

President	George Washington
Chronological Order	1
Life Span	1732-1799
Home State	Virginia
Elected	1788 (unanimously), 1792 (unanimously)



Political Party	None
Vice President	John Adams
First Lady	Martha Dandridge Custis Washington
Children	1 stepson, 1 stepdaughter
Physical Attributes	6'2" tall, 190 lbs., blue-gray eyes, long reddish-brown hair pulled back in a queue, strong, athletic
Undergraduate Education	None
Military Service	Colonel in VA militia in French and Indian War, Commander in Chief of the Continental Army
Profession	Surveyor, Planter, Soldier
Other Political Offices	Delegate to Continental Congress, President of Constitutional Convention
Nickname	Father of His Country
Family Lineage	English
Religious Affiliation	Episcopalian

Biographical Notes

- George Washington's nickname, "Father of His Country," was well-earned. First, he served as commander in chief of the Continental Army for eight years and led it to victory over Great Britain in the Revolutionary War. Second, when the American government was failing under the Articles of Confederation, he presided over the Constitutional Convention that produced the form of government the United States still enjoys. Third, he served two terms as America's first president at a time when his leadership and level-headed decision-making were crucial in getting the nation off to a successful start. Finally, even though the Constitution did not term-limit the president, Washington set an important precedent by voluntarily limiting himself to two terms. Thomas Jefferson – and others – had feared that a powerful president would get himself re-elected multiple times and become almost like a king. Washington's two-term tradition nixed that possibility. All his successors, except Franklin Roosevelt during World War II, have followed the two-term tradition, which is now required by law.

As president, he made farsighted decisions that shaped the federal government and protected America's interests. For example, the Constitution makes no mention of a cabinet to advise the president. It was Washington's idea to use the heads of the major departments (State, Treasury, and War) plus the attorney general as an advisory board that met to discuss almost all the significant issues that arose during his administration. Also, he maintained the separation of powers by defeating the Senate's attempts to control the dismissal of his cabinet officers. Domestically, he allowed Alexander Hamilton to set up the financial system that helped the young nation thrive. In foreign policy, he insisted that America remain neutral during Britain's war with France, thereby protecting the country from a fight for which it was ill-prepared.

- Washington was the most athletic and physically robust of the Founding Fathers. As young men, John Adams went to Harvard; Thomas Jefferson went to William & Mary; James Madison went to Princeton; Alexander Hamilton went to King's College; George Washington went to the French and Indian War. Washington was 6'2" tall and weighed approximately 190 lbs. He was incredibly strong, with huge hands and feet, and was very well-coordinated. He was an excellent dancer and, according to Thomas Jefferson, the best horseman in the state of Virginia.

Washington's physical size and dignified bearing made an immediate impression on people. Benjamin Rush, Surgeon General of the Continental Army and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, commented that Washington "has so much martial dignity in his deportment that you would distinguish him

to be a general and a soldier from among ten thousand people. There is not a king in Europe that would not look like a valet de chambre by his side." Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John, "You had prepared me to entertain a favorable opinion of him, but I thought the one half was not told me."

Washington's lack of a college education made him seem more provincial than the other Founding Fathers, his knowledge of Europe more secondhand. However, he compensated for his lack of education by being extremely intelligent with a quick ability to grasp ideas.

3. John Washington, George's great-grandfather, reached the New World in 1657, settling in Virginia. Little definitive information exists on George's ancestors before his father, but what is known is that by the time George was born to Augustine and Mary Washington on February 22, 1732, the family was part of the lower echelon of Virginia's ruling class. George was the eldest child of Augustine's second marriage; there were two sons from the first. Farming and land speculation had brought the family moderate prosperity. However, when George was eleven years old, his family was dealt a terrible setback. Augustine became mortally ill after surveying his lands during a long ride in bad weather — ironically, the same circumstances killed George fifty-six years later.

His mother, Mary, a tough and driven woman, fought to hold home and hearth together. George's father and stepbrothers had been educated in England, and Mary hoped to send George for schooling there, but Augustine's death made that impossible. Instead, George received 7 or 8 years of education from a private tutor, which did not include studies in Latin or Greek. When George was 15, his family faced another financial crisis, and his education ended. Using his father's surveying tools, Washington apprenticed himself to a local surveyor and learned the trade to make some money.

After his father's death, George's half-brother, Lawrence, fourteen years his senior, became George's mentor. Lawrence was married to Anne Fairfax, daughter of Colonel William Fairfax, head of one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Virginia. The Fairfax plantation, Belvoir, was four miles downriver from Lawrence's home at Mount Vernon on the Potomac. Lawrence started bringing George to Belvoir, and Colonel Fairfax became very fond of him. Eventually, Colonel Fairfax became like a second father to George.

When George was 16, he joined a team of men surveying Fairfax lands in the Shenandoah Valley between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains. It was the young man's first real trip away from home, and he proved his worth on the wilderness journey, helping the surveyors while learning more about their trade. Surveying offered George decent wages, travel opportunities, and time away from his strict and demanding mother. By the time he was seventeen, he had gone into the surveying business on his own.

In 1759, Lawrence Washington petitioned the Virginia House of Burgesses to establish a new port city, Alexandria, on the Potomac, about ten miles upriver from Mount Vernon. George helped survey and plat the new settlement. Also, due to his Fairfax connections, George was appointed surveyor of Culpeper County, Virginia, making him the youngest county surveyor in Virginia history. In 1750, he surveyed extensively in the Shenandoah Valley and bought 1,500 acres of land there.

However, when George was 20, tragedy visited the Washington family once again: Lawrence contracted an aggressive strain of tuberculosis. George accompanied him to the island of Barbados in the West Indies in the desperate hope that the tropical climate would help his brother. Unfortunately, it did not, and George returned to Virginia alone, concluding the one trip of his life outside America. While in Barbados, George contracted a mild case of smallpox; this gave him immunity from the disease that killed so many soldiers during the Revolutionary War.

Lawrence had commanded a local militia near the Washington family home. Soon after returning to Virginia, George, barely out of his teens, lobbied the colonial government for the same post and was awarded it with the rank of major. The young man had no military training whatsoever, and it eventually showed up in disastrous fashion.

4. In the 1750s, the British and French were competing for control of the Ohio Country, which was the region west of the Appalachian Mountains, south of Lake Erie, and, roughly, north of the Ohio River. It encompassed almost all the current-day state of Ohio, plus portions of three neighboring states. The French were building forts between the Ohio River and Lake Erie. In 1753, British King George II empowered Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie to build a chain of forts in the Ohio Country and to send an envoy through the wilderness to locate the French positions. If the French were on land claimed by Great Britain, the envoy was to warn them off. If the French did not withdraw, Dinwiddie was to use force to dislodge them.

No Virginian whose social position was commensurate with acting as a royal emissary possessed wilderness experience. However, Washington, who had a connection with the prominent Fairfax family, had surveyed in the semi-wild Shenandoah Valley. Consequently, in October 1753, Dinwiddie appointed twenty-one-year-old Major George Washington as the royal envoy to the French. He instructed Washington to travel from Williamsburg, Virginia, to the nearest French outpost in the Ohio Country, approximately 500

miles away. He gave Washington a letter to deliver that demanded that France vacate the Ohio Country. Dinwiddie also asked him to confer with the Iroquois Confederacy members in the region and to gather intelligence on the French forces there.

Washington and a small group of men crossed the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains and entered the Ohio Country. They met with Seneca tribal leader Tanacharison (a.k.a. Half-King) and other Iroquois chiefs at Logstown, on the Ohio River, and secured their promise of support against the French. Half-King and some Frenchmen they encountered escorted Washington's party to the French outpost at Fort Le Boeuf, approximately 15 miles south of Lake Erie.

Just before Washington arrived, he changed into his military uniform. He was then cordially received by the French commander, Legardeur de St. Pierre, as a diplomat, not an enemy. He then delivered Dinwiddie's letter. After a few days, the Frenchman gave Washington his official answer in a letter to be delivered to Dinwiddie. The letter stated that the Ohio Country belonged to France, and the French would not be leaving. St. Pierre then gave Washington's party food and extra winter clothing for the long, cold trip back through the wilderness to Williamsburg.

The trip back was arduous and, on two occasions, almost fatal for Washington. On one occasion, he and his Virginian guide were shot at by their Indian guide. On another occasion, while crossing the storm-swollen Allegheny River on a raft, Washington fell into the freezing water and almost drowned. He survived the night but nearly froze to death. Washington arrived in Williamsburg in January 1754, having completed the dangerous round-trip mission in 77 days. He handed St. Pierre's reply to Dinwiddie, plus a map of Fort Le Boeuf and a careful estimate of French military power. Afterward, *The Journal of Major George Washington*, which describes the trip and includes Dinwiddie's letter and a translation of St. Pierre's letter, was published in both Williamsburg and London. It awakened colonial and British officials to the urgent need to defend the western frontier from French encroachment. Excerpts were published in colonial newspapers as far away as Boston, and Washington became known throughout the colonies and in prominent circles in England as a result.

5. Next, Governor Dinwiddie sent a task force of thirty-three men to build a fort at the Forks of the Ohio, where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers meet to form the Ohio River (the site of present-day Pittsburgh). When the task force reported rumors of a significant French invasion, Washington was promoted to lieutenant colonel and ordered over the mountains with 160 men in April 1754.

Upon arriving in the Ohio Country, Washington soon saw the little garrison from the fort approaching him. They reported that they had been surrounded by a thousand Frenchmen and Indians, but had not been attacked. Instead, they were courteously escorted onto the trail back to Virginia, after which the French occupied the fort and renamed it Fort Duquesne. The men also told Washington that Half-King had cursed out the invaders, expressing continued support for the English. In order not to let his Indian allies down, Washington decided to continue his advance, even though his force was now greatly outnumbered.

Half-King soon notified Washington that a French party was lurking in the nearby woods. Overlooking the fact that the English and the French were not at war, forgetting that the French had not attacked the British task force at the Forks and that Dinwiddie had ordered him to warn all Frenchmen away before engaging in hostilities, Washington allowed himself to be persuaded to use the Indian tactic of a surprise attack.

Advancing through the dark, rainy night with forty soldiers and a posse of Indians, at dawn, Washington surrounded the thirty-two Frenchmen who were lounging by their campfires and attacked before they could get to their weapons. Ten Frenchmen were killed, and the rest were taken prisoner. However, the survivors did not cower in humiliation. Waving documents, they shouted their outrage. Interpreters finally explained their claim that one of the men killed, Joseph Coulon, Sieur de Jumonville, had been leading the group on a mission similar to Washington's a few months before: to warn the British off what the French claimed was their land. Washington, the prisoners insisted, had attacked a peaceful diplomatic mission and murdered an ambassador.

When Washington learned of Jumonville's mission, he expected the French from Fort Duquesne to come after him. So, his men hastily built a fortification, aptly named Fort Necessity, near Great Meadows in western Pennsylvania. Washington made two tactical errors in the construction of the fort. First, it was on low ground, not high ground. Secondly, he did not chop down enough trees to clear the field of fire beyond the range of the French rifles. Consequently, the French could hide in the trees and deliver a devastating fusillade of fire onto Fort Necessity.

On the morning of July 3, French forces surrounded the fort and began firing from the line of trees. After four hours in a torrential downpour of rain, the British were losing badly and were running low on gunpowder. Washington's troops suffered more than 100 casualties, including 31 dead. When the French offered to negotiate Washington's surrender, he agreed in order to save his men. The terms of surrender were written in French, which Washington did not know how to read, and his Dutch translator did not

accurately read the document to him. The document Washington unwittingly signed admitted that he had assassinated Jumonville, which led to the formal launch of the French and Indian War, which would soon escalate into the global conflict known as the Seven Years' War. Therefore, George Washington's first military action triggered a world war.

6. By the summer of 1755, Britain and France were engaged in the French and Indian War in the Ohio Country. In July, 2,100 British soldiers, led by General Edward Braddock, traveled through the wilderness intending to take Fort Duquesne, the French stronghold at the Forks of the Ohio. Washington, who was not in the British Army, volunteered to be an aide to Braddock, and the British general accepted his offer because of the Virginian's previous experience in the Ohio Country. Washington warned Braddock that the French and their Indian allies would attack by surprise from the surrounding woods. However, Braddock, accustomed to European battles in open fields, was overconfident and refused to listen.

Several weeks into the mission, Braddock, Washington, and a sizable advance unit forged ahead of the main force. On July 9, near the Monongahela River, less than 10 miles from Fort Duquesne, the French and Indian troops ambushed the long line of British soldiers from the trees. British soldiers started falling rapidly, chaos ensued, and the Redcoats panicked. In the ensuing "Battle of the Monongahela," Braddock suffered a mortal wound, and all the other British officers were injured as well. (They were easy targets because they were on horseback.) Washington stepped into the breach, took command, organized the troops, and executed an orderly retreat. He had two horses shot out from under him, his hat was shot off, and multiple bullets passed through his coat, but he was uninjured and remained very calm. The battle was a loss for the British, but it built the foundation for Washington's reputation as a cool-headed, brave military leader and the myth – prevalent amongst the Indians – that bullets could not hit George Washington. Some later referred to him as "The Hero of the Monongahela." After Braddock died, what was left of the British army fled to Philadelphia.

7. The destruction of Braddock's army left the frontier easy prey for Indian raiders. Governor Dinwiddie created a Virginia militia regiment and gave Washington command with the rank of colonel. The purpose of the regiment, known as the Virginia Blues because of its trademark uniform color, was to defend the colony's western frontier against Native American attacks.

Washington took charge of every facet of the regiment. He raised it, supplied it, trained it, and led it into battle. This command was an invaluable apprenticeship for the supreme command of the Continental Army that would come to him two decades later. He earned the men's trust, and his officers and enlisted men were very loyal to him. They defended the frontier for three years, engaging in periodic skirmishes with Indians across western Virginia.

In 1758, the Blues participated in the British expedition to capture Fort Duquesne, but they found that the French had already abandoned it. The fort was renamed Fort Pitt in honor of British war minister William Pitt. The city that grew up around it became known as Pittsburgh. Afterwards, Washington was frustrated by the British officers' condescending attitudes towards his Virginia militia and was frustrated when he was denied a commission in the British Army. Hence, at the age of 26, he resigned from the military and returned home to Mount Vernon, the farm on the Potomac River he was leasing from Lawrence's widow. Upon her death a few years later, George inherited Mount Vernon.

8. In 1758, Washington was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, an office he would hold for 15 years, first representing Frederick County, then Fairfax County. In 1759, he married Martha Custis, an attractive, diminutive (5' tall), wealthy young widow. His early married years were happy ones. Washington worked hard and learned everything he could about farming, but his new occupation gave him another reason to resent the mother country. He found himself at the mercy of a trade system that heavily favored British merchants. The London agent he dealt with, Cary and Company, bought his major crop, tobacco, and then sold him the manufactured items he requested. The tobacco prices were generally poor, and the manufactured items they sent were expensive, out-of-date, and of inferior quality.

Washington's marriage to Martha raised him financially from a middle-of-the-road planter to a man of substance. One-third of the 18,000-acre Custis estate had come to him (with certain restrictions) as Martha's husband, and he controlled the other two-thirds as the guardian of his two stepchildren, Martha Parke Custis (Patsy) and John Parke Custis (Jackie).

George and Martha never had any children of their own. The reason is unknown, but perhaps George's bout with smallpox had left him sterile, or Martha's difficult second childbirth had left her unable to have more children. Patsy Custis had epilepsy; she had a seizure at the dinner table at Mount Vernon and died in George's arms at age seventeen as Martha looked on. Jackie Custis was uneducated (despite Washington's best efforts), lazy, and financially irresponsible. Born in 1754, he did not join the Continental Army, even though he was of the appropriate age. He joined Washington at the siege of Yorktown as a volunteer aide

and died there of "camp fever" (probably typhus or dysentery) at age twenty-seven.

9. By 1766, Washington had abandoned tobacco farming and diversified Mount Vernon into wheat, corn, and fish (from the Potomac), commodities that could be sold more easily in America. He also built a large and profitable distillery and a gristmill for grinding grains. He processed and cultivated hemp for industrial use. These ventures were aimed at making his plantation more self-sufficient, thus minimizing his business ties to England.

Up to three hundred slaves labored at Mount Vernon; some were owned by Washington, some by Martha. As Washington turned to crops that were less labor-intensive than tobacco, he had more help than he needed. However, although he could increase profits by minimizing labor costs, he seldom sold or moved a slave to another property unless the slave wanted to leave. As he approached middle age, Washington expressed increasing qualms about the practice of slavery. In his will, he freed all his slaves after Martha's death; he was the only slaveholding Founding Father to do this.

10. In 1766 and 1767, the British Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, which imposed taxes on the American colonies to pay for the French and Indian War and the expense of maintaining troops in America to thwart Indian attacks. Washington and others opposed these taxes because the American colonies had no representation in Parliament; this was "taxation without representation." In 1769, the House of Burgesses passed a resolution that supported Massachusetts' protest of the Townshend Acts. It also declared that only the House of Burgesses had the right to tax Virginians. The Virginia royal governor responded by dissolving the House of Burgesses. The burgesses then walked over to the Raleigh Tavern, reconvened, and discussed what to do. The next day, they drew up the "Nonimportation Resolution," an agreement to boycott, by nonpurchase or nonconsumption, practically all British goods. Sixteen men signed the agreement, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and George Mason. They were now deeply involved in the politics of protest.

In 1774, the British Parliament passed the Coercive Acts (a.k.a. the Intolerable Acts) to punish Boston and Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party. The acts closed the Port of Boston until Boston repaid the East India Company for the loss of its cargo, which the Bostonians refused to do. The acts also took away self-governance and rights that Massachusetts had enjoyed since its founding. In response, the House of Burgesses proclaimed that the day of the port's closure, June 1, 1774, would be a day of "fasting, humiliation, and prayer" as a show of solidarity with Boston. In response, the royal governor of Virginia dissolved the House of Burgesses (again). The burgesses reconvened at the Raleigh Tavern (again) and called for Virginia's counties to elect delegates to the First Virginia Convention to meet in August. Washington and Charles Broadwater were elected as Fairfax County's representatives to the convention.

On July 5, 1774, Washington and others from Fairfax County met in Alexandria, Virginia, and appointed a committee to draft what became known as the Fairfax Resolves. In the Resolves, written by George Mason with input from Washington, the Fairfax County men expressed a desire to remain subjects of the British Empire. However, they insisted that "we will use every means which Heaven hath given us to prevent our becoming its slaves." The Resolves also contained (a) a concise summary of American constitutional concerns on such issues as taxation, representation, judicial power, military matters and the colonial economy, (b) a proposal for the creation of a nonimportation effort to be levied against British goods, and (c) a call for a general congress of the colonies to convene for the purpose of preserving the Americans' rights as Englishmen. The Resolves marked a step forward by proposing inter-colonial cooperation as more Americans began to realize that a threat against one colony was a threat against them all.

11. In 1774, the First Virginia Convention voted Washington one of seven delegates to the First Continental Congress, held in Philadelphia. The Congress adopted the Suffolk Resolves, a measure drafted by several counties in Massachusetts, which included a declaration of grievances and urged each colony to establish and train its own militia. The Congress also drew up a Petition to the King requesting redress of their grievances and the repeal of the Intolerable Acts. It agreed to reconvene in May 1775 if Great Britain failed to address the grievances.

In April 1775, electrifying news came from Massachusetts. Local militias from towns around Boston had engaged British troops at Lexington and Concord. The Second Continental Congress met one month later and assumed control of the various Massachusetts militia units surrounding Boston, thereby creating the Continental Army. John Adams of Massachusetts nominated Washington for Commander-in-Chief of the Army. He was the natural choice for several reasons. He was still considered a hero from the French and Indian War; at forty-three, he was old enough to lead but young enough to withstand the rigors of the battlefield; Northerners hoped a general from Virginia would help draw the South into the conflict. Above all, the leadership and charisma of the tall, quiet, stately Virginian were unsurpassed. A unanimous vote chose Washington.

In accepting command of the colonial forces, Washington crossed a deadly serious line. In the eyes of the British, he was now leading an armed revolt against King George III. He was a traitor, and if the rebellion failed, the British would hang him.

12. In the 1770s, the city of Boston was located on a peninsula, bounded by water on three sides. After the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the Massachusetts militias surrounded Boston, trapping the British Army. In June 1775, Washington assumed command of this newly formed "Continental Army" and, upon his arrival in Boston, the British and Continental armies were in a stalemate. To break the impasse, Washington sent General Henry Knox on a hazardous mission to retrieve 59 pieces of heavy artillery (cannons, mortars, and howitzers) recently captured more than 200 miles away at Fort Ticonderoga, New York. Knox floated the artillery pieces down Lake George, then used teams of oxen to haul them over the Berkshire Mountains, all the way to Boston. On the night of March 4, 1776, Washington's army stealthily put most of these pieces on Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston, completely surprising the British when they got up the next morning. British General William Howe now saw his position as untenable and withdrew his 8,900-man army from Boston by sea.

13. The British plan was to seize New York City next. The New York City area had so much water access (e.g., New York Harbor, the Long Island Sound, the East River, and the Hudson River) that the British, with their huge navy and its troopships, had an overwhelming strategic advantage over the Continental Army, which had no navy to use to move its troops around. Capturing New York City would offer the British several advantages: a large port, the propaganda value of holding one of the rebels' most significant cities, a large Loyalist population, and a route for delivering British troops to upstate New York via the Hudson River. Washington moved to stop the British. In July—a few days after the Declaration of Independence was signed—the British landed a massive force on Staten Island. By August, 30,000 troops opposed Washington's army.

In the Battle of Brooklyn Heights, the Continental Army was unable to stop the British, and at the end of the first day of fighting, it seemed like Washington's army would be destroyed when fighting resumed the next day. However, during the night of August 29-30, under the cover of fog, Washington used small boats to miraculously evacuate the entire army across the East River to Manhattan without the loss of supplies or a single life. On September 15, the British landed on Manhattan Island, and in a pitched battle, Washington's troops ran away. Enraged, he shouted at them, "Are these the men with whom I am to defend America?" A day later, his troops performed better and won a small engagement in Harlem Heights. But by November, the British had captured two forts that the Continentals had hoped would secure the Hudson River, and Washington was forced to withdraw into New Jersey and then Pennsylvania. The British thought this anticipated the end of the conflict and dug in for the winter, not bothering to chase the Americans.

14. In December 1776, Washington's army was in Pennsylvania, just across the Delaware River from Trenton, New Jersey. His troops were deeply dispirited by their losses, and for many, their enlistments would be up soon. Washington and his staff knew something dramatic was needed to change the army's mindset; otherwise, it might dissolve in a few weeks. To prevent this, Washington devised a Christmas night raid on the British outpost at Trenton. Before the raid, the soldiers were stirred by Thomas Paine's newest pamphlet, *The American Crisis*, which said, in part:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he who stands by it *now* deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap we esteem too lightly – 'Tis dearness only that gives everything its value.

On Christmas night, in a driving mix of snow, sleet, rain, and hail, Washington, 2,400 men, 50 horses, and 18 field pieces crossed the Delaware River and marched ten miles to Trenton. Ice floating in the river made the crossing treacherous, and it was so cold that two men froze to death on the march. At 8 a.m., the Americans attacked the formidable British garrison in Trenton and caught the Hessian mercenaries by surprise. The battle was over by 9:30 a.m. Nearly 900 Hessians were taken prisoner, and valuable weapons and supplies were captured. A few days later, Washington took a British garrison at nearby Princeton. These actions were not large-scale battles; they were more like guerrilla raids. Nonetheless, these victories gave his army confidence, brightened the spirits of the American people, and told the British that they were in for a long and bitter struggle.

15. The Revolution's third year (1777) was its turning point. In November 1777, a Continental force

commanded by Major General Horatio Gates won the first significant American victory at Saratoga, New York. Over 7,000 British soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured. This victory convinced the French that the Revolution was winnable for the Americans. In addition, the Continental Congress passed the Articles of Confederation in that same month, which convinced the French that the United States was serious about nationhood. They began to consider an alliance with the colonial rebels—partly to get back at an old enemy, Great Britain, and partly to share in prizes from raids on British ships.

For Washington, however, 1777 was a profoundly trying year. He lost major battles with the British at Brandywine Creek and Germantown in Pennsylvania. He also failed to keep them from taking Philadelphia, home to the new nation's government, which was forced into hiding. In response to the setbacks, Thomas Conway and a group of army officers and politicians (a.k.a. the Conway Cabal) attempted unsuccessfully to oust Washington as commander and replace him with General Gates. The winter of 1777-1778 saw his army camped in freezing, wretched huts at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

16. By springtime, things began to improve as the army drilled hard and marched out of Valley Forge as a more disciplined fighting force. In May 1778, the French agreed to an alliance with the Americans, sending troops, munitions, and money. By mid-1779, 6,000 French troops were fighting alongside the Americans.

George Washington was not a great general, but he was a brilliant revolutionary. Although he lost most of his battles with the British, he held his ragtag, hungry army together year after year, which was his most significant accomplishment as commander of the American forces. One French officer wrote: "I cannot insist too strongly how I was surprised by the American Army. It is truly incredible that troops almost naked, poorly paid, and composed of old men and children and Negroes should behave so well on the march and under fire." Knowing that one great victory by his army would undermine support in Great Britain for this endless foreign war, Washington patiently waited year after year for the right circumstances. The British relentlessly dared Continental forces to fight a line-to-line battle in the open. But Washington stayed with his hit-and-run tactics, forcing the frustrated British to play the game by his rules.

The British altered their strategy in 1778 and invaded the South. The new plan was to secure the southern colonies and then march a large army northward, forcing the rebellion out of upper America. It was a mistake. The British captured the port cities of Savannah, Georgia (1778), Charleston, South Carolina (1780), and Wilmington, North Carolina (1781). However, outside the cities, the British found themselves fighting a guerrilla war against shadowy bands of expert snipers led by Patriot militia leaders such as Francis Marion ("The Swamp Fox"), Andrew Pickens, and Thomas Sumter. An American soldier, fighting in and for his homeland, could work on his own while a Redcoat could not. Colonial troops could move twice as fast as their equipment-heavy enemies, and every English soldier killed or captured meant a new one had to be sent from England — a journey of several weeks that weakened British presence elsewhere in their empire. By 1781, the war was deeply unpopular in Great Britain.

17. Washington's army and a French army under General Rochambeau united north of New York City during the summer of 1781. Following the arrival of dispatches from France that included the possibility of support from the French West Indies fleet of the Comte de Grasse, disagreements arose between Washington and Rochambeau on whether to ask de Grasse for assistance in besieging New York or in military operations against a British army in Virginia under the command of Lord Cornwallis. Cornwallis, at first given confusing orders by his superior officer, was eventually ordered to build a defensible deep-water port, which he began to do at Yorktown, Virginia, where the York River meets the Chesapeake Bay. On the advice of Rochambeau, de Grasse informed Washington of his intent to sail to the Chesapeake Bay.

When word of de Grasse's decision to engage the British navy at the Chesapeake Bay arrived in New York, the American and French armies began moving south toward Virginia, engaging in deception tactics to lead the British to believe a siege of New York was planned. De Grasse sailed from the West Indies and arrived at Chesapeake Bay at the end of August, bringing additional troops and creating a naval blockade of Yorktown. At the beginning of September, a British fleet led by Sir Thomas Graves was dispatched to relieve Cornwallis. However, Graves's fleet was defeated by de Grasse at the Battle of the Chesapeake. As a result of this victory, de Grasse blocked any reinforcement or escape by sea for Cornwallis. The French navy also disembarked the heavy siege guns required by the French and American land forces to lay siege to Yorktown. Washington and Rochambeau arrived at Yorktown on September 28, 1781. The American and French army and naval forces had now surrounded Cornwallis.

After initial preparations, the Americans and French began the bombardment. With British defenses weakened, on October 14, 1781, Washington sent two columns to attack the remaining British outer defenses. A French column took Redoubt No. 9, and an American column under Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton took Redoubt No. 10. With these defense positions disabled, the allies were able to move the Franco-American artillery closer. The allies shelled the British heavily; the British position began to deteriorate rapidly, and the British surrendered on October 19. Lord Cornwallis was embarrassed and did

not attend the surrender ceremony; he pleaded illness and sent a subordinate to surrender his sword in his place. When the subordinate tried to give the sword to Rochambeau, the Frenchman deferred to Washington. Washington then had his subordinate accept the sword. Approximately 670 British soldiers were killed or wounded, and 7,500 were captured. Three hundred eighty-nine allied soldiers were killed or wounded. As a result of the "Battle of Yorktown," on February 28, 1782, the British House of Commons voted 234 to 215 against "further prosecution of offensive warfare on the continent of North America." The war formally ended with the Treaty of Paris in September 1783.

18. The Newburgh Conspiracy was a plan by Continental Army officers to challenge the authority of the Continental Congress, arising from their frustration with the Congress's long-standing inability to meet its financial obligations to the military. By early 1783, widespread unrest had developed into an atmosphere ripe for mutiny at Washington's headquarters in Newburgh, New York. Newburgh is on the Hudson River, approximately 70 miles north of New York City.

On March 10, an anonymous call was made for a meeting of officers the following day. An inflammatory address written by Major John Armstrong, aide-de-camp to General Horatio Gates, was being circulated. The address implored the officers to abandon the moderate tone of Washington's entreaties to Congress in favor of a forceful ultimatum. If Congress did not address their financial concerns, the army would threaten to disband, leaving the country unprotected, or refuse to disband after a peace treaty ending the war was signed. The latter option was a thinly veiled threat of a military takeover.

On March 11, Washington's general orders declared the impropriety of such a meeting. Hoping to give the officers time to cool off, he called for a meeting four days later to discuss the matter and implied that he would not be present.

On March 15, the officers gathered, and Gates stepped forward to chair the proceedings. However, he was interrupted when Washington entered the room unexpectedly to address those gathered at the meeting. The speech he gave became known as the Newburgh Address. He promised that Congress would ensure their pay, that Congress, "from a full conviction of its [the army's] merits & sufferings, will do it complete Justice."

Washington came to the end of his prepared speech, but his audience had not been moved. He clearly had not achieved his end. He reached into his pocket for a recent supportive letter from a congressman, which he wanted to read to them. He pulled the letter out, and something went wrong. The General seemed confused; he stared at the paper helplessly. The officers leaned forward, feeling anxiety for him. Washington pulled from his pocket something only his intimate associates had seen: a pair of eyeglasses. "Gentlemen," he said, "you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country."

This unpretentious act did what all of Washington's arguments had failed to do. Hardened soldiers wept. The threat of a military takeover was over. Washington had saved the United States from tyranny and civil discord – again.

19. On April 19, 1783, Washington announced to his army that England had agreed to a cessation of hostilities with the United States. Eight years, to the day, had passed since Massachusetts' militia traded musket fire with Redcoats at Lexington Green, and by the end of the year, the last English troops had shipped out of New York. Washington then went to Annapolis, where Congress was sitting, and resigned his commission on December 23. He told Congress, "Having now finished the work assigned to me, I now retire from the great theater of Action." As far as he was concerned, his public life was over. When told that Washington intended to resign his military commission and give up all that power to go back to life as a farmer, King George III exclaimed, "If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world." Thomas Jefferson said, of Washington's willingness to relinquish power: "The moderation and virtue of a single character [Washington] ... probably prevented this revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish."

20. During the years immediately following the war, the United States was governed according to the Articles of Confederation, which resulted in a weak and unstable government. Poor economic conditions led to conflict between indebted farmers and state governments trying to collect taxes, especially in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. In August 1786, angry farmers led by former Revolutionary War officer Daniel Shay rose up in protest, in what became known as Shay's Rebellion. In September of that same year, an interstate commerce convention, attended by delegates from five states, met in Annapolis, Maryland. With Shay's Rebellion as a backdrop, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton convinced the other attendees at the convention to unanimously call for a meeting to try to produce a system of government that could meet the needs of the nation.

Madison knew that the meeting, held in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 and known as the

Constitutional Convention, needed the best people in attendance to gain credibility, so he convinced a reluctant George Washington to attend. Madison, Washington, and the other members of the Virginia delegation arrived in Philadelphia before the other delegations and formulated the Virginia Plan, which they proposed to the convention. It called for a republican form of government with three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial, with the chief of the executive branch being the president.

Washington was unanimously elected to preside over the Constitutional Convention. He did not say much on the floor of the convention, but made his opinions known at the dinners and in the taverns after the sessions. The delegates eventually chose a form of government similar to the Virginia Plan. In it, the chief executive was to be the president, and the Constitutional Convention gave the president unprecedented power. He was to be elected independently of the other branches and to be indefinitely re-electable. He could carry out many of the essential functions assigned to him without being controlled by any statutory advisors. He was to be commander-in-chief of the armed forces and, while Congress could not interfere with his province, he could interfere with Congress through the veto. The president could be removed from office only for treason or criminal behavior. As the delegates debated the question of presidential powers, they assumed that George Washington would be the first president. One delegate commented, "Many of the members ... shaped their ideas about the powers to be given to a president by their opinions of his [Washington's] virtues."

Washington came to believe that the Constitution produced was not perfect, but was the best that could be expected, given the differences of opinions and interests among the thirteen states. He worked behind the scenes to ensure that the states ratified the Constitution, which they did in 1788. In describing the effect that Washington's stature had on the ratification debate, James Monroe wrote Jefferson, "Be assured, his influence carried this government."

21. As specified by the Constitution, the president was chosen by the Electoral College. In 1788, the method for selecting electors was decided by each state legislature—by public vote in some states and by legislative selection in others. Each state had as many electors as senators and representatives. The election was administered only in ten of the states because Rhode Island and North Carolina had yet to ratify the Constitution, and a quarreling New York failed to choose electors in time. Each of the sixty-nine electors was instructed to vote for two different candidates for president. Washington received the support of all sixty-nine electors and was elected president. John Adams, who received thirty-four votes, was the runner-up and was thus elected vice president. Thirty-five votes went to minor candidates.

22. The Constitution was vague when it came to the structure of the executive branch of government. In particular, there was no reference to a cabinet. It merely stated that the president "may require the opinion, in writing, of the principal officer in each of the executive departments, upon any subject relating to the duties of their respective offices."

As the commanding general in the Revolutionary War, when an important decision was to be made, Washington would call a council of war, listen to his staff's opinions, and then make his decision. As president, he decided to do the same thing by establishing what is now referred to as a "cabinet" composed of the heads of the major departments (State, Treasury, and War), plus the attorney general. (There was no Justice Department at the time; the attorney general simply provided legal advice to the president.) For his cabinet, Washington chose: for State, Thomas Jefferson (VA); for Treasury, Alexander Hamilton (NY); for War, Henry Knox (MA); for Attorney General, Edmund Randolph (VA). On almost every significant issue during his first term, Washington met with these four men and discussed what needed to be done.

Jefferson and Hamilton were generational talents and truly gifted intellectually. But Washington was in charge due to his strong personality. He typically moved slowly and cautiously to judgement, listening to both sides of each argument, but when ready to act, he did so decisively and did not second-guess himself. Unfortunately, in his second term, after Jefferson and Hamilton had resigned, Washington's cabinet was not nearly as strong and some problems ensued.

It is interesting to note who Washington *did not* include in his cabinet: Vice President John Adams. Adams and Washington did not have a good relationship. The Massachusetts native was fearful of tyranny and had fought in the Continental Congress against Washington's desire to build a long-term, professional army. He was also jealous of Washington's fame. Adams's selection as vice president was predicated on geographically balancing the two leadership positions. Washington recognized the wisdom in doing this, but had no intention of working closely with his old opponent. Adams played no significant role during Washington's eight years in office, other than to preside over the Senate and break ties there when necessary. In this regard, Washington set a precedent – as he did in so many other things – for how presidents utilize vice presidents. (N.B. The first president to give his vice president an extensive role in his administration was Jimmy Carter in the late 20th century.)

23. Washington's appointment of Jefferson led, almost immediately, to cabinet clashes between Hamilton and Jefferson. Hamilton favored a powerful federal government and a financial system similar to Great Britain's; Jefferson disapproved of several parts of Hamilton's financial system, in particular the creation of a privately-owned national bank and government subsidies for manufacturers. In foreign policy, Hamilton favored Great Britain; Jefferson favored France. In Jefferson's words, he and Hamilton were "daily pitted in the Cabinet like two cocks."

One of the first contentious issues to arise was Hamilton's proposal for the federal government to assume the unpaid debts that the states had incurred during the Revolutionary War. Jefferson and Madison opposed this since it would penalize states like Virginia, which had already paid its debts, and reward delinquent states like Massachusetts that had not. Madison helped defeat the authorizing bill in the House of Representatives.

Around the same time, Congress was to decide the location of the permanent capital of the United States, and Washington, Jefferson, and Madison wanted it to be a new federal city located on the Potomac River at the Virginia-Maryland border. Jefferson then invited Madison and Hamilton to have dinner with him at his home to discuss these two issues. At this meeting, the three men struck a deal, which is often referred to as the Dinner Table Bargain (1790). Madison would see that enough votes would change for the debt assumption to pass, and Hamilton would ensure that his legislative allies supported the Potomac location for the capital. Both men fulfilled their parts of the deal. Assumption passed, and the capital ended up right where the three Virginians wanted it: present-day Washington, D.C., about fifteen miles north of Mount Vernon.

By the midpoint of Washington's first term, however, examples of such cooperation vanished. Washington's administration split into two rival factions: the Republican Party headed by Jefferson and Madison and the Federalist Party led by Hamilton. The two factions disagreed on virtually all aspects of domestic and foreign policy, and the President spent much of his energy mediating their differences. (N.B. Jefferson's Republican Party is not related to the modern GOP; in fact, it evolved into the modern Democratic Party.)

24. Washington, Jefferson, and Madison were intimately involved with creating the nation's capital. Washington put together the land deal and chose the three local commissioners. Washington, Jefferson, and Madison wrote the building codes and arranged for the sale of the government lots. Madison, Jefferson, and the commissioners chose a rectangular grid structure for the streets. They gave east-west streets alphabetical names and north-south streets numerical names, with the Capitol serving as the coordinate system's origin. Later, Pierre Charles L'Enfant superimposed diagonal avenues on top of the grid. The commissioners named the federal district Columbia and the city Washington.

The three Founding Fathers brought complementary talents to the creation of the nation's capital. Washington excelled at surveying and land acquisition. Jefferson understood city planning and architecture. Madison knew history and constitutionalism. Madison mediated between Washington and Jefferson when differences occurred. In particular, he reconciled Jefferson to Washington's desire for a city majestic enough to meet a rapidly growing nation's needs for centuries to come.

25. Washington was very impressed by James Madison's contributions to the Virginia Plan, and the two men collaborated closely to make the Constitutional Convention successful. Afterward, they began collaborating on other projects as well.

In February 1789, on his way from his home in Virginia to attend the first session of the House of Representatives in New York City, Madison visited Washington at Mount Vernon. The two men discussed the president-elect's seventy-three-page draft of his inaugural address, which had been prepared by Washington's secretary, David Humphreys. Madison and Washington agreed to start over on the speech, and Madison drafted a four-page alternative, which Washington edited and gave two months later at his inauguration.

During the first five months of Washington's presidency (April to September 1789), the executive departments did not exist yet; hence, the President had no cabinet members to advise him. Consequently, Washington relied heavily on Madison for advice during this trying period when all sorts of presidential precedents were being set. He sought Madison's counsel about relations with Congress, appointments, policy, and etiquette. Madison edited Washington's first annual address in January 1790 and drafted his second one in December 1790. Madison was Washington's chief ally in Congress early in his first term as president, and Washington supported Madison's effort to pass the Bill of Rights.

Washington and Madison grew apart due to the President's support of Hamilton's Federalist policies. The final break occurred during the debates over Jay's Treaty in 1795. Madison argued passionately against it in Congress, and Washington felt that Madison, a Republican, was being partisan rather than objective. The controversy over Jay's Treaty also caused an irrevocable break in Washington's relationship with Thomas Jefferson.

26. In 1789, the French Revolution sent shock waves across the Atlantic. Many Americans, mindful of French aid during the American struggle for independence, supported returning the favor. At the same time, the British were once again inciting Native Americans to attack settlers in the West, hoping to destabilize the fledgling Republic. American anger in response to these attacks reinforced support for aiding France in any conflict with Great Britain. Washington was leery of any such foreign entanglement, considering his country too weak and unstable to fight another war with a major European country. The Federalists favored Great Britain, and the Republicans supported France.

Within days of Washington's second inauguration, France declared war on a host of European nations, including Great Britain. Controversy over American involvement in the dispute redoubled. The Jefferson and Hamilton factions fought endlessly over the matter. In April 1793, Washington issued his Proclamation of Neutrality, which declared that the United States would remain neutral in the conflict between France and Great Britain. The Proclamation advised American citizens to be friendly but impartial toward the belligerent powers, forbade them from assisting either side, and warned that the U.S. government would prosecute those who violated the law of nations with respect to the powers at war. The Proclamation also established a precedent for American foreign policy, emphasizing non-intervention and urging the nation to focus on domestic affairs.

The French ambassador to the U.S. — the charismatic, audacious "Citizen" Edmond Genet — had meanwhile been appearing nationwide, drumming up considerable support for the French cause. Washington was deeply irritated by this subversive meddling. When Genet allowed a French-sponsored warship to sail out of Philadelphia in defiance of direct presidential orders, Washington demanded that France recall Genet, which it did.

27. In 1791, Washington learned that an American force had been defeated by a Native American uprising in the Northwest Territory that killed over 600 American soldiers and militia. The President ordered the Revolutionary War veteran General "Mad" Anthony Wayne to launch a new expedition against a coalition of tribes led by Miami Chief Little Turtle. Wayne spent months training his troops to fight using forest warfare in the style of the Indians before marching boldly into the region. After constructing a chain of forts, Wayne and his troops crushed the Indians in the Battle of Fallen Timbers (near present-day Toledo) in the summer of 1794. Defeated, the seven tribes—the Shawnee, Miami, Ottawa, Chippewa, Iroquois, Sauk, and Fox—ceded large portions of Indian lands to the United States and then moved west. (N.B. The Northwest Territory was the land west of Pennsylvania, east of the Mississippi River, north of the Ohio River, and south of the Great Lakes.)

28. Washington wanted to retire after his first term. He was now sixty years of age, his eyesight and hearing were deteriorating, and the peace and quiet of Mount Vernon beckoned. But he slowly realized that it was not to be, for many crucial issues remained unresolved. For example, there were ongoing problems stemming from the continuing French-British rivalry. Additionally, the political schism between America's northern and southern halves was so severe that there was even talk that the southern states might try to form a separate nation. Washington's advisers warned him that the times were too volatile to risk surrendering the presidency to someone lacking his popularity and moderation. In particular, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison all asked him to serve a second term. In the election of 1792, Washington was elected unanimously (132 electoral votes), and Adams finished second (77 electoral votes), thereby becoming vice president again.

29. In mid-1793, Britain announced that it would seize any ships trading with the French, including those flying the American flag. In protest, widespread civil disorder erupted in several American cities. By the following year, tensions with Britain were so high that Washington had to stop all American shipments overseas. Six large warships were commissioned; among them was the *USS Constitution*, the legendary "Old Ironsides." An envoy was sent to England to attempt reconciliation, but the British were now building a fortress in Ohio while increasing insurgent activities elsewhere in America.

The President's strong inclination in response to British provocations was to seek a diplomatic solution, and he sent Federalist John Jay to London to negotiate with the British. The treaty he produced was not favorable to the U.S. Jay's Treaty agreed that almost anything that could be of use to the French was contraband that could be seized by British raiders from American ships. The treaty discarded America's best weapon against the British: the possibility that private British funds in the U.S. might be sequestered. Jay conceded, to the vast potential damage of the southern states, that no American ships would carry to Europe a variety of American goods, including cotton, which were produced in the British West Indies. And, worst of all, the treaty did not address the then-common British practice of the impressment of American sailors. The treaty did require the British to abandon their forts in the Northwest Territory. The Senate, which had a Federalist

majority, approved the treaty with the proviso that England reduce some of the trade barriers it imposed. Washington, while dissatisfied with elements of the treaty, signed it nonetheless because it prevented war with Great Britain.

Jay's Treaty was very unpopular, especially with Republicans. For the first time, members of the government openly criticized Washington. While this no doubt led to some hard feelings, it was also a milestone. The fledgling government chose partisan sides, verbally jostled with their President, everyone was heard, the public hurled angry rhetoric — and the government remained standing. It was the first example of the partisan give-and-take that has been essential to the survival of American democracy for over two centuries.

Jay's treaty with the British continued to have negative repercussions throughout Washington's administration. France declared it a violation of agreements signed with the United States during the American Revolution and claimed it constituted an alliance with France's enemy, Great Britain. By 1796, the French were harassing American ships and threatening the U.S. with punitive sanctions. Diplomacy did little to solve the problem, and during the Adams administration, American and French warships exchanged gunfire on several occasions in what was referred to as the Quasi-War.

30. A tax on whiskey—production of which had increased dramatically in the 1790s—was one of the key elements of Hamilton's fiscal program. This taxation enraged many citizens, and in 1794, resistance to the whiskey tax boiled over in western Pennsylvania with attacks on tax collectors and the formation of several well-armed resistance movements. Washington was alarmed by the Whiskey Rebellion, viewing it as a threat to the nation's existence. In an extraordinary move designed to demonstrate the federal government's preeminence and power, the President ordered militia from several other states into Pennsylvania to keep order. He then traveled to the site of the troubles to personally oversee the buildup of troops and to lend his encouragement to the enterprise. The insurrection collapsed quickly with little violence, and the resistance movements disbanded. Later, Washington pardoned the men convicted of treason in the matter.

31. In the midst of the controversy over Jay's Treaty, Washington was able to claim a spectacular diplomatic breakthrough with Spain. Settlers in the western hinterland had long chafed at Spanish restrictions on shipping their produce down the Mississippi River. Frustrated with federal government inaction, Kentucky residents threatened to secede from the Union, prompting Washington to post Thomas Pinckney to the Spanish court as envoy extraordinary. In October 1795, in the Treaty of San Lorenzo, Pinckney won the right for Americans to use the Mississippi River freely and trade in New Orleans. The treaty also established the Mississippi as the western boundary of the United States and clarified the boundary between the U.S. and Spanish Florida.

32. Although it was his for the taking, Washington never considered running for a third term. Over four decades of public service had left him exhausted physically, mentally, and financially. He happily handed the office to his successor, John Adams. With customary care, Washington was scrupulously silent on his opinions of the men jockeying to succeed him. By ceding office after two terms, Washington helped ensure a regular and orderly transfer of executive power. His two-term limit set a custom that would stand for a century and a half until Franklin Roosevelt was elected to a third term in 1940 and a fourth term in 1944. The Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1951, now codifies Washington's two-term limit.

Washington closed his administration with a thoughtful Farewell Address. Written with the help of Hamilton, the address urged Americans to be vigilant and conscientious. "You should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness," he said. "The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government." It was as if he saw the significant challenges to come in the next decades and was asking his fellow citizens to remain a unified nation. He also warned against "foreign entanglements." Eighteenth and nineteenth-century presidents by and large avoided foreign entanglements; later presidents did not. He also warned his fellow citizens against "the baneful spirit of faction," referring to the party spirit that had disrupted his administration. But, once political parties formed, there was no going back.

See the next page for a list of references.

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