George Washington’s Precedents

George Washington’s inauguration took place on April 30th, 1789 at Federal Hall in New York City. As the first man who took the Oath of Office, Washington added the words “… so help me God” Establishing the first Presidential precedent. There were many questions about this new job, this “President person”. People wondered “What do you say?” “How do you describe this person who is going to head the United States of America?” Think for a moment, what it would be like in our own time if the Sergeant at Arms had to introduce the president today as his Mightiness, his Excellency, his High Mightiness, the President, the defender of our liberties. That in fact was one of the titles suggested for the President. He said “No, no, no… call me Mr. President”. It’s a nice gesture… it doesn’t mean much, but it’s a nice gesture. It was all part of establishing the image of the Presidency. One example is how Washington projected his physical being. George Washington was the most athletic, robust, and dynamic of all the Founding Fathers. He was the action hero, if you will, of the 18th century who was considered by Jefferson to be the best horseback rider of the entire period. Washington usually rode a white horse named Nelson and Nelson became a vital part of Washington’s public relations package. He was Washington’s version of a tail-hook landing. When he would travel to towns during his Presidency, sometimes he would travel in the company of a carriage most of the distance between towns. But in many cases, he would hop out of that carriage, get onto Nelson, and ride into town looking like that war hero, that man among men, looking like someone who could lead anyone. Washington understood *very* clearly that everything he did as the first President of the United States would be watched by nations abroad and by people at home and would set a precedent. The main precedent that he’s known the most for is that he left. He decides at the end of his 2nd term that he wants to step down. Partly, I think, he’s feeling the approach of age; he’s in his mid 60’s . I think he also wants to teach the country a lesson in the passing on of power. Grace is in knowing when to leave. Washington left after two terms. I think that was his finest moment.