of the scene a teacher demonstrates the use of dividers.



Marine

This scene shows [Neptune](#), the Roman [sea-god](#), with [trident](#) and [crown](#) of [seaweed](#) riding in a [shell chariot](#) drawn by sea horses. [Venus](#), goddess of love born from the sea, is depicted helping to lay the [transatlantic telegraph cable](#) which ran from America to the Telegraph Field in Ireland.^[1] In the background is an [ironclad warship](#) with [smokestacks](#).



Commerce

[Mercury](#), the Roman god of commerce, with his winged [petasos](#) and [sandals](#) and a [caduceus](#), is depicted giving a [bag of gold](#) to [American Revolutionary War](#) financier [Robert Morris](#). To the left, men move a box on a [dolly](#); on the right, the [anchor](#) and [sailors](#) lead into "Marine."



Mechanics

[Vulcan](#), the Roman god of [fire](#) and the [forge](#), is depicted standing at an [anvil](#) with his foot on a [cannon](#) next to a pile of [cannonballs](#). A [steam engine](#) is in the background. The man at the forge is thought to represent Charles Thomas, the supervisor of ironwork during the construction of the Capitol dome.



Agriculture

[Ceres](#), the Roman goddess of agriculture, is shown with a wreath of [wheat](#) and a [cornucopia](#), symbol of plenty, while sitting on a [McCormick mechanical reaper](#). The personification of Young America in a [liberty cap](#) holds the [reins](#) of the horses, while the goddess [Flora](#) gathers flowers in the foreground.

The Aristocratic Washington: High Society's Darling (1876-1930s)

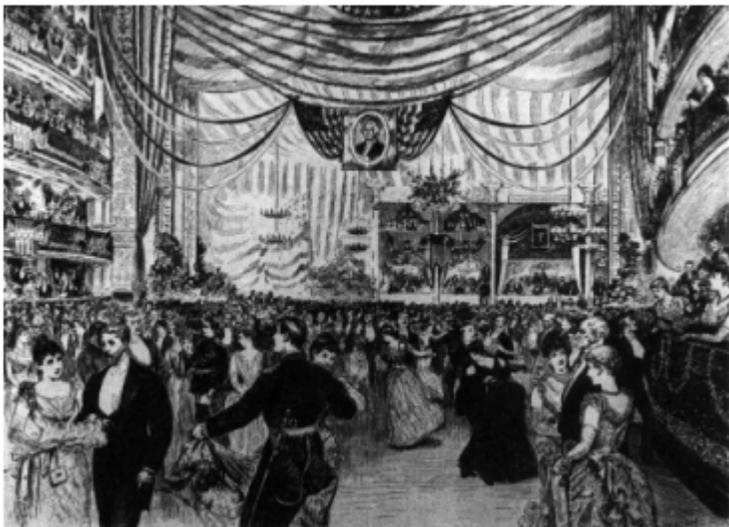
While the 1876 Centennial allowed people from all walks of life to get close to the relics of their country's birth, some individuals from the "more cultivated" classes grew anxious. George Washington, they argued, was a man too refined for the raw democracy the United States was beginning to represent. Several of these classes yearned for what they remembered as the glorious days of Virginia aristocracy and Washingtonian refinement, when "a 'Republican Court' still flourished--and everybody else still knew their places" (Marling, 87).

Images of Martha Washington, even before those of her husband, may have played the earliest role in heightening America's upper- class preoccupation with finding an "aristocratic" lineage. As early as 1865, a painting by Daniel F. Huntington, *The Republican Court in the Time of Washington, or Lady Washington's Reception Day*, elicited enthusiasm from those yearning for evidence of highly cultivated ancestry. The painting depicts the Friday evening social engagements held by Martha Washington throughout her husband's presidency and included several recognizable faces.



In the decades following, Martha Washington "teas" and "receptions" were advertised as ways to celebrate the upcoming centennials, and shared simultaneous success with the celebratory Boston Tea Parties of 1873 (Marling, 47, 44). The costumes and etiquette of such "haute couture" social engagements harked back to the colonial era and some went so far as to enlist guests as pretend Martha and George Washingtons to preside over the affairs.

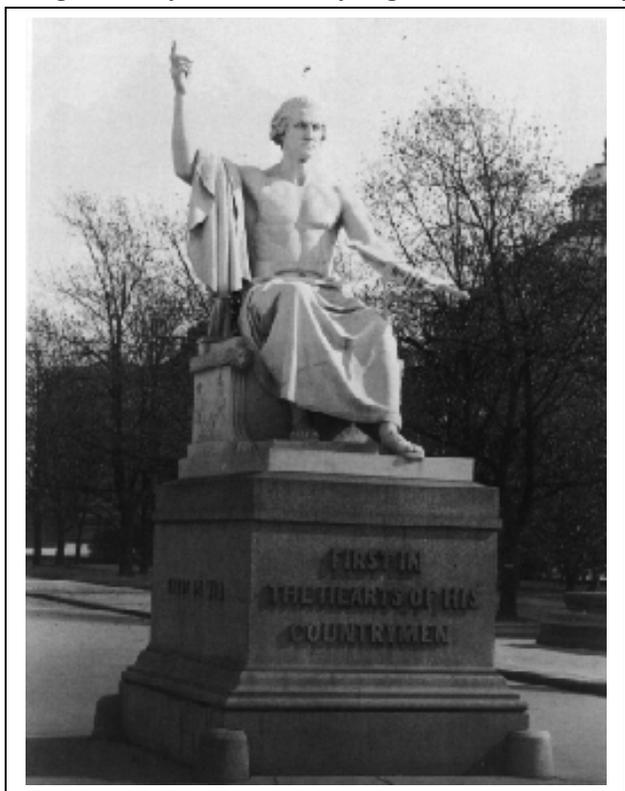
By the time of the centennial of Washington's inauguration in 1889, members of the upper classes were well prepared to present the Washington they cherished. Groups claiming ancestry to Washington and other Revolutionary War heroes (in particular, the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution) sprang up at this time, gathering for balls and banquets up and down the East Coast. As early as 1887, organizers of the Centennial Inauguration secured the Metropolitan Opera House in New York for the imitation Inaugural Ball, and in doing so, also secured a privileged view of the festivities for New York's elite. If others wished to witness some of the events, the parade could be seen from the streets, or, for a small fee, one could gain a spot in the galleries of the Opera House to watch the more fortunate feast below. In fact, more than 4,000 citizens did so, gasping at the luxurious gowns, expensive table-settings and gourmet food they were supposed to associate with Washington's era (Marling, 120).



The Centennial Ball, as drawn by W.A. Rogers. (Marling, 113)

The ball itself was an event for the picture books. To accurately replicate the actual 1789 event, a group of ladies from families of famous ancestry and wealth were selected to dance a quadrille in the center of the floor. As historian Karal Ann Marling reports in *George Washington Slept Here*, the dance itself was relatively disappointing, but the costumes held everyone's gaze. Diamonds, pearls, lace and embroidery covered the gowns, almost all tailored in floor-sweeping, colonial style. One woman, said to be George Washington's great-grandniece, wore a buckle containing a lock of her dear great-grand uncle's hair (Marling, 114).

These inaugural celebrations may seem an extreme example of the way elite society appropriated Washington, but they set the stage for society's highest strata to crown the Father of Our Country the father of their own good taste. As Marling writes, "For good or ill, during the 1890s Washington the lover, the dancer and the courtly aristocrat displaced the rather abstract figure who once stood for national unity, moral rectitude, self denial and a stoic devotion to duty." (Marling, 143). During a time characterized by a suspicion of populism, resentment of immigration, and nostalgia for days of classed society, the more aristocratic elements of Washington's life superceded all others. By evoking the Washington of Virginia plantations and embroidered finery, America's high society could finally legitimize aristocracy in a country of increasingly blurred class lines.



George Washington by Horatio Greenough, marble; purchased 1833-36
(Installed in the Rotunda 1841 and moved to the east Capitol Grounds in 1844. Transferred to Smithsonian Institution in 1908.)