



The RULES OF CIVILITY

Richard Brookhiser

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In the early eighteenth century, a young George Washington copied out by hand 110 rules for civil behavior in a little notebook. These rules, borrowed from a text used by generations of Jesuit tutors, provided a common-sense framework for any young gentleman who hoped to rise in society. Washington took these rules very much to heart; he carried the hand-written list throughout his life, from the coldest day at Valley Forge to the triumph at Yorktown, and through all eight years of his distinguished presidency. Our first president was in many ways an ordinary man who, through singular self-discipline, rose to greatness. But his progress was no accident. As biographer Richard Brookhiser explains, Washington was fastidious about hewing to a strict code of conduct, courtesy, and honor. Clearly, it was this deliberate, disciplined way of approaching life's difficulties that vaulted Washington ahead of his luminous peers - intellectual giants like Jefferson, Franklin, and Hamilton - and into a position of leadership. What can we learn today from Washington's example? In his commentary on Washington's Rules of Civility, Brookhiser demonstrates how seemingly simple notions like courtesy, respect, honesty, and humility contribute more to worldly success than the Machiavellian traits that modern politicians seem to revere. In stark contrast with today's political and business leaders, Washington frowned upon those who relied on cleverness, sensitivity, stubbornness, or impetuousness to get ahead. Material success without honor, he believed, was worthless. Though at first glance many of Washington's rules may seem quaint or outdated, Brookhiser makes their meaning and relevance clear for modernreaders surfeited with false sophistication, and seriously proposes that we follow the modest example of perhaps the greatest American who ever lived. This edition of Rules of Civility, enlivened by Richard Brookhiser's insightful and witty commentary on how these rules could, and



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