

### The Fate of a Nation

George Washington and MacBeth were two historic figures who were influential in determining the fate of their nation. Both were ambitious men living during perilous times, yet each charted a different course for himself and his country when faced with the lure of power. Washington fulfilled his ambitions by devoting his life to creating a nation, while MacBeth was ignorant his responsibilities to his country, in turn destroying it and himself.

Throughout his whole life, Washington yearned for power. As a young man, he wanted this power as a British officer. Later, as a Virginia gentleman, he sought power in the forms of honor and wealth. His ultimate rise to power eventually came when he was pronounced general of the colonial militia in the war against Britain. It was under his command that the colonial militia emerged victorious against the British. However, in defeating the British another threat to American democracy had been released. This threat was Washington himself. Washington had the colonial militia under his control. He could have easily performed a "coup d'état" and seized control of the newly freed nation. However, Washington's ambitions were not to become a dictator, or king. He believed that power did not come from controlling others, but from the honor and respect that was given to him. Washington knew that this power would only come from subordination to civilian authority. He would be a precedent by being the first general to turn down his immense powers. With these actions, Washington assured the success of a new democratic nation.

MacBeth, like Washington, was power hungry and very successful in war. However, he felt that power came from wealth and control over his subordinates. As a king, MacBeth abused his power. His first priority was to secure his own safety, and not his country's. He does this by assassinating Banquo. This action shows only concern for himself, but not for his nation. When he visits the Witches, he does not ask about the future of Scotland, but his own future. As a king, he only kills and destroys, but does not nurture his country. Scotland suffered greatly during MacBeth's rule because of his ignorance and refusal to step down and let someone better qualified take over. The majority of MacBeth's thanes eventually went to England to seek help to overthrow him. This led to MacBeth's own downfall when help finally arrives from England.

Lord Acton once said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". MacBeth epitomizes this quote. He took power and was overwhelmed by it. He did not think about the responsibilities that came with his power, and ruined his life and country. However, Washington was not overwhelmed by his power. His restraint of it paved the way for the first truly democratic nation. His willingness to sacrifice this power brought him the honorable reputation he had sought for his entire life.

