

## Gilbert Stuart, George Washington, 1796

Upon first glance, I notice that the style of this painting is like that of the portraits we were shown and discussed last week in class. Upon further inspection, it becomes clear that the subject of this painting is George Washington, the United States' first President. This portrait is not as technically involved as works shown in class, but there are details that reveal the historical significance of this painting. For starters, on the left-hand side of Washington is a table with a red cloth draped over it. The document on top is likely the Declaration of Independence, and it may have been signed sometime before this portrait was made. Circling back around to the red cloth beneath the document, it may be symbolic of the newly formed country's ability to "crush"/defeat such a powerful country. When examining the background further, the rainbow in the top right corner immediately jumps out at me. The painting seems very dark to me overall, but this rainbow gives the portrait a feeling of happiness. I feel as though the rainbow is representative of the ending of the fighting that had ensued for so long, as well as how the Americans can now have hope for a better and more free future. Another detail I notice is Washington's gesture – turned, as though he is presenting something. Because there is no obvious item he appears to be gesturing to, I believe he may be inviting someone who is not in the painting. I interpret this person he is gesturing to as either the men he worked with to make the Declaration of Independence, or America as a whole. By America as a whole, I mean that Washington could have been using this gesture to symbolize the colonists that fought for freedom – this seems as though it could be the case because his gesture looks like he is letting someone bow. The sword in his hand could also be indicative of the symbolism of the soldiers, or just of the fact that he was once one himself. Overall, the details in this portrait give me an overall sense of triumph, even if the painting is not as intricate as portraits I have viewed previously.