



## PROFILES IN COURAGE

Teacher's Guide

# GEORGE MASON

### CREDITS:

Starring Laurence Naismith, John Colicos, Donald Harrow, Arthur Franz, and Wesley Addy. Written by A.J. Russell. Directed by Joseph Anthony. Produced by Gordon Oliver and Robert Saudek Associates. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. **50 minutes.** Guide prepared for Social Studies School Service by Robert D. Barnes, 1983.

### OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the concept of democratic process.
- To discuss the importance of the Bill of Rights.
- To explore the issues dividing Americans under the Articles of Confederation.
- To understand the meaning of moral courage.

### BACKGROUND:

Adopted three weeks before the National Declaration of Independence in 1776, the Virginia Declaration of Rights opens with the following:

"That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights...namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety. That all power is vested in, and consequently derived from, the people..."

The author of this document was George Mason of Virginia. When our Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia in 1787 to draft a Constitution for the United States, George Mason refused to sign the document because it did not contain a Bill of Rights, which he felt was essential to the protection of individual liberty.

Mason returned to Virginia to urge the Convention there to reject Constitutional ratification until a Bill of Rights was included.

This episode is about that struggle.

### SYNOPSIS:

We see George Mason, determined that individual protection of rights should be included as an integral part of the Constitution, not merely added as amendments, urge the Virginia Ratifying Convention to reject ratification until a Bill of Rights is included. We see James Madison and Governor Randolph convince the delegates that the problems facing a floundering Confederation of States necessitate the immediate adoption of the Constitution.

We see Mason remind Randolph that: "France, under Louis XVI; Spain, still suffering the Inquisition; Russia, in serfdom, all lack a written Bill of Rights."

Finally, after rejecting Mason's position by ratifying the Constitution, we see the Virginia Ratifying Convention resolve that the first order of business for the new Congress shall be to amend the Constitution with a declaration of rights.

### VOCABULARY:

The following words and phrases appear in the program. Teachers may wish to check for student understanding:

confederation	tyranny	vilification
constitution	concessions	denounced
anarchy	conciliation	accede
amendments	unanimity	preeminence
Virginia Declaration of Rights	oblivion	unequivocally
ratification	vested	ensue
gout	circumspect	suppressed
smelled a rat	assent	alienated
dissolution	expatriating	vanquished
impartial	perpetrating	Inquisition
bulwarks	deprivation	serfdom
despotic	treachery	goad
jeopardy	decisively	hectoring
	rhetoric	

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. "No morn ever dawned more favorably than ours did, and no day was ever more clouded than the present. We are fast verging to anarchy and confusion..." What were the specific concerns that prompted Washington to make the statement above?
2. What reasons did Patrick Henry give for not attending the Constitutional Convention? Would you like to have Henry on your side in a struggle? Support your position with examples from the statements and actions you observed.
3. George Mason struck a deal with Mr. Hellinger from New York. What was its purpose?
4. Speaking to the Virginia Convention, Mason said, "I hope that a government may be framed which may suit us by drawing a line between the general and the state governments. What were his fears? Is there such a "line" established in the Constitution? Explain.
5. Henry and Mason both supported "union," but placed another concept first. Identify this concept. What southern practice did Mason speak out against? Did the Constitution address this issue? Explain.
6. Why did Mason want treaty-making power to reside in the House of Representatives rather than the Senate? What does our Constitution say?
7. Governor Randolph broke with Henry and Mason on their tactics of delay. Why?
8. What "lawyers' argument" did Mason present for obtaining a Bill of Rights before the fact? Give arguments from your own experience to support or attack this position.
9. Realizing that Randolph's "change of heart" will swing the Convention to ratification, James Madison challenges Mason to "put a good face on it, the face of unity." Mason is resolute. Is this stubbornness?

What does Mason's late night question to Henry ("Are we fighting against the common good?") tell us about the character of Mason?

10. Governor Clinton of New York unwittingly sends his letter supporting Mason to his friend Randolph, now a member of the opposition, who withholds its message. What is Mason's reaction? Hellinger's? With whom do you agree?

### ACTIVITY:

Ask each member of the class to spend 30 minutes listing the rights they would include in a constitution they supported. On the following day, have listed on the board when the class arrives, the more than thirty different rights granted in our Constitution's amendments. What rights did your students neglect? Why? What rights did they add? Why?

### FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION:

Obtain a copy of the Constitution of the Soviet Union. Are provisions made for the fundamental rights of citizens? Are there differences between what is written in the Soviet constitution and actual practice in the USSR? What about differences between our Constitution and actual practice in the United States? Examples? Would you add any additional rights to our Constitution?