

# Reichstag Ceremony Honoring George Washington (March 1932)

## Abstract

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This March 1932 newsreel clip reported on a March 6 ceremony in the Reichstag commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of U.S. President George Washington's birth, including excerpts from speeches given by Chancellor Heinrich Brüning and U.S. Ambassador Frederic M. Sackett. For the occasion, organizers prominently placed a bust of Washington on a pedestal, just behind the speaker's podium. In addition to this government-sponsored observance, organizations such as the Berlin American Chamber of Commerce and the Carl Schurz Society—both of which emphasized Germany's shared ties with the United States and sought to foster closer relations—sponsored various public events and publications throughout the year. They came at a time when Germany desperately sought to rekindle its important economic and financial ties to the U.S., which had frayed as a result of the Great Depression, much to Germany's detriment. The events also took on a domestic political meaning for supporters of Germany's republic, coming at a time when their own constitution faced attack from increasingly popular parties on the far right and far left, especially the NSDAP. By highlighting the specific German contributions to the development of American democracy, from Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben's involvement in the Revolutionary War to Carl Schurz's leading role in preserving the Union some four score and seven years later, these various observances sought to inspire their audience's democratic sensibilities. Specific comparisons between German politicians and George Washington, moreover, had a history in the Weimar Republic. At an SPD party congress in Heidelberg in September 1925, for instance, Hermann Molkenbuhr drew a direct parallel between Washington and Friedrich Ebert, Germany's first president under the Weimar Republic, who had died just months earlier. The inclusion of this ceremony in a newsreel in the first place, not to mention the adulatory close-ups of Washington's bust that appear throughout the segment, also represented a determined editorial choice by the newsreel's production company, Emelka.

## Source

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Germany honors Washington. Address by the Reich Chancellor and the American ambassador at the official ceremony in the Reichstag.

Brüning: Ladies and gentlemen, it rarely happens that a statesman who has long since passed away is honored by any people other than his own. Only very extraordinary reasons can create this possibility. The celebrated person must be a historically outstanding personality as a statesman and as a human being, and there must be special bonds of friendship with the people from whom he came.

[Applause. U.S. national anthem is played.]

U.S. Ambassador Sackett: In the distinguished presence of the Chancellor of the Reich, attended by the cabinet, and surrounded by the leading personalities of the government and people, I rise in this historic chamber to bring America's greetings to the German nation.

[Applause]

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Source: *Emelka-Ton-Woche* No. 77, 1932. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 773,  
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