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From: larry_arnn@claremont.org

To: governor@govoff.state.ms.us

Subject: Claremont Institute Precepts: 'Crossing' the Line of Fact and Fiction

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The Claremont Institute--PRECEPTS |
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The story of young George Washington's inability to lie about chopping down a cherry tree first appeared in 1806, in the fifth edition of a small biography of Washington by the Reverend Mason Weems. The story was later adopted by McGuffey's Reader and became for years the best-known anecdote about Washington's life. Although the story was a fabrication, we can say with confidence that it illuminated a truth about Washington, who by all accounts was extraordinarily honest.

Contrast with this the recent A&E Network movie about Washington, "The Crossing." Like Rev. Weems, the makers of this movie fabricated an anecdote about Washington's life. Specifically, they invented an exchange between Washington and one of his officers, after the Battle of Trenton, in which they seem to agree that the American Revolution was driven by a base desire for profit, i.e., by opposition to British taxes, and thus that Washington's soldiers were not morally distinguishable from the Hessian mercenaries they had just defeated. The great difference with this fabrication is that it flatly contradicts all historical evidence.

Let us begin with the fact that the colonists were, in fact, paying various taxes at the time, both to Britain and to their own local governments. These taxes were low, as taxes ought to be. Their position was not that Britain could not tax them. Rather it was that Britain could not tax them for the purpose of gaining revenue (as opposed to tariffs to regulate trade) without their consent. They called this taxation without representation, and identified it as a form of slavery.

Let us also consider that on July 2, 1776, less than six months before the action of "The Crossing," Washington addressed his army in these words: "The eyes of all our countrymen are now upon us, and we shall have their blessings and praises if, happily, we are the instruments of saving them from the tyranny meditated against them. Let us therefore animate and encourage each other, and show the whole world, that a freeman contending for liberty on his own ground is superior to any slavish mercenary on earth."

However cynically we might view the American Revolution today, the revolutionaries themselves did not understand their cause as base or mercenary. They described it in plain language as the cause of self-government, which they

understood in light of the principles announced in the Declaration of Independence two days after Washington addressed his army.

It is one thing to interpret history, and another to rewrite it. The first invites debate, the second demands condemnation. I invite you to read more about "The Crossing" in an article by Institute Senior Fellow Doug Jeffrey at <http://www.claremont.org/publications/jeffrey000120.cfm>, or go to our home page at <http://www.claremont.org>. I then encourage you to send a message to A&E, protesting its blatant historical dishonesty, at <http://www.aande.com/feedback/feedback.html>.

Sincerely,
Larry P. Arnn
President, The Claremont Institute

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